

The World's Greatest Speech

Dr. Micah Stohlmann

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Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children.
Ephesians 5:1

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Introduction

There have been many captivating and stirring speeches that have been given in the history of the world. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech was a defining moment of the civil rights movement in which he called for an end to racism. His speech had great passion born out of a compelling purpose to improve the lives of others. President Abraham Lincoln gave one of the best-known speeches in American history in his Gettysburg Address. President Lincoln demonstrated that a speech did not have to be long to be memorable. In just over two minutes, he emphasized the importance of true equality that was espoused by the Declaration of Independence.

President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address in 1961 became known for one phrase: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." This phrase provided a call to action that listeners could rally around.

Mother Teresa, in her acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, used the words of others to provide perspective and motivation in life. At the beginning of her

speech she had the audience pray with her the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi.

*Lord, make me a channel of Thy peace
that, where there is hatred, I may bring love;
that where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit of forgiveness;
that, where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
that, where there is error, I may bring truth;
that, where there is doubt, I may bring faith;
that, where there are shadows, I may bring light;
that, where there is sadness, I may bring joy.*

*Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted,
to understand than to be understood;
to love than to be loved;
for it is by forgetting self that one finds;
it is forgiving that one is forgiven;
it is dying that one awakens to eternal life.*

It is interesting that in all of these speeches, the speakers' Christian faith was evident in the influence of what was said. Martin Luther King Jr. knew based on the Bible that all people are precious to God as it states in 1 Timothy 2:3-4: *This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who*

wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Dr. King wanted his work to be used for God's purpose and glory. He stated, "Use me, God. Show me how to take who I am, who I want to be, and what I can do, and use it for a purpose greater than myself."

President Lincoln strove to lead with his faith and conviction that all people are created equal. He knew that it was only with God's help and guidance that we as humans could make it through life. One of President Lincoln's most famous quotes states this well. "I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day."

President John F. Kennedy urged everyone to do what they could to make the United States of America a great country. He noted that the country was "strengthened by Christian morality." In a speech that he never gave due to his assassination, he planned to use Psalm 127:1 to conclude the speech. He emphasized the importance of staying strongly rooted to faith in God. *Unless the Lord builds the*

house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.

Mother Teresa was guided to help the poor and sick based on her Christian faith. The words of Jesus clearly state the importance of helping and loving others. *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”* John 13:34. Since God has shown us such amazing love, we then can in response show love to others. Mother Teresa kept this in her mind and heart. She once stated, *“Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier.”*

While there have been many memorable speeches, the most important words that have been spoken are those of Jesus. Only Jesus’ words have the power to save us from certain death from our sins. Jesus clearly speaks that those who believe in Him as their Lord and Savior will not perish but have eternal life. Jesus’ words that are recorded in the Bible demonstrate the power of His message and His great purpose for His time on earth. Jesus often could say quite a bit in a few words. Through His words He provided a call to action for how Christians can live their lives. In His ministry

He set an example that whenever anything good occurs all glory can be given to God.

One of Jesus' greatest speeches, The Beatitudes, is found in Matthew 5:3-12. The eight blessings that Jesus describes serve as the basis for the chapters in this book.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The words of Jesus in the Beatitudes were quite counter-cultural in their time and continue to be so today. Society often extols those that are self-reliant, who demonstrate strength, who are rich and powerful, and who can rely on their own merits and abilities. There is a joke about an arrogant man who took God's preeminence to task.

The man looked up to the heavens and declared, "I can do what you can do! I can create a person out of dust! I understand the systems of life and science!"

God accepted the offer. "All right," he told the buffoon. "Let's see what you can do."

The man reached down and took a handful of dirt. But before the man could go further, God interrupted him.

"I thought you said you could do what I did."

"I can."

"Then," God instructed, "get your own dirt."

No one can come even close to what God can do and yet God shows love to us and cares for us. The correct response to this is not to try to rely on our own abilities and strength because that will not work. We need to look to God and His strength, power, and love for our salvation and sustenance.

Jesus conveyed this message. Jesus knew what was most important in life and what would lead to true happiness. Loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind in response to God's love and letting this love guide our lives.

Instead of the word, "blessed", some translations use the word, "happy" in the Beatitudes. Billy Graham in his book, *The Secret of Happiness*, states how we can view life with this perspective. "Happy are the meek. Happy are the yielded. Happy are those who trustingly put their lives, their fortunes, and their futures in the capable hands of their Creator. Happy are those who 'let go and let God.'"¹

When we live our lives focused on God and trust Him to direct, correct, and protect us then we can have inner happiness because we know that whatever happens we will spend eternal life in heaven. Jesus knew that the Christian life is not always easy, but God goes with us to help us.

Blessed means divinely favored or fortunate. Christians know that because of our sins we deserve death, but the Good News is that Jesus had paid the price for our sins! Because of this we are freely given eternal life in heaven. We do not need to fear or worry about what

happens after death because we know that we have a place secured in heaven. The popular phrase, “Too blessed to be stressed,” is certainly one to hold on to as you go about your day.

Christians are blessed and because of this we can rejoice. *This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.* Psalm 118:24. When I was in college I was in choir and one of my favorite songs that we sang was “Blest are They”. It is a beautiful song that details the Beatitudes with a refrain that can remind Christians that no matter what happens in life we can stay focused on what matters. We have a great God that cares for us and takes care of us, because of this we can rejoice!

Refrain:
Rejoice and be glad!
Blessed are you; holy are you!
Rejoice and be glad!
Yours is the Kingdom of God!²

There have been great speeches given through the course of history, but only one person’s words have the power to save. Jesus’ words are powerful and life changing! He provides us with life everlasting and support for our lives on earth. By

studying and taking to heart the words of Jesus in the Bible much can be learned and we can grow closer to Him. Let's explore more about how we are blessed beyond belief as spoken by Jesus in the words of the Beatitudes.

Chapter 1: Blessed are the poor in spirit

At first glance this blessing does not seem to be what a Christian life is about. Shouldn't Christians want to be rich in spirit to have a strong faith? It is certainly true that Christians should strive to grow in their faith and get to know more about God. In Matthew 6:21 Jesus states, *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* A Christian's treasure or most valued item should be their faith in God that can be aligned with his or her heart's desire: To love God with all our heart, soul, and, mind because of the love that God has shown us.

The poor in spirit that Jesus is talking about in this first blessing is for us to be humble in our spirits and to understand that we need God. God is our creator and without Him we would be lost in our sins. We simply cannot say too much about God's goodness or love! It is only through God that Christians have eternal life and come to know the saving love of Christ.

James 4:6 says it this way, *God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.* When people are filled with pride and think that they do not need God then they are missing out on an amazing blessing. Christians know that on our own we can't get through this life and certainly not on to heaven. Full reliance on God provides hope, joy, comfort, strength, guidance, protection, and many other blessings. Having a humble heart helps us know that we are sinners and need God's forgiveness. God shows us His love, blesses us, and saves us by us believing in Him as our Lord and Savior.

Billy Graham states it nicely, "Jesus had a humble heart. If He abides in us, pride will never dominate our lives. Jesus had a loving heart. If He dwells within us, hatred and bitterness will never rule us. Jesus had a forgiving and understanding heart. If He lives within us, mercy will temper our relationships with our fellowmen."¹ Having Jesus in our lives makes

all the difference. Understanding well our relationship with Him and our total dependence on him ensures a right understanding of blessed are the poor in spirit.

When Christians are poor in spirit it will be evident in several ways: humbleness, obedience to God, and a life of service.

Humbleness

Without God humans would not be in existence. God's love brought creation into being and it is only God's love that sustains all of creation. Christians know of their importance and their worth. It is not from anything that we have done but comes from God. We can be humble because God is all powerful and yet still cares and knows each of us.

Motivational speaker, Nick Vujicic, has overcome challenges in his life through the strength and hope found in Jesus Christ. He knows that people have many limitations. Regardless of who you are and your situation you can find everything you need in

Jesus. Nick was born with no arms and no legs as a result of a rare disorder, and is just one of seven known individuals who live with this syndrome.

It was not easy growing up for Nick. He tried to commit suicide at age 10 because of bullying he received at school that convinced him that he was a mistake. Vujicic relied on his faith for His true worth though. When he felt thoughts that he should just give up he remembered Psalm 139:14. *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.* He also kept Philippians 4:13 in his heart. *I can do all this through him who gives me strength.* He knew that until people find Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, there will always be something missing.

He has had the opportunity to speak to many people but remains humble because he knows it is all about God. In a video of one of his talks he states, "God can use a man without arms and legs to be his hands

and feet. To prove that it is not about Nick. It is not about his ability. It is not about him and his strength...It is not about me. It is about Jesus. I didn't write my story. Jesus wrote my story. He knew me before the earth began."²

It's all about Jesus. Anything good that comes from us is all because of God's strength and His love. John the Baptist is an excellent example of this and humbleness. John was receiving great attention for his preaching, teaching, and baptizing. He rightly stated his place though. *I baptize with water...but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.* John 1:26. Later in John 3:30 he described this further, *He (Jesus) must become greater, I must become less.*

John was humble because He knew that everyone is powerless and helpless without God. His one goal was for others to come to the saving faith found only through Jesus Christ. He wanted others to

know the love of God and to experience the blessings of this. When we are humble by being poor in spirit we are really rich in Christ and have everything that we need.

Obedience to God

Being humble means understanding that God is all powerful and all knowing. Because of this and God's love for us we can trust Him for guidance and direction. We can strive to be obedient to His will for our lives. Jesus states this clearly, *"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."* Luke 11:28.

Christians know that their lives are different because they have God as their Savior. It changes what we think about, how we act, and how we speak. This does not mean that we will not sin, but that we will strive to live out the love that God has shown us. 1 Peter 1:14 shares this focus, *As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.*

Non-Christians may not realize the blessings of the life that they could be living with saving faith in Christ. They can be focused on other things like money, power, possessions, or self. If we stay focused on God however, life has more meaning and purpose because we know that it is not about us but it is about what God has done. Because God has shown us His awesome love, we seek to listen to His will for our lives. We do not need to seek to be great and make a name for ourselves because Christians know there is only one Name that is above all names and that is Jesus!

Being obedient does not always seem like a positive because we like to be in control. We know that God is all-knowing and only wants what is best for us. We can trust whole-heartedly that obedience to Him will only lead to a more purposeful life. James 1:25 reinforces this. *But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it – not forgetting*

what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

A life of service

Those that are poor in spirit follow Jesus' example of a life of service. Jesus had every right to be proud and boast of His power. However, He remained humble and gave all glory to God. We can have the same mindset of Jesus. Philippians 2:6-8 states Jesus' humble approach to His life of service. *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice so that we can have forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven. He cared so much for us that He was willing to suffer and die on the cross for our sins. The Good News is that He

did not stay dead. He arose to life three days later to be with us always with His love and peace! Because of this Christians can show God's love to others because God has shown great love to us.

We never know the people that God will place in our lives that we can serve and help. We can be ready to show God's love to them. When we are humble and follow Jesus' example of caring and loving others it can make a life-saving difference.

Nancy Abell went out for a hike along the Pacific Crest Trail in Washington state not expecting anything other than quality exercise and fresh air. On the trail she met and talked briefly to another hiker, 34 year old Katharina Groene, who was from Germany. Katharina had already walked the first 2,500 miles of the trail, which starts at the Mexican border, and she had just 150 miles to go.

Katharina mentioned to Nancy her plan to continue hiking alone up to the Canadian border.

Nancy knew that she had no idea what she was getting into and tried to talk her out of it. She told Katharina, "If you were my daughter I wouldn't let you do this." Since Katharina had already walked so far she brushed aside Nancy's concern and continued with her goal to reach the Canadian border.

Nancy returned home but could not stop worrying about Katharina. For the next seven nights, Nancy grew increasingly restless. She knew it was pretty late in the season to be walking that final stretch without snowshoes. When she read the forecast for two feet of snow in the mountains, Nancy felt compelled to act.

She called 911 to report that a hiker was "probably at risk." Generally, the authorities do not go looking for missing people who aren't missing. There had been no distress call and Katharina had not even missed a checkpoint. Yet somehow, Nancy convinced them that her hunch was an educated one, so they went

searching. The Snohomish County Sheriff's department scoured the mountains where Nancy suggested. That's when they spotted her! Katharina was frostbitten, with maybe a day to live. Nancy's phone call to the rescue crew had saved Katharina's life!

Katharina let Nancy know that she had rescued her in more ways than one. In an interview, Katharina noted the big difference Nancy made, "Someone cared," she said. The whole reason that she did the hike alone was because she had given up on people. "I lost faith in humanity."³

Christians know that we have been saved because Someone cared. Jesus cares for each and every one of us and wants all to come to know the saving love of Christ. In response to God's love we can provide encouragement by sharing God's love to others. When we are humble in spirit, we can live our lives to serve and help others.

This world can be tough and it can lead us into despair, but Christians can be a light that shines brightly in the midst of darkness. You never know what others are going through in life. At any point you might be able to offer the bright hope that someone needs to go in the right direction. This is the chance to point them to the constant and unchanging love of Christ that never disappoints. When we are poor in spirit, we are strong through Christ!

Chapter 2: Blessed are those who mourn

Author, Carey Kinsolving, asked kids what they thought this Beatitude meant and the children provided some insightful responses. Todd, age 9, stated “This verse means to pray for those who are sad. Try to help them take their mind off it. Invite them over to spend the night or to a water park.” Sean, age 10, talked about how Christians can be compassionate. “It means that God blesses those who have a tender heart.” Eleven-year-old, Avery, had a different interpretation. He stated, “This means that those who feel sorry and awful for what they did wrong will be comforted by God.”¹ This comment is in close relation to Jesus’ words in Luke 4:18. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives...”* As the kid’s responses show this Beatitude can be interpreted differently.

It is natural when reading this blessing to immediately think it refers to God comforting us when we mourn a loved one's death. Christians know that we receive God's consolation in times of loss. We are also comforted by the sure promise of eternal life in heaven for those who die trusting in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Because of this we will see our loved ones again. Revelation 21:4 states how God will remove all sadness and replace it with joy. *"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

Comfort in times of loss is just part of the meaning of Blessed are those who mourn. It is important to remember that the Beatitudes are not promises for non-believers. They are promises for Christians. Also, in the Beatitudes, Jesus is speaking about qualities we are to proactively pursue. In chapter 1 we read about aiming to be poor in spirit. In this chapter we are blessed when we mourn. What does it

mean to pursue mourning? It certainly does not mean we should seek out sadness or grief. When these moments do come we know that God will be with us.

A right view of pursuing mourning is when we mourn for our sin and its offense against our Holy God. Godly sorrow comes when we rightly see ourselves in the light of the Word of God and see how short we fall. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 7:10, *For Godly sorrow produces repentance*. Repentance is the act of sincerely regretting the sin in your past with the goal to never do it again. It is determining to turn away from evil and to serve God. When we repent of our sins, God promises that all our sins will be forgiven. It is truly a blessing that God's grace removes all of our sins and instead we are viewed as holy children of God!

The right mindset of humility is directly related to this Beatitude. Also, the blessing of this Beatitude allows Christians to move from mourning to joy as "Blessed are those who mourn" is infused with hope.

Spiritual mourning arises from humility

Spiritual mourning follows naturally from the first beatitude, being poor in spirit. When Christians understand that we do not have what it takes to save ourselves and rightly view our place in this world as God's creation we take a humble mindset. We can recognize our own sins and shortcomings and mourn over the times we have not lived as God would like us to live.

Have you been brokenhearted over your inadequacy to be genuinely good to others? Is it plain to see how far your life is from what God describes in the Bible? If you can answer yes, you will be comforted because your godly sorrow will produce repentance, which leads to action and obedience. This is why it is written in Ecclesiastes 7:3-4, *Frustration is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.*

If people search after sinful things that satisfy the desires of the flesh like sexual immorality, idolatry, and selfish ambition they may feel passing pleasures. God has not made us for such things though and knows what we need most in our lives to live to His glory. Paul in Galatians 5:16-17 states, *So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh.* What does walking with the Spirit look like? Verse 22 and 23 describe this, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*

Mourning over our sins and feeling sorry over our mistakes is important as we strive to keep in step with the Spirit. This goes against many of the messages that are provided on television and from popular culture. If we do something wrong it is often conveyed to try to forget it and move on. Pretend like it never happened. Social media and popular figures

demonstrate that we should always try to portray our best self. We should never let people see us in our weaknesses and faults. This can lead people to try to be self-reliant, and carry around problems and shame that does not get resolved.

God wants our problems and struggles. He wants us to lay it all before him with pure honesty. By doing this God can comfort us and help us to live better lives. We should take time every day to mourn over our sins. We all sin daily and need forgiveness. Our mourning can lead to gladness. Though we are sinners, there is great news that we have a Savior! We have the blessed assurance of heaven and that God will never leave us. The Holy Spirit works in our lives to comfort, guide, strengthen, and lift us up!

We can pray to God the words of the song, "Hosanna", written by Brooke Ligertwood as we seek spiritual mourning in our lives. Hosanna is an expression of adoration and joy. As Christians we can

praise God for His goodness and love as He works in our lives.

Heal my heart and make it clean.

Open up my eyes to the things unseen.

Show me how to love like you have loved me.

Break my heart for what breaks yours.

Everything I am for your kingdom's cause.

As I walk from earth into eternity.²

Spiritual mourning is infused with hope

It is an astonishing thing to speak of the joy of sorrow, the gladness of grief, or the bliss of the brokenhearted. David in Psalm 51 wrote that a "broken spirit" and a "contrite heart" are offerings that most please God. When faced with the consequences of our sin and the suffering of living in a fallen world, we can harden our hearts or open them by crying out to God for help and comfort. While we mourn over our sins we know that in Christ there is unending hope. We know for certain that our hope is not in vain and that God's

promises are true. When our time on earth is over, we will live forever in heaven where sin will be no more!

Mourning that leads to despair is listening to lies about your relationship with God. The lies of the devil tells us that we are no good and have no value. We are hopeless and will continue to make bad decisions. God does not desire us to be despondent but to focus on His love. The Holy Spirit can take our mourning and bring us to the hope in Christ. Focusing on hope is a signature mark of spiritual mourning and the comfort that God promises. That is why Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:10 states that Christians are *sorrowful yet always rejoicing*.

Christians say, "How sinful I am and unworthy." But we do not end there. Our mourning is infused with hope so we continue, "Thanks be to God who has given me the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Christians say, "Chief of sinners though I be."

While we know this is true, it is not the end. We proclaim with gratitude, "Jesus shed His blood for me; died that I might live on high. Lives that I might never die!"

Christians say, "My soul is weary with sorrow."

Drawing on the words from Isaiah 40:31 we state with confidence, *"but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."*

Christians say, "For the good I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." But we also remember the words of 1 John 1:9. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

Christians say, "I am a poor miserable sinner and justly deserve eternal punishment." We then raise our eyes to heaven and think of the cross. "Be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being. You are my all

in all. You are the pleasure that I seek. I know that when I fall down you pick me up.” We then are reassured by the precious promise of forgiveness that all of our sins have been forgiven. We are drawn back to the God’s promises of grace and hope.

Jesus was called a “man of sorrows” because he understood the destructive nature of sin and evil. He mourned over the condition the world was in. In response He took upon Himself all of our griefs and sorrows. He was crushed for our sin. It was the joy set before Him that gave Him the strength to endure the cross. Jesus knew that His suffering would lead to salvation for those who believe in God as their Lord and Savior. This gave Him great purpose and joy.

Because of the love of Christ and His ultimate sacrifice of dying on the cross and gloriously rising three days later, we have hope. We are not left to mourn over our sinful condition. We can trust the

promise of Jesus, *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”*

The pastors at my church went out to lunch one day and noticed that their waitress had a tattoo on one arm that stated, “Every sinner has a past.” We all are sinful and fall short of what God would want for our lives. We do not need to end there though, because of God’s love and grace.

One of my pastors asked the waitress if there was another part to the tattoo. She then showed them her other arm that read, “Every saint has a future.” Being justified by faith through Christ we are viewed as holy and blameless saints. We do not need to doubt about what the future will bring because eternal life is what is in store. What a blessing and a comfort!

Chapter 3: Blessed are the meek

Jesus is sometimes thought of in the wrong way because He described himself as meek in Matthew 11:29. *“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest unto your souls.”* To many people, “meekness” suggests the idea of passiveness, spinelessness, or weakness. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the Greek New Testament, “meek” is from the Greek term, “*praus*.” It does not suggest weakness; rather, it means **strength under control**.¹ Jesus had all the power in the world, yet chose to live His life in service to others. In the biblical sense, being meek describes one who has channeled his strengths into the service of God.

On December 2nd, 2012 Spanish athlete Iván Fernández Anaya was competing in a cross-country race in Burlada, Spain. He was running second, without much chance of catching the first place runner. The leader of the race was Kenyan Abel Mutai, bronze

medalist in the 3,000 meter steeplechase at the London Olympics. As Fernández Anaya entered the final stretch of the race, he saw Mutai, the certain winner of the race, mistakenly pull up about 10 meters before the finish, thinking he had already crossed the finish line.

Fernández Anaya quickly caught up with him, but instead of using the mistake to his advantage, he used gestures to guide the Kenyan to the finish line and let him cross first. After the race Fernández Anaya was asked if had made the right decision. “Even if they had told me that winning would have earned me a place in the Spanish team for the European championships, I wouldn’t have done it either...And that is very important, because today, with the way things are in all circles, in soccer, in society, in politics, where it seems anything goes, a gesture of honesty goes down well.” Fernández Anaya had the power to benefit himself by winning the race, but chose to help another instead. He chose an act of kindness and was glad to do it.

In a situation much more significant than a race, Jesus also chose to make a sacrifice to benefit others. He decided to come to earth. As true God, He has all the power in the world. Yet he was willing to experience pain and suffering and die on the cross. He willingly did this because He cares and loves for all people. He gloriously rose three days later and defeated death and the devil for all time. His passion was to use His strengths in service to God.

In this Beatitude, Jesus states blessed are the meek. Meekness leads to reliance on God which fosters a life of joy and hope. There are additional benefits of meekness including wisdom. The second part of the Beatitude, for they shall inherit the earth, further describes the blessings of meekness.

Meekness is tied to wisdom

When we use our strengths to serve God, we rely on Him for direction and guidance. We trust that God has all knowledge and knows how our time and

talents can be used to glorify Him. James 3:13 states this, *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.* Service to God in response to His love is wise. Christians can humbly serve others because they know that God is good and God is loving. God wants only the best outcome for our lives. Christians want others to know this as well.

The truly meek person is gentle and open to reason and promotes peace. James 3:17 reinforces this. *But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.* This does not mean that Christians do not stand up for themselves or for God's commands, but they do so with respect. Meekness brings courage, strength, and conviction from God who is unchanging.

Meekness and wisdom bring a calming presence in life. Christians know that on their own they are

insufficient to cope with the complexities and pressures of life, and they trust that God is able to sustain and protect them. This brings a steady calm knowing that God is all powerful. He will work things out for the best. Isaiah 30:21 states, *Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."* Christians need not worry because God will take care of them through all the complexities of life.

Recently, actor, Chris Pratt, in accepting an award gave a testimony about the importance of trusting in God and also using our God-given time, talents and treasures to serve Him. "God is real. God loves you. God wants the best for you. Believe that. I do. If you are strong be a protector and if you are smart be a humble influencer. Strength and intelligence can be weapons and do not yield them against the weak."²

When we are blessed to have a mindset of meekness, we can draw great strength from the

wisdom of God that can guide our lives. Knowing that God loves us we can use our time, talents, and treasures to show God's love to others.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth

The greatest blessing of being a Christian is our heavenly inheritance, eternal life in heaven. We know that this cannot be taken from us. It is a free gift from God. All are invited to believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior and to live forever in heaven. 1 Peter 1:4 describes the promise of heaven for Christians. *An inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.* God has a reserved place in heaven for all Christians and it is waiting for us when our time on earth is done.

The blessing of inheriting the earth also speaks to our time on earth. It is clear that God created the earth and it belongs to Him. *The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.* Psalm 24:1. As children of God we are co-heirs with Christ

with God as our Father (See Romans 8:17). In light of this when we live according to God's Word we are better able to enjoy the blessings of earth and our time here.

When Christians live according to God's Word, they are part of a community of believers that support each other, rejoice with each other, and grow in faith with each other. Christian community is a great blessing that enables us to enjoy life. In a world that is becoming more secular, times to worship and fellowship with other believers can strengthen us and embolden us to live our lives in service to God.

In 2 Corinthians 8:9 we find this promise. *Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.* We are rich in Christ because God has promised to be with us in this life and God has given us eternal life in the Kingdom of heaven!

A small cathedral outside of Bethlehem marks the supposed birthplace of Jesus. Behind a high altar in the church is a cave, a little cavern lit by silver lamps. To enter the cave you have to stoop down. The door is so low that you can't go in standing up. It is a reminder that we can bow before God and worship Him for His great love and power.

Meekness is living our lives in service to God. Christians are blessed by living our lives on earth with God as our companion and guide. Christians are blessed through being a part of a community of believers as we work to serve God. Christians are blessed by knowing the awe-inspiring love of Christ. Christians are blessed by having the all-powerful Creator and God on our side. Christians are blessed because we receive eternal life in heaven as a free gift. Truly blessed are the meek!

Chapter 4: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

Growing up I remember a skit that I saw several times at various talent shows. It starts with one person standing alone at the center of the stage contently drinking a bottle of water. Then, another person crawls into view from off stage, clearly showing signs of fatigue. This person weakly gasps, "Water. Water." The person at the center of the stage moves quickly to help the person in need. When the fatigued person is handed the bottle of water, the person quickly stands up and say, "Thanks!" This person then proceeds to take a comb out and uses the water to comb his or her hair. The person in this humorous skit clearly did not have real thirst.

In the fourth Beatitude Jesus, states, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.*" Many of us in the United States have not experienced hunger and thirst to an uncomfortable degree for very long if at all.

To truly understand this Beatitude and what Jesus is asking of Christians we can look at Jesus' time on earth. Once we rightly understand how we are to hunger and thirst for righteousness, the blessing that comes with this is all the more beautiful.

Jesus' experience of hunger and thirst

Righteousness is the perfect holiness of God and is the complete opposite of sin. To commit sin is to go against God's design for our lives, and the wages of sin is death. Righteousness is only possible for people from Jesus' death and resurrection that paid the price for all of our sins.

In this Beatitude Jesus did not state, blessed are the righteous. Romans 3:10 states, *There is none righteous, no, not one.* This would be impossible for people to accomplish without Jesus' intervention as Romans 3:23 states, *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.* Instead, Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.*

This way there is not the impression that someone can keep God's commands and earn righteousness through works. People who hunger and thirst for righteousness recognize that they lack the ability to be righteous on their own accord.

Righteousness is so important that it is desired above all else, righteousness through Jesus leading to eternal life.

Looking at the Greek words that Jesus used in this Beatitude provide more insight to what is meant by hunger and thirst for righteousness. During Jesus time on earth, many in Israel were in poverty, so they understood Jesus' words in this Beatitude better than we do.

The first key Greek word that Jesus used was *peinao*, which is translated as "hunger". It is the same word that was used to describe Jesus' hunger after he had been in the wilderness for forty days and nights without food.¹ If you have ever gone a day with food,

you know the strong feeling of hunger for food. After forty days without food, the desire to eat would be all-consuming. Christians can hunger for righteousness to this level!

The next key Greek word that Jesus used is *dipsao*, translated as thirst. In John 19:28 this Greek word is used for when Jesus said, *"I thirst."*¹ This was after Jesus had been whipped and beaten for hours by the Roman soldiers and then had been left hanging on the cross for hours. Soon after this Jesus said, *"It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.* John 19:30.

One of the prominent effects of crucifixion was overpowering thirst because of the loss of fluids through open body wounds and perspiration. This level of desiring something to alleviate thirst is how Christians can yearn for righteousness!

Jesus came to earth to serve and to carry out the will of God. He was willing to suffer and die on the

cross, because He knew He was doing His Father's will. Jesus gave Himself as a sacrifice and gloriously rose three days later defeating death and the devil for all time. Jesus paid the price for our sins to give us the free gift of grace. Because of Jesus' sacrifice Christians are seen as holy and made righteous!

The blessing of this Beatitude is that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. The Greek word for this is *chortazo*. This means having all that you want and being completely satisfied.¹ Those who are constantly and continually hungering and thirsting after righteousness will have all that they need and be satisfied. This is not according to worldly standards of money and possessions that are temporary. But according to what is eternal; faith in God that leads to eternal life in heaven.

Jesus is true God and is perfect and holy, so has been righteous for all time. His time on earth is an example though, for how to completely devote our

lives to doing God's will. We can hunger and thirst for righteousness with so much fervor that we can have inner joy as we endure the trials and tribulations of this life. We know that God will strengthen us in this life to life everlasting. With Jesus we are victorious and have what we need in this life and for all time in heaven.

Christian group, Elevation Worship, has a song called, "Resurrecting" that speaks to this. Christians know that death is not final and that we will see those who die in the Lord again in heaven. One of the verses of the song speaks of Jesus' victory and ours.

The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now
The Savior knelt to wash our feet
Now at his feet we bow.²

Jesus endured pain and suffering doing the will of God because He knew it would lead to God being glorified. He set the example of service for us. In our lives empowered by God we can strive to do God's will and

serve Him. Jesus promises us that we will have all that we need if we pursue this calling. We can praise and worship God in this life for all His blessings and in heaven we will live forever praising God for His goodness!

How do we pursue righteousness to this degree?

Humans are not able to produce righteousness or contribute in any way to be obtain it. Our righteousness is given to us through Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross and glorious resurrection three days later. *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* 2 Corinthians 5:22. Only Jesus could have accomplished this for us.

When we pursue righteousness, this means we strive to turn away from sinful desires and turn to Christ and His perfect and righteous ways. *Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure*

heart. 2 Timothy 2: 22. As we pursue righteousness our desires become inline with what God desires for our lives.

To do this with the fervor that Jesus describes we can keep God's Word with us in our hearts, minds, and actions throughout the whole day. Our conversations can be seasoned with grace. We can spend time studying and discussing God's Word, listening to the Holy Spirit as we are guided by Him, praying throughout the day, worshiping God, and being encouraged by Christian music. When we fellowship with a community of Christians, we are more likely to stay focused on God's Word and not be influenced by worldly influences that go against God's will.

Some may feel that they are too busy during the course of the day or week to fit time in to study, discuss, and meditate on God's Word. Martin Luther would describe that when he had a busy day, he would

spend *more* time in prayer. He knew that He needed God's strength and guidance to make it through each day. No matter what we have to do, we can follow Martin Luther's example to remember what is most important in this life.

Band of Brothers is a war drama miniseries that tells the history of Easy Company, 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, of the 101st Airborne Division during World War II. The miniseries is a moving depiction of the heroism of American soldiers and includes interviews with Easy Company veterans.

The main music theme of the miniseries is stirring and filled with emotion. World War 2 resulted in the loss of millions of lives. American soldiers and our allies fighting for a just cause led to many more millions of lives being saved and given back their freedom. The top comment on the YouTube video of the main music theme of the show describes the

gratitude felt for the soldiers that risked their lives to protect others.

I am an Englishman in my 80th year and nearing the end of my life. One of my memories as a boy was standing at the roadside and saluting the American troops as they passed through our town on the way to the Normandy Invasion...I have lived a very long and happy life in a democracy free from the evils of a Nazi system which could have been my destiny. I salute the bravery and sacrifice of this generation of men and women...I will never forget them. God bless them.²

There are many stories of people throughout time feeling indebted and beyond grateful for having their lives saved. Christians are also beyond grateful for God saving us from our enemies of sin, death, and the devil.

The song Jesus Paid it All is a wonderful song and especially moving during Holy Week as we focus

more on the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. The lyrics and music came together with God putting the right people in the right place at the right time. Elvina Hall was sitting in church and her thoughts focused on the price Jesus paid for our salvation. Words began to come to her and she jotted down the following lyrics.

I hear they Savior say,
“They strength indeed is small;
Child of weakness, watch and pray,
Find in Me thine all in all.”
Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.

After the church service, she shared the lyrics with her pastor. The pastor read the lyrics and realized that he had the perfect tune to go with them. The organist of the church, John Grape, had recently shared with the pastor a new tune he had composed. The

pastor put the two together and one of the most beloved songs of the church came into being.³

As we think about and meditate on those lyrics for our own lives, we can be motivated by God's love to pursue righteousness. As humans our strength pales in comparison to God's. We need to turn to God for what we truly need in this life. We owe Him our life and everything we have. Our sins deserve death, but Jesus paid it all! He has blest us with the forgiveness of sin! He has saved our lives! Because of this we can turn away from sin and look toward the Savior for how to lead our lives!

Fully satisfied

When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus promises that we will be fully satisfied. When we eat junk food, we can eat a lot of it and not feel full. And in fact we will feel worse. However, if we eat chicken, fish, fruit, and vegetables then our body will

feel full and we will feel better. This is because our bodies are getting what they need to function well.

Similarly, if we seek after self-centered and worldly desires to fill up our time in life, we will not feel satisfied. We will feel worse and make others feel worse as well. By seeking righteousness, we will have what we need in this life and feel completely satisfied. We will strive to show God's love to others and help support others to thirst and hunger for righteousness as well. God will satisfy our deepest desires if we look to Him for fulfillment. Our deepest desires will involve knowing and doing God's will in our lives. Christian author, Oswald Chambers, once stated "There is only One Being who can satisfy the last aching abyss of the human heart, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus wants our whole heart, mind, and soul to love Him with all we have.

We can strive to focus on our Father in heaven and what He wants for our life. Pastor Mitchell Dillon,

tells a story that illustrates this. When he was a boy, he always looked forward to summer trips from San Francisco to West Texas to spend vacation time with extended family. The trips were great adventures filled with the excitement of seeing new places and the extravagance of eating out; something his family never did at home.

One year, his youngest brother James, who was five-years-old at the time started to notice what their Dad was eating. James then started to place the same order every time the family stopped to eat. "I'll have what Dad is having," he would insist. James had noticed that the food his father was eating looked more appealing than what was typically placed in front of him. James realized that anything Dad wanted would be something that he wanted.⁴

If we follow this idea, like five-year-old James, we can keep in mind what our heavenly Father wants. Then we will hunger and thirst for righteousness and

be filled. We can stop setting our hearts on things that are certain to disappoint us and start focusing on God's promises that will bring us lasting satisfaction. Eternal life in heaven awaits us and God wants the best for our lives on earth and into life everlasting. Truly blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness!

Chapter 5: Blessed are the merciful

An anonymous folktale tells about a king who had a large orchard with a variety of fruit trees planted there. A skilled gardener took care of the fruit trees and would pick the ripest and juiciest fruits to bring to the king every morning. One day the gardener collected some cherries and took them to the king. The king happened to be in a bad mood. When he picked a cherry to taste, it was not perfect. The king then took out his anger on the gardener and threw the cherry at him.

The cherry hit the gardener on the forehead and the gardener exclaimed, "God is merciful!"

This confused the king and he inquired, "You should be angry or afraid but you say, 'God is merciful.' Why?"

The gardener replied, "Your majesty, I was going to bring pineapples for you today, but I changed my mind. If you had thrown a pineapple at me, I

would have been badly hurt. God was merciful for having changed my mind.”

This humorous story shows an act of unintentional mercy, but also makes the point that the word, “mercy” is often interpreted in different ways. If you look on the Internet for definitions or description of mercy you would find several different descriptions. One description of mercy is compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one’s power to punish. A variation on this is that mercy is a loving response prompted by the misery and helplessness of a person on whom the love is to be shown. A short definition of mercy is love that responds to human need in an unexpected or unmerited way.

At its core, mercy is compassion and forgiveness. It is the ready willingness to help anyone in need, including those in need of forgiveness. Jesus showed what it means to be merciful. He healed the

sick, welcomed and helped strangers and sinners, and forgave those who persecuted and killed Him.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus states, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*" It is important to note that this does not imply that our actions of mercy towards others enable us to receive mercy. It is God who is merciful first of all to us; then we as Christians are able to be merciful to others because of God's mercy shown to us.

Mercy follows naturally from the previous Beatitudes that we have looked at. When we are humble in spirit we know we need full reliance on God. We can mourn for our sin and repent with the goal to turn towards God and His will for our lives. When we are meek we have power under control as we channel our strengths into serving God. We can hunger and thirst for righteousness with all our mind, body, and soul as we turn away from sinful desires and turn to Christ. We know that it is only through God's free gift

of grace that are made righteous and have eternal life. With this in mind, showing compassion and forgiveness to others is more natural given what God has done for us and how this can change our life and mindset. Let's look at three aspects of mercy that are highlighted in the parable of the good Samaritan found in Luke 10:25-37.

Mercy sees distress and responds internally

The parable of the good Samaritan is well known and teaches important lessons about mercy.

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead." Luke 10:30. After this a priest and a Levite walk by the man and continue on their way.

Verse 33 provides the first important aspect of mercy from the parable. *"But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him."* Luke 10:33.

Mercy sees distress and responds internally. The Samaritan could see that the man was in need of help and felt compassion towards him. There is no mention of this from the priest and Levite that walked by the man.

Based on the love that God has shown us we can be compelled to see others that are in need and feel compassion for their situations. If we become too busy or focus on things that do not matter we can lose sight of what God's direction is for our lives.

There is a story of a bus driver that had a full load of passengers and went on the intercom to make an announcement. "I have good news and bad news. The bad news is that I am lost. The good news is that we are making great time."

Too often in life we can be busy but are not heading in the right direction. We need to take time to focus on what really matters and seek to listen to God's Word at all times in our lives. When we do this we will be more

sensitive to the needs of others. Through the Holy Spirit working through us we will be moved with compassion.

Mercy responds externally

The good Samaritan did not simply feel compassion for the injured man but responded externally with action. *“He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’* Luke 10: 34-35.

If we are in a position to help and are able to, we can respond with words and actions or financial gifts to assist those in need. An act of compassion or assistance has the power to change a person’s entire life, since we all want to be understood and know that we matter.

A farmer had some puppies that he needed to sell and brought them into town to see if he could find them owners. As he was finishing setting up, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down into the eyes of a little boy.

“Mister,” he said, “I want to buy one of your puppies.”

“Well,” said the farmer, “These puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal of money.”

The boy dropped his head for a moment. Then reaching deep into his pocket, he pulled out a handful of change and held it up to the farmer.

“I’ve got thirty-nine cents. Is that enough to take a look?”

“Sure,” replied the farmer. He then opened up the dog carrier crate to let the puppies run out into the pen he had set up. Out from the carrier ran four little balls of fur. The little boy’s eyes danced with delight as he watched the puppies wag their tails and play.

The little boy then noticed another puppy coming out into the pen. This puppy was noticeably smaller and hobbled as it tried to run.

“I want that one,” the little boy said, pointing to the runt.

The farmer knelt down at the boy’s side and said, “Son, you don’t want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you like these other dogs would.”

With that, the little boy stepped back, reached down, and began rolling up one leg of his trousers. In doing so, he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his leg attached to a specially made shoe.

Looking back up at the farmer, he said quietly, “You see sir, I don’t run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands.”

With tears in his eyes, the farmer reached down and picked up the little pup. Holding it carefully, he handed it to the little boy.

“How much?” inquired the little boy.

“No charge,” answered the farmer. “There’s no charge for love.”

One act of kindness can change someone’s life.

When we look to meet the needs of Christians, we provide support so that they can persevere to life everlasting in heaven. When we provide help for non-Christians, it can lead them to desire to know more about the love that they have received. This can then provide the opportunity for God to work in their lives so that they are able to come to saving faith through Christ Jesus our Lord!

Mercy responds even to an enemy

Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan in response to an expert in the law asking him “who is my neighbor?” The question being posed can be interpreted in another way. “With whom do I have to show love?” The expert in the law knew that God desired us to love the Lord our God with all our heart

and with all our soul and with all our strength and with all our mind. The expert in the law also knew that we should love our neighbor as ourselves. The man's question seems to ask if we really need to show love to all people.

In Jesus' time the Jewish people did not like Samaritans. Jesus purposefully includes a Samaritan man in the parable to show how he helped the injured man in need. The message is clear to show love to all people, even those whom we would consider enemies.

God wants all to come to the saving faith and be granted eternal life. He offers forgiveness and grace to all, even those who have worked to persecute Christians in the past. Paul, formerly Saul, is a prime example of this. He persecuted Christians but came to know the power of God's love in His life. God offered him forgiveness and compassion.

In our own lives, we know that we are not deserving of God's forgiveness and love. God provides

forgiveness and grace as a free gift. In response to this we can then show compassion and forgiveness to others. Even those whom we would consider our enemies. God changes hearts every day to bring people to know his love. We know we would be lost without God and can strive to help others know this as well.

Christians know that our sins deserve death, but due to God's great mercy, our sins are forgiven. Since we have received mercy, we can respond to others in kind. Truly blessed are the merciful for we will be shown mercy!

Chapter 6: Blessed are the pure in heart

When a new boss starts a job, employees want to know if they can trust what their boss tells them and if the new boss has their best interests in mind. When we are starting a new relationship it is natural to want to know if the person is someone who can be trusted and will show genuine care.

When it comes to relationships, the heart matters. The heart is what you are, in the secrecy of your thoughts and feelings, that no one fully knows but God. God looks at and cares about our hearts. What we do in our actions and words is important but God also is concerned with our thoughts, feelings, and desires.

In Matthew 23:25-26 Jesus drives this point home. *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”*

Jesus' goal was not only to reform the actions of people, but to change the hearts of sinners like you and me. For example, Jesus wants more than just a world where there are no acts of adultery. *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* Matthew 5:27-28.

In this Beatitude, we focus on *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."* It seems impossible that any human being can be pure in heart given a focus on actions, words, thoughts, and feelings. The amazing beauty is that it does not depend upon us. Jesus has stated, *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* Matthew 19:26. Through God's grace, He makes us pure and holy. In response to this we strive to know God's will for our lives and His Word better in order to live a life worthy of the calling we have received to show God's love to others. We can

pray each day for God to create in us a clean heart to serve and worship Him.

How can this be accomplished? In Psalm 119:9 we read, *How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word.* God's Word is the guidebook for helping us to keep our hearts pure. When our hearts are pure, it leads to happiness. We know that by having saving faith in Jesus Christ we have all we need. This purity of heart can affect our interactions with others and how we think and feel towards others. There are several things that we can look for that are markers of a pure heart.

Goal to glorify God

Those with a pure heart, know that anything good comes from God. They use their actions, words, and situations to bring glory to God. Jesus preached the Beatitudes so that His Father would get the glory for the way Christians would live guided by these words. His aim was to create a lifestyle in Christians that

would make people seek out and look towards God.

Being pure in heart means to show love to others without an expectation to get something in return. A Christian's life is a calling of service to help those in need and to share the love of God. It is all about God and He deserves all the glory!

Being pure in heart, by the grace of God, we can use our time, talents, and treasures in order to help others. Not everyone is called to be a church worker or a missionary, but we can all serve in our occupations and share how God's love has impacted our lives. We can also support other Christians in their vocations. Those with a pure heart seek to glorify God in all that they do.

Loving

Being pure in heart leads to showing God's love to others. This flows naturally given the great love that God has shown us. We are sinful people and do not deserve God's love, but God loves us anyway.

We can follow God's example in our lives by meeting the needs of others and showing them that they matter. *Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* Ephesians 5:1-2. We can do this by meeting the needs of the broken, the hurting, and the hopeless.

Content

Being pure in heart leads to contentment and acceptance of God's sovereignty over our lives. We pray and state, "Not my will, but Yours be done God." Even in the midst of the difficulties in life we can be content because God is good and God is loving.

The pure in heart spend time seeking to know God better and aligning their conduct, attitude, and thoughts with God. 1 Timothy 6:6 states, *But godliness with contentment is great gain.* This means that Christians that are pure in heart and content do not focus on

amassing money and possessions. Instead they focus on God and how they can show God's love to others.

No matter what situations come in life we can have contentment and inner joy by keeping God as our all in all. Pastor and author, Max Lucado, has stated, "God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile."

This Beatitude reads, "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*" Christians know that when we get to heaven we will see God. We have been reassured that God has a place waiting for us in heaven and we will spend our days praising God. What an amazing future we have in store!

To see God also is related to understanding. The more we seek God's will and come to know Him the more we understand and are able to see what God wants for our lives. Christians who are pure in heart allow their lives to be fully fixed on God. Their understanding, their perception, their discernment of

who God is, of His ways, of His will, and of His heart grow. We will never have the knowledge and understanding that God has , since *the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom*. 1 Corinthians 1:25. But we can come to know Him better and His word. This leads to seeing and thinking what God wills for our lives.

Sometimes we can question God's will when we are faced with suffering and difficulties. But with time, with patience, and with perspective, we can begin to **see** things differently. We come to **see** that even in the midst of loss, grief, and heartache that God still cares for us and God can still work good out of a bad situation. We also come to see God's purpose of strengthening our faith through the trials and tribulations of life.

When we have a pure heart, we are able to persevere and keep our gaze on God. When it comes to relationships, the heart matters. God knows our heart. He knows our thoughts and circumstances. We can

trust that God cares for us and will be with us. We are blessed because we will see God in heaven. We are also blessed because we can rely on Him to provide guidance and to chart our path in life on earth. By focusing on God's Word and His love we can look at things from the right perspective. *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."*

Chapter 7: Blessed are the peacemakers

Minnesotans are known for being “Minnesota nice.” This is due in large part to the vast majority of Minnesotans being Christian. Some would say the cold winters also play a part as Minnesotans are known for helping and supporting each other all year, but especially during the winter months.

People still have disagreements, but Christians can approach differences with God’s love in mind and the goal to live peacefully with others. Being a peacemaker is not always easy, but can be a benefit to all involved. A recent article in the Washington Post provided another opportunity for people in one Minnesota town to demonstrate a peacemaker’s response.

Chris Ingraham, writer for the Washington Post, wrote an article about a seemingly innocuous U.S. Department of Agriculture study that ranked every county in the country based on scenery and climate. In

the article Chris concluded that, “The absolute worst place to live in America is Red Lake County, Minnesota.”

The story was published at 9:32 am on a Monday and by 9:37am Chris was already receiving a stream of messages in opposition to his article. He had never had such a reaction to an article that he had written. Just about all of the messages were from the same ZIP code. The ZIP code was Red Lake County, Minnesota.

One of the residents of Red Lake County, Jason Brumwell, decided to see if Chris Ingraham would put his money where his mouth was so to speak. Jason invited Chris for a visit, and Chris agreed. Ingraham describes the reception he received when he arrived. “So I pull up to the courthouse and I get out of the car—and there’s a marching band playing. And there were no pitchforks, no torches, no nothing. Just a bunch of beaming, smiling people.”¹

Peacemakers try to build bridges to people to remove any animosity. The goal is for reconciliation. The peacemaker looks the enemy right in the eye and extends a greeting with the desire for peace.

Jesus stated that, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”* It is important to note that children resemble their father. God is a peacemaker and we as His children in turn are also peacemakers. John 1:12 states, *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.* By believing in God as our Lord and Savior, we are blessed to be called children of God. Let’s look more at these ideas.

Children of God

Christians are adopted by God as their heavenly Father. You may not have a good human father, but God is a perfect Father. He loves us no matter what. There is nothing that can separate us from His love as described in Romans 8: 38-39. *For I am convinced that*

neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is a story of a little boy who couldn't sleep so he went into his parent's room. His dad brought him back into his room to go to sleep. When the boy had got back in bed and comfortable he closed his eyes. After a few minutes he asked his dad, "Is your face looking at me?" His dad replied, "Yes, I am always looking out for you." When the boy heard this, he was able to fall asleep.

In our lives, we can experience fear and anxiety but we can trust that God's is watching us and protecting us. Like the little boy communicated to his dad, we also can communicate our thoughts to God for His comfort and guidance. *The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer*

and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Philippians 4:5-6. As children of God, we are blessed to have a heavenly Father that cares for us and wants the best for our lives. The Lord watches over you—The Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. Psalm 121:5-8.

Children of God—heirs of God

As children of God, we inherit God's great blessings He has promised us. *Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.* Romans 8:17. Jesus promised that He has a place reserved for us in heaven. It is a wonderful blessing to know that endless joys of heaven await us when our time on earth is done.

There are many other blessings of being a child of God. For all times of our life we have guidance and direction. We also have inner joy no matter what our circumstances because God loves us. God cares for us and the more we know about Him the more we will see His will for our lives and how we can show God's love to others.

Children of God-rely on God

In one of my previous books, *Wisdom for Life: A Collection of Bible Verses and Quotes*, I detail Bible verses and Christian quotes for a range of emotions. For example, when we are feeling overwhelmed we can remember, "God doesn't give us what we can handle. He helps us handle what we have been given." When we need encouragement we can read Psalm 33:11 *But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purpose of his heart through all generations.* This can reassure us that we can be fully convinced that God has the power to do what He promises.

In all of our moments of life, we can trust and rely on God. Christians know that without God in their lives, life can be too difficult at times. God can strengthen us through our trials and we can use our experiences to help and encourage others. In all we have the blessed hope of heaven to keep our focus on God and His grace for our lives.

Children of God-reflect God's image

Children are often a reflection of their parents. Since we are children of God, our Heavenly Father is the perfect role model. *Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children.* Ephesians 5:1. The more time we spend reading, meditating, and discussing God's Word the more our actions will align with God pleasing decisions and words.

I have been blessed to have parents that are faithful Christians who strive to build their relationship with God and live out His love in their lives. Both of

my parents are writers and teachers and I was blessed to grow up in a Christian home.

A sentence in one of my mom's book, *Micah Makes Six*, summarizes beautifully the blessings of being a peacemaker and a child of God. "Peaceful living comes from close communion with Jesus in whatever we do." When we live our lives with God as our constant companion, we have peace no matter what life brings. Peaceful living and being a child of God can be intertwined.

A great outcome of living out God's love that He has shown us is that others can come to notice the way we live our lives. Our enemies or those that would talk bad about us can become our friends.

Returning to the story at the start of this chapter, when Chris Ingraham returned from his visit to Red Lake County, Minnesota he found the trip had an unexpected affect. He wrote, "And the weird thing

about the trip, when I got back, I couldn't stop thinking about the place."

The impact of the peaceful and welcoming people in the town was felt. After some discussion with his wife Briana they packed up and moved with their twin toddlers to, you guessed it, Red Lake County, Minnesota. When Chris had the opportunity to come out to visit and meet the people, he realized the absolute worst place to live in America, based on his article, was actually the place where his family wanted to call home. Today Chris still writes for the Washington Post but he works from home, giving him lots more time to spend with his family. All of the people that could not believe the article he had written, he now considers friends.¹

The Christian life can make a big difference in the lives of others. This is because God's love is great and powerful! Peacemaking is God's work and as His

children, we can strive to imitate Him! Yes, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”*

Chapter 8: Blessed are those who are persecuted **because of righteousness**

The first seven Beatitudes describe values and conditions of the heart that we should strive for empowered by God's love. With each of these qualities, God has promised blessings to follow. The eighth Beatitude is simply the outcome of a life marked by the first seven Beatitudes.

At first glance it seems that persecution and being blessed do not fit together. But, if we remember that persecution comes from a life lived with Christ as our companion and guide, we can focus on the blessings Jesus describes. We will be comforted, inherit the earth, be filled and satisfied, be shown mercy, see God, and be called children of God. The first and last Beatitudes bookend the most important blessing of eternal life in heaven!

The eighth Beatitude states, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the*

kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10. Christians experience persecution due to the fact that worldly ideals and values are often in contrast to Godly values. Striving to live a Godly life in a sinful world can lead to persecution when worldly values are seen as superior to Godly values.

In the last Beatitude the importance of being a peacemaker was emphasized. This does not mean that Christians must work towards ignoring truth to appease others. The apostle, Paul, in Romans 12:18 states, *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* Further, Jesus states the importance of putting God first and following His Word above all else. *"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me."* Matthew 10: 37-38.

We should work towards peace and always live according to God's love. We can pray for our enemies and work to overcome barriers between us. But we

must never abandon what we know is right and true based on God's Word. Living out God's Word can cause unbelievers to elicit hostility towards us. When we face persecution, remembering God's promises will help us to stay strong in the faith.

Jesus wants us to focus on the blessing of heaven much more than worldly things. Jesus wants our hearts to focus on the joy and hope of heaven since God's promises are true and His love is unchanging.

Jesus detailing the Beatitudes is a speech with power because God's Word has the power to change lives. In the Beatitudes, Jesus provides a call to action for how Christians can approach their lives and what they should seek after.

We can look back at how God has sustained us in the past, how He cares for us today, and how He will be with us into the future. I recently came across a sermon that my dad, Rev. Dr. Steve Stohlmann, gave for a New Year's Eve church service in 1997. It

describes well how we can focus our thoughts on what matters and trust in the unchanging love of Christ to sustain us to life everlasting in heaven. The three Scripture readings for the service are listed first and then the text of the sermon that my Dad gave. Blessed, happy, and hopeful are those who have Christ as their Savior in their life!

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

Hebrews 13:8.

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn. Isaiah 5:1.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39.

YESTERDAY

How many yesterdays can you remember?

There were 364 of them in 1997 so far. How many can you remember? 5, 10, 15, or 20 maybe? And how many

of the yesterdays of 1996, 1995, 1994 can you remember? Probably even fewer. Our memories never can take in all that has passed. We are left with impressions, moments, glimpses of what has gone by.

Remembering everything about every yesterday is not really all that important anyway. It's not really what the psalmist meant when he said, teach us to number our days (Psalm 90:12). It means instead what the Old Testament lesson said. Remember those yesterdays as times to look to the Rock and the quarry from which you were dug. Look to that which is permanent in the yesterdays, not to that which is impermanent that you cannot even remember it.

Tonight the world celebrates the passing of 364 yesterdays. It celebrates the impermanence of life. It celebrates but it does not look to the Rock nor to the quarry from which it was dug. The worldly yesterday is soon forgotten.

But the Biblical yesterday was a time when the Rock was at work to tell His people through Moses, the prophets, and the psalms that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise on the third day so that forgiveness of sins could be proclaimed in His name to all the nations. Yesterday, all 365 of them, and all the 365 of them in the previous years gone, God was the same for His people. A God who was at work to work the deliverance of His people. That yesterday, the Biblical yesterday, we can never forget.

TODAY

Today is the day of salvation. Today with God is the same as all the yesterdays with Him. Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever. His name assures us of that.

Traditionally in the calendar of the church, the New Year marks the celebration of the naming of Jesus. On the 8th day after His birth, He was circumcised in accordance with the law of Moses. Mary and Joseph

called His name, Jesus, the name the angel, Gabriel, told them to name Him, because He would save His people from their sins. He would accomplish that reconciliation between God and us, which is so necessary after all those yesterdays in our lives.

Today His name is still Jesus because today He still delivers His people from everything in their lives that has separated them from God. Worry is one of those things that separates us from God. Worry is lack of trust in the name of Jesus. It is the unconscious assumption that Jesus has changed today, that He is no longer like yesterday, so we need to worry...So we worry about what we will eat, what we will wear, etc.

And to show us how silly the worry is, that we let it separate us from God, our Lord asks us to think of the flowers and the birds, and how they are provided for by the God who is our Rock, impervious to changing His ways with His people, constant in His love for them. As He provides for them, so He provides

for us, today as He did yesterday. Jesus is the same today. He does not change—so you can use today and every today to strive for His kingdom. As he provided yesterday, He will provide for today. His name is Jesus TODAY as it was yesterday.

FOREVER

That's the word I never cease to be amazed about. It is so outside my understanding. I can understand yesterday somewhat and today a bit, but never will I understand "forever", on this earth.

It's so much easier to count the tomorrows: January 1st, 2nd, etc., 1998, 1999, 2000, but there is no counting "forever". So God tells me what I can hang on to to deal with the "forever" ---Jesus Christ, the same forever as He was yesterday and today. That's all I need to be able to cope with "forever". Jesus Christ, God's love made visible, God's promise made complete. God's salvation that lasts forever!

Forever with the Lord—for my father that's been more than 21 years now, that "forever" for my uncles and aunts has been more or less than that. For your loved ones? Does it matter? It does not matter how long it has been because it's been the same with Jesus Christ, yesterday and today and forever in that Great Day of the Lord which has no beginning and will never end because with God, a thousand years are but a day and a day is like a thousand years, so His day lasts forever.

There is never a way to number forever. It's never an old forever, nor is it a new forever, but in the Day of the Lord, it is always a happy forever, a blessed forever. The greeting "Happy New Year" never lasts. It soon changes to, "Oh, brother, another year just like the old year." Instead, may your greeting be "Happy Day that Lasts Forever! Because Jesus Christ is forever!"

Tomorrows come and go. Forever never perishes. It never ceases to exist or gets lost. It is

literally forever and our Lord and Savior, Jesus, is our Lord and Savior forever!

Nothing can separate us from that—nothing in those yesterdays, nothing today, nothing tomorrow ...because He is forever the same. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Happy Forever!¹

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