

HOW TO FIND HAPPINESS

Have you ever noticed that just as your cup of happiness is full and you finally settle back to enjoy it, somebody bumps your elbow? Happiness can be an elusive thing. I don't know how you would measure this, but according to one study only 20% of the people in the U.S. claim to be happy. For some people it is that bumped elbow upsetting their cup of happiness. For others, it can be that thing that never happens that upsets their happiness.

What is your picture of a happy life?

Take a moment before we start to fill in the following blank, "I would be happier if ____." That statement you just thought about says a lot about what you believe. It might even say something about your approach to life. I want you to compare the statement you thought about and your beliefs about happiness with some of the words of Jesus describing the happy life.

Jesus gave us a picture of a happy life that was very different. Jesus told us you can find happiness in strange places. He described these strange places to find happiness at the beginning of his ministry when he gave a defining message, his Kingdom Manifesto, a message that is commonly called "The Sermon on the Mount." This sermon begins with those familiar words "blessed are." Modern translators have often used the words "happy [are]" or "fortunate [are]" instead of "blessed [are]" as a translation to the term Jesus used.

This section of Jesus' message is referred to as the beatitudes. The beatitudes are not a series of commands, but blessings that are described and the promises associated with the attitudes that are rewarded with these blessings. The beatitudes describe the kind of person who will receive the blessings of God. The beatitudes identify a series of qualities that produce happiness, even though happiness is not readily apparent.

Jesus gave us an unconventional perspective on happiness when he spoke the beatitudes as the introduction to his Sermon on the Mount. This introduces more than simply a sermon; it introduces a whole new approach to life.

Happiness is found where there is . . .Spiritual Poverty.

Matthew 5:3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* (NIV)

This very first statement of his sermon is the paradoxical premise of the entire Sermon on the Mount: The only people who can truly experience the “blessedness” Jesus offers are those who know they cannot achieve it on their own. How could being “poor in spirit” be the source of happiness? Why does Christ begin with this? What does “poor in spirit” mean? Jesus’ choice of words was no accident. The word he chose for “poor” was not the word for the working poor who scraped by and made enough to survive. The word he chose was for the beggarly poor who could not make it without outside assistance. Poverty of spirit is the foundation of all other spiritual graces. All other gifts of God come only to the degree that we recognize that we are poor in spirit. We do not receive the gifts of God based on merit. We receive the gifts of God based on faith. This faith is a humble reliance upon God's goodness rather than our own. We cannot become a Christian unless we are poor in spirit. Jesus is saying this is the starting point.

The fact is Jesus knew that we on our own were incapable of scaling the mountains of morality that he depicts for us in the Sermon on the Mount. The following truth is taught throughout the New Testament—holiness is not achieved; it is received. Only those who recognize that they don’t have the personal resources to attain the kingdom get in the kingdom. Jesus said, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* (Mark 2:17, NIV) The world says happy are the rich and famous and self-sufficient and proud. Jesus says just the opposite. We will never be blessed until we see our poverty of spirit. We will never lean upon God until we see that we need Him. We will never seek the physician until we believe we are sick. Happy are the sick who know it. Woe to the one who is sick and does not know it.

Jesus came to fill those who admit their own resources are inadequate. Jesus was telling us that we cannot be filled till we are emptied. Let’s dump out our cups and ask to be filled.

Let’s just say you were walking down a country lane and you came upon a very strange sight. You are walking by fence post after fence post, and suddenly you come to one of the fence posts and you stop and look because there is something on it. There on the top of the fence post sits a turtle. It sits there, legs dangling, perched on the underside of his shell. It doesn’t take a Sherlock Holmes to do some quick figuring and deduce that the turtle didn’t get there on his own. Now, believe it or not, that’s the picture of the Christian life well lived. If you ever meet a person that DOES truly live out the values of Christ’s kingdom, you know he didn’t get there on his own either. The New Testament makes it clear that just like that turtle someone helped him get there. The rest of the “Sermon On The Mount” describes the turtle on the fence post. In other words, it

describes the Christian life, what it looks like, but the beatitudes describe the fact that we didn't get there on our own. There are preconditions that give us something that is not ours naturally. These preconditions, these attitudes, open us up to the Kingdom of God.

What's "the Kingdom?" Notice the present tense. It is something the "poor in Spirit" can have now. Let's call that kingdom the sphere of God's reign and rule. The kingdom of God is where God rules. The precondition of acknowledging our own spiritual poverty opens us up to a supernatural ruling of our lives. This precondition, this attitude, opens us up to God taking charge and ruling us, giving us new abilities, new inclinations and new desires, even a new power. This outside source is the ruling power of God in our lives. That is why Jesus opens his sermon the way he does. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs IS the kingdom of God. The ruling influence of the king can come only to one kind of person, the kind of person who recognizes that they need Him, because without him they are spiritually impoverished. Without this outside help we are spiritually bankrupt. Knowing this is a very important key to finding true happiness.

Happiness is found in the very strange place of emptying yourself and asking God for help. The next strange place of happiness actually expresses the practical how-to side of it.

Happiness is found where there is . . .Sadness.

Matthew 5:4 *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."*
(NIV)

How can happiness be found in the place of sadness? Isn't this just some kind of spiritual double speak?

Let's peel the layers of truth back from this statement slowly and carefully. On the surface Jesus is saying to us that happiness can be found where there is weeping. There is a hidden blessing in mourning. We as a nation have been mourning for a while over national events. The mourning and the tears are part of the grieving process. It is part of the healing. It is the counselor who tells us today that people who do not allow themselves a chance to grieve and mourn actually hamper their healing in a grief process. When grief goes underground it can channel its way into bitterness or rage. All this is true, but this is still just the surface truth to the statement of Jesus, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."* Jesus is saying more than this surface layer.

The context helps us understand the more profound truth that Jesus is telling us. Jesus is talking about how those who mourn over their spiritual poverty, their personal sin, are the ones who are blessed by God.

2 Corinthians 7:10 *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”* (NIV)

James 4:8-10 *“Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”* (NIV)

These are words designed to wake up the sleeping soul. Mourners are happy because only mourners are forgiven. Happiness isn't in the sadness itself, but in the results that this correct assessment causes.

People who don't mourn over their own sin don't understand their own sin. People like this look at the disasters of the world and the evil of the world and settle into a rage that can be counterproductive. It is easy for each of us at this time to walk through the pathway of rage rather than the path of mourning. Maybe I can explain it the way G. K. Chesterton did.

An editor to a series of articles asked the question “What is wrong with this world?” Do you ever ask that question? We all ask that question when we try to puzzle through the horrible events of terror. But G. K. Chesterton gave a very short and surprising answer to the editor. The letter to the editor read this way: “Regarding your article ‘What’s Wrong with the World?’, I am.”

Until we mourn our sin, we will not be set free from it. Until we mourn over our sin, we will not be able to properly respond in mourning over the corporate sins of our world. Until we see ourselves as part of the problem, we cannot ourselves become part of the solution. Until we ourselves go through the process of receiving the answer to our problem, we will not be able to offer the answer to anyone else.

1 Corinthians 11:31 *“But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.”* (NIV)

Happiness is found where there is . . .Humility

Matthew 5:5 *“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”* (NIV)

To the modern mind meekness is a quality to avoid. To the worldly minded, meekness is weakness. But this just isn't true. Meekness is not weakness. Meekness is power under complete control. Meekness is not for the faint-hearted or timid. Try to follow Jesus' example of meekness. Can you turn the other cheek when someone slaps you unjustly? Can you control yourself to give back good for evil? Do you have such self-control? Can you go the second mile, when someone is forcing you to go the first? These are all responses of meekness. These are responses that

say, "I am going to do what is best for you even though you don't deserve that." Meekness is power under control. But the kind of control is not really self-control at all, but it is yielded control. The only truly meek people are people that understand the self-control the Bible talks about, the self-control that is the result of the Spirit of God getting control of your life (Gal. 5:22).

Meekness is perhaps best seen in the raw power of the wild stallion that has been gentled by his master. His power becomes completely useful to his master because he is gentled, he is submissive; he has become meek. This state or quality of meekness cannot be achieved without first walking through the first two blessed states that Christ described. In other words, you can't get to verse 5 before going through verse 3 and 4. Each of these "beatitudes" build on each other. You cannot get to the attitude in verse 5 without first coming through the process described in verse 3 and 4.

Editor's note: Next month we will continue this article with the remaining beatitudes in "How to Find Happiness, Part 2".

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APOLOGIA

QUESTION: If all people are from Adam and Eve, why do we have different tribes, languages, skin complexion, and cultures?

ANSWER: What we eat, the climate (weather conditions) in which we live, and our habits have much to do with differences among human beings. The proper answer, however, is that the consequence of sin brought about our many differences. Because of sin the world suffered a disastrous flood in the days of Noah, in which only eight people survived. God instructed Noah's descendants to "*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth*" (Gen. 9:1). We are informed in Genesis 10 the extent to which the earth began to grow in population and in Genesis 11:1, "*The whole earth was of one language, and one speech.*"

Prior to this time we know of no differences in speech, color, or social behavior. Upon attempting to construct a tower "*lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth*" (Gen. 11:4), in direct rebellion of God's instructions, the peoples' language was confounded. "*And from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth*" (Gen. 11:9). "*In his [Peleg's] days was the earth divided*" (Gen. 10:25; 1

Chr. 1:19). It is after the Babel episode that we read of differences among the earth's population – the consequence of sin.

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GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>PLACE</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
May 6 - 9	Van Lear Van Lear, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 17 - 20	Mt. Zion Crab Orchard, KY	Hunter Bulger (Fort Deposit, AL)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. In Genesis, what man walked with God, and God simply “took him?”
2. What reason did God give Joshua about his men being defeated in their first attempt to take the region called Ai?
3. God said through Ezekiel that the prince of Tyre was wiser than whom?
4. Paul asked the Colossians to “remember my chains.” To what did this refer?
5. According to James, what should a person never say when they are tempted?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month’s questions?

1. According to Moses in Deuteronomy, what two miracles took place during the forty years of wandering? THEIR CLOTHES DID NOT WEAR OUT, AND NO ONE HAD SWOLLEN FEET (Deut. 8:4)
2. In II Samuel, why did Joab enlist the help of a “wise woman” of Tekoa to pose as a mourner before King David? TO CONVINC

DAVID TO BRING ABSALOM BACK TO JERUSALEM (2 Sam. 14:1-3)

3. What did Solomon decide was the “whole duty of man” as a summation of Ecclesiastes? FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS (Eccl. 12:13)
4. Why did Herod the tetrarch have John the Baptist put to death? HEROD’S NIECE REQUESTED HIS DEATH (Matt. 14:1-12)
5. In Acts when a group of about forty Jews formed a conspiracy to kill Paul, who caught wind of it and saved Paul? PAUL’S NEPHEW (Acts 23:12-16)