

Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business

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Leader's Guide – Participant's Guide

Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 1

LEADER'S GUIDE

How to Find True Happiness

Blessedness is a measure of our spiritual maturity.

According to the Beatitudes, we should pursue happiness in the Lord. We need to adopt a theology of happiness. The pursuit of happiness is common to all people. It is the motive behind much of what we do. But the path to true happiness is far different than people think.

This nine-part series investigates the joys that can be found in knowing God and living his way.

Scripture:

Nehemiah 8:10; Psalm 16:11, 37:4; Ecclesiastes 2:2, 3:12; Matthew 5:3-12; Philippians 4:4; James 4:9

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMONS



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Would it be worthy to have a New Year's resolution in which your goal was to experience more happiness in God than ever before? People often divide Christendom into two attitudes toward pleasure and happiness. And each attitude can find a basis in Scripture.

There are those who are ascetic and austere. Life is no laughing matter. Seriousness is next to godliness. Read James 4:9 and Ecclesiastes 2:2. Puritanism is misunderstood by some to be "the haunting fear that somewhere, somehow, somebody may be happy."

Then there are the shiny, happy people. Life is good. Drink it up. Read Nehemiah 8:10 and Ecclesiastes 3:12.

Where are you? Is the goal of experiencing happiness a worthy one? This study hopes to persuade you that it is—to give you a theology of happiness that is both serious and joyful.

We need to begin with what happiness is not. It's not the right circumstances, abundant material possessions, or dependent on your emotions.

We need to use the language of heaven to describe true happiness: it is to be blessed.

Blessedness is deep, lasting, spiritual, and accessible, not circumstantial, tangible, and emotional. Blessedness is serious business. Blessedness doesn't come from this world, but the next. It is not from human resources, but divine.

To be blessed means to be approved by God. It is to sense his smile of endorsement upon you, his love and affection. Blessedness is to appreciate your worth in his eyes.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] What makes you happiest? Describe the last thing that truly made you happy.
- [Q] When do you feel blessed? Is there a difference between blessed and happy?
- [Q] Name something that made you happy temporarily, but then wore off.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Happiness is a matter of first importance.

Blaise Pascal, the philosopher, said, "All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every person, even of those who hang themselves."



In living for Christ it is not just sacrifice, discipline, and hard work that are important. The first word in the various Beatitudes is *blessed*. This is a matter of first importance. Why is this first? Because God is a happy God. 1 Timothy 1:11 describes God as blessed. And since his happiness and our happiness are bound together, we can only be truly happy if we are connected to him. The Westminster Catechism says, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” So God’s glory and our enjoyment are serious business.

Seeking happiness is our universal instinct. People try to buy, snort, and vacation their way to happiness. We seek it tenaciously. To find happiness, the point is not to get back to the Garden, but to get back to God. Jesus tells us how to get back to God, via the eight qualities described in the Beatitudes.

Read the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3–12.

- [Q] What stands out to you as you hear these pronouncements?
- [Q] What do you think Jesus is trying to get across?
- [Q] Why do you think God made us to long for happiness?

Teaching point two: Happiness is a measure of our satisfaction in God.

John Piper says that if the chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever, then our chief end is to be happy in God. He adds, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.”

Therefore I can conclude that if I’m not happy, I’m not very satisfied with God. I’ve chased a false happiness; I’ve invested in less than the best. For those who truly want to walk with God, happiness is not just an alternative; it’s imperative.

- [Q] Read Psalm 16:11. Name at least three things that indicate why we should be happy in God, according to this verse. What comes to mind when you hear the word *pleasure*? Does this verse change the way you think about this word?
- [Q] Read Psalm 37:4. How do we delight ourselves in the Lord? Does this mean he will give us everything we want? What does “he will give you the desires of your heart” mean?

Teaching point three: Happiness is a moral obligation.

It is your sacred duty to be happy in God. This happiness is not a superficial cheerfulness. The fruit of the Spirit is joy, not perkiness. The Beatitudes lay out the path to happiness in logical fashion. There are eight beatitudes—eight character qualities, eight steps—in the path to happiness.

The amazing thing is that what Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 sounds exactly the opposite of happiness. He says blessed are the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers, the persecuted. The Beatitudes demand we redefine happiness.

Think about those affected by your unhappiness. God is not glorified, you are not satisfied, your family is not nurtured, the lost are not drawn to Christ. Kids breathe the atmosphere you create. Who is drawn to a God whose followers are miserable?



Read Philippians 4:4.

- [Q] How can we rejoice in the Lord, even when we don't feel like it?
- [Q] Does being happy in the Lord mean that we will never feel sad? What does it mean?
- [Q] What does it mean to enjoy God? What do we have to know about him to enjoy him?

Teaching point four: Happiness is a mindset we must learn.

Blessedness is not just a fortunate state into which we drift. It is a choice, a mindset. In the pursuit of happiness in God, it is important whom we listen to. Someone has said, "We listen to ourselves far too much; we talk to ourselves far too little."

Greg Lafferty tells this story about a woman named Mabel:

The state-run convalescent hospital is not a pleasant place. It is large, understaffed, and overfilled with senile, helpless, lonely people who are waiting to die. On the brightest of days it seems dark inside, and it smells of sickness and stale urine. It is not the kind of place one gets used to.

On this particular day I was walking in a hallway looking in vain for a few who were alive enough to receive a flower and a word of encouragement. I saw an old woman strapped in a wheelchair. Her face was an absolute horror. The empty stare and white pupils of her eyes told me that she was blind. The large hearing aid over one ear told me that she was almost deaf. One side of her face was being eaten by cancer. There was a discolored, running sore covering part of one cheek. It pushed her nose to the side, dropped one eye, and distorted her jaw. She drooled constantly. I was told later that when new nurses arrived, the supervisor sent them to feed this woman, thinking that if they could stand her, they could stand anyone. She was 89 years old and had been there bedridden, blind, nearly deaf, and alone for 25 years.

I don't know why I spoke to her, but I put a flower in her hand and said, "Happy Mother's Day." She tried to smell it and then she spoke. And much to my surprise, her words, though somewhat garbled were obviously produced by a clear mind. "Thank you, it's lovely. But can I give it to someone else? I can't see, you know, I'm blind."

Soon Mabel held out the flower to another patient and said, "Here, this is from Jesus."

During one hectic week of final exams, I was frustrated because my mind seemed pulled in 10 directions at once. The question occurred to me, "What does Mabel have to think about—hour after hour, day after day, week after week, not even knowing if it's day or night?"

So I asked her, "Mabel, what do you think about when you lie here?"

She said, "I think about my Jesus. I think about how good he's been to me. He's been awfully good to me in my life, you know."

- [Q] How was Mabel living out the kind of happiness the Beatitudes talks about? How do you think she learned this attitude?



[Q] How can we learn to be filled with joy, even when circumstances are difficult?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

C. S. Lewis says in his sermon “The Weight of Glory,” “Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) I love being a Christian.
- 2) The Christian life seems hard.
- 3) I'm glad I'm a Christian, but I'm dissatisfied a lot.
- 4) I love Christ, but I'm not happy.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. What difference does it make which statement you see yourself in? How does that view affect your life?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us understand our underlying feelings about God, which affect our happiness.*

Activity: *Give each person a note card, envelope, and pen. Ask each of them to write a note to God expressing how he or she feels about him. Assure everyone that no one will see this note—it's between that person and God only. When they are finished, they are to seal the note into the envelope, put their name on the envelope, and return it to the leader. At the last study, the leader will return their note, still sealed.*

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 1

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

How to Find True Happiness

Blessedness is a measure of our spiritual maturity.

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Based on:

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Is the goal of experiencing happiness a worthy one? This study hopes to persuade you that it is—to give you a theology of happiness that is both serious and joyful.

Happiness is not:

- ◆ The right circumstances
- ◆ Abundant material possessions
- ◆ Dependent on your emotions

True happiness is to be blessed. To be blessed means to be approved by God. It is to sense his smile of endorsement upon you, his love and affection. Blessedness is to appreciate your worth in his eyes.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Happiness is a matter of first importance.

Teaching point two: Happiness is a measure of our satisfaction in God.

Teaching point three: Happiness is a moral obligation.

Teaching point four: Happiness is a mindset we must learn.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

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Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 2

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Happiness of Helplessness

*Our true happiness is dependent upon knowing
we are spiritually impoverished.*

Jesus says we must be poor in spirit. He insists that our true happiness is dependent upon knowing we are spiritually bankrupt. This means we need a kingdom perspective of our spiritual helplessness. The common understanding of happiness is contrary to the attitudes Jesus presented. Our materialistic society is an obstacle to appreciating spiritual poverty as requisite for true happiness. This study will help us come to terms with our spiritual poverty.

Scripture:

Matthew 5:3; Romans 3:10-18, 23; 12:1-3; Ephesians 2:1-10

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

How would you complete this sentence? "I would be happy if only I had..." At the risk of sounding trite, you completed that sentence wrongly if you included anything but Jesus. Even then, some of you have Jesus, but you still aren't happy.

Generally, people are conditioned to be unhappy unless made temporarily happy. As believers, we are usually happy unless made temporarily unhappy. Our attitude in life is: I would be unhappy only if... We need mental training to learn how to frame the questions of life. We need to learn how to think and process our experiences. "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). When it comes to the kingdom of God, happiness is defined differently. Jesus equated happiness with God's approval.

Jesus said something that is preposterous unless you have a kingdom perspective. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). With those words, Jesus launched into the greatest sermon ever preached.

The sermon was stunningly brilliant and captivatingly fresh. Jesus quoted no rabbis, religious authorities, or ancient authors. Characteristically, he cut to heart of the matter with amazing authority (7:28–29), and he told them how to get into the kingdom.

Jesus said: Blessed are the poor in spirit—it belongs to them. It is like saying the general admission crowd enters first. Some thought, That's ridiculous. Blessed are the season ticket holders, those with the reserved seats. Happy are the skybox executives with the full buffet. Blessed are the press credentialed who get into the post-game locker room. Happy are the celebrity fans, frequently shown on camera. Blessed are the players' spouses who have access to all that money!

No, Jesus said the opposite. Blessed are the shirtless fans in the worst seat in the stadium who really can't afford to be here anyway. Any other happiness is false and temporary.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Do you agree with the statement, "Generally, people are conditioned to be unhappy unless made temporarily happy"? Why or why not?
- [Q] What do you think it means to be "poor in spirit"? How could that possibly lead to happiness?
- [Q] How can we train ourselves to think differently about happiness?



PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We should know before God that we are poor in spirit.

The word *poor* refers to the “beggarly poor,” those who cower and cringe. We need a theological perspective to understand this poverty. We are conditioned to think otherwise. “Stand on your own two feet.” “Reach for the top.” “Make something of yourself.” “Plan your work, and work your plan.” “Be assertive. Look ‘em in the eye. Give a firm handshake.”

We are advised to spike our resumes with action verbs and to finesse the facts. We are told to turn “garbage collector” into “sanitation engineer,” or make “short order cook” into “culinary surgeon.” We list initials behind our name, display our degrees on the wall, and keep our credentials handy. Conventional wisdom says we should make ourselves huge.

Such actions and attitudes show we are far from the kingdom. Listen to Brennan Manning’s words: “I experienced a significant breakthrough into the freedom of the children of God at my first AA meeting. In the past I would have set great store not only on looking good, but on thinking too often about who was looking. My self-image as a man of God and a disciplined disciple had to be protected at all costs...It was a supreme moment of liberation to stand up, kick the pedestal aside and simply state: ‘My name is Brennan; I am an alcoholic.’”

Everybody has to do that. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom.” There is an issue we must wrestle with: Can we become spiritually impoverished when we’re not materially poor? Some can, but as Jesus said, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.” Material wealth usually masks spiritual poverty, while material poverty heightens it.

Mother Teresa said, “The poor can see better.” The poor stand a chance of being saved by God because they know they don’t stand a chance otherwise. The radical truth is contrary to proverbial wisdom. God helps those who can’t help themselves.

[Q] Read Romans 3:10–18. What do these verses have to say about our ability to be good by our own efforts? What about our ability to seek God on our own? What does this say about our need to be poor in spirit?

[Q] Read Romans 3:23. What does it mean that we “fall short of the glory of God”?

[Q] Why would God want us to know we are hopeless on our own?

Teaching point two: Our only chance of happiness is to be poor in spirit.

The need to believe we are spiritually poor is not something we outgrow. We don’t start out on God’s grace plan and grow into the works plan. We don’t initially draw worth from Jesus, and then earn it ourselves. We must believe we are helpless from beginning to end.

The question of belief applies to both halves of the Beatitude. Not only believing we are blessed in our spiritual poverty, but that we possess the kingdom of heaven and enjoy the promise of happiness. In the person of Jesus, the kingdom is within you now. All the benefits are yours. Heaven, earth, comfort, righteousness, fullness, mercy, peace, family of God, and great reward are ours as we travel toward ever-increasing spiritual blessing.



Read Ephesians 2:1–10.

- [Q] According to these verses, how does being poor in spirit lead to happiness or blessedness?
- [Q] Name all the blessings you can find in these verses. Why would knowing about these blessings change the way you live your life? Why must we know we are spiritually impoverished in order to appreciate these blessings?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us understand our blessings in God, which outweigh all earthly blessings.*

Activity: *Ask each person to list things they think would make them happy. These should be worldly things that anyone would want. Then ask them to list after each of these a spiritual blessing from Ephesians 2:1–10. Discuss as a group a contrast between the two.*

Teaching point three: The fact that we are poor in spirit should be evident in what we are living for.

Those who know they are spiritually poor are humble in mind. The word humility means “low-minded.” They are authentic in relationships because they aren’t worried about impressing. And, most of all, they are joyful in God. The spiritually impoverished are those who are hopeful in outlook, grateful in grace, and reveling in love.

Philip Yancey writes in *The Jesus I Never Knew*:

Why would God single out the poor for special attention over any other group? I used to wonder. What makes the poor deserving of God’s concern? I received help on this issue from a writer named Monika Hellwig, who lists the following “advantages” to being poor:

The poor know they are in urgent need of redemption.

The poor know not only their dependence on God and on powerful people but also their interdependence with one another.

The poor rest their security not on things but on people.

The poor have no exaggerated sense of their own importance, and no exaggerated need of privacy.

The poor expect little from competition and much from cooperation.

The poor can distinguish between necessities and luxuries.

The poor can wait, because they have acquired a kind of dogged patience.

The fears of the poor are more realistic and less exaggerated, because they already know that one can survive great suffering and want.

When the poor have the gospel preached to them, it sounds like good news and not like a threat or scolding.



The poor can respond to the call of the gospel with a certain abandonment and uncomplicated totality because they have so little to lose and are ready for anything.

Read Romans 12:1–3.

- [Q] How does “offering our bodies as living sacrifices” indicate that we are poor in spirit?
- [Q] What does it mean to have our minds transformed? What are practical ways we can do this?
- [Q] How can we avoid thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought? How is self-centeredness the opposite of being poor in spirit? Why does self-centeredness make us unhappy instead of happy?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Jonathan Edwards said, “The enjoyment of [God] is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied.... Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows, but enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.”

Contrast that with what actor Alan Alda said: “It isn’t necessary to be rich and famous to be happy. It’s only necessary to be rich.”

- [Q] Who do you think was the happiest in this life and the next? Edwards or Alda? Why?
- [Q] What does being poor in spirit have to do with enjoying God? Why is enjoying God key to our happiness? How can we begin to enjoy God?

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 2

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Happiness of Helplessness

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Jesus says we must be poor in spirit. He insists that our true happiness is dependent upon knowing we are spiritually bankrupt. This means we need a kingdom perspective of our spiritual helplessness. The common understanding of happiness is contrary to the attitudes Jesus presented. Our materialistic society is an obstacle to appreciating spiritual poverty as requisite for true happiness. This study will help us come to terms with our spiritual poverty.

Scripture:

Matthew 5:3; Romans 3:10–18, 23; 12:1–3; Ephesians 2:1–10

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

How would you complete this sentence? "I would be happy if only I had..." Generally, people are conditioned to be unhappy unless made temporarily happy. We need to learn how to think and process our experiences. "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Jesus equated happiness with God's approval.

Jesus said something that is preposterous unless you have a kingdom perspective. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). With those words, Jesus launched into the greatest sermon ever preached.

It is like saying the general admission crowd enters first. Blessed are the shirtless fans in the worst seat in the stadium who really can't afford to be here anyway. Any other happiness is false and temporary.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We should know before God that we are poor in spirit.

Teaching point two: Our only chance of happiness is to be poor in spirit.

Teaching point three: The fact that we are poor in spirit should be evident in what we are living for.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Jonathan Edwards said, "The enjoyment of [God] is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied.... Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows, but enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean."

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Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 3

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Joy of Mourning

Happiness is only found when we are willing to mourn over our sin.

We must truly repent to experience the comfort of God, because we will only find the meaning to life when we learn to mourn our sin. Our rush to be happy keeps us from dwelling on the pain and seriousness of our sin. We must resist our culture's aversion to guilt and sadness so that we can experience the happiness that comes from true repentance. This study will focus on that repentance and the resulting joy.

Scripture:

Job 42:6; Psalm 51:1-4, 11; 103:10-14; Isaiah 6:5, 57:15; Matthew 5:4, 26:75; Romans 7:24; 2 Corinthians 7:8-10

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

If we are not numb and desensitized, there is much to mourn. We live in a world of hurt, not the world that was meant for us. We were:

- ◆ meant to rule...instead we're dominated
- ◆ meant to relate...instead we're alienated
- ◆ meant to reflect glory...instead we're depraved and everything we touch is desecrated

When G. K. Chesterton was asked, "What's wrong with the world?" he answered, "I am."

That's the heart and soul of the second Beatitude: Blessed and happy are those who mourn. In our world, happy and sad are contrasting opposites...they clash hideously. In God's world, happy and sad are color coordinates...they go together nicely.

Listen to how the Heidelberg Catechism expresses it:

Q: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A: That I am not my own but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

Q: What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A: Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.

The word *mourn* is the strongest of nine such words in the New Testament. Humanly speaking, we seek to avoid any feelings of sadness, because our happiness depends on it. But happiness is not circumstantial, material, or emotional. It's spiritual; for it follows on the heels of mourning our sin.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Is it possible that you've missed a lot of joy in life because you thought to be happy you couldn't be sad? Why must we experience sorrow before we can experience true happiness?
- [Q] Why, like G.K Chesterton, do we need to recognize that we are what's wrong with the world?
- [Q] How do we mourn our sin without giving into despair?



PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: To mourn over our sin, we have to point the finger at ourselves.

Read Psalm 51:1–4. David responds in this Psalm to his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. He uses the words “my transgressions,” “my iniquity,” “my sin,” and “I have done what is evil.”

Blame is not to be cast, but caught.

- ◆ No soft-pedaling
- ◆ No excuse-making
- ◆ No ennobling bluster: “I take full responsibility.”
- ◆ No counterattack.

Sin is not stepping on God’s toes; it’s a capital offense. It is to be taken seriously.

In the early 1980s, Congressmen Daniel Crane and Gerald Studds were both censured by the House of Representatives. Crane’s censure was for having sex with 17-year-old female page. Studds’ censure was for having sex with 17-year-old male page.

In an ethics essay for the *Chicago Sun-Times* (8-22-83), Thomas Roeser wrote, “Being censured is the only thing Crane and Studds have in common.”

Crane tearfully admitted he “broke the laws of God and man,” cast a vote for his own censure, and faced the House as the Speaker read the tally.

Studds acknowledged he was gay in a dramatic speech, defended his relationship as “mutual and voluntary,” said it didn’t warrant the attention or action of the House, merely voted “present” on the censure, and turned his back on the House when the verdict was read.

Roeser commented: “There’s one consolation for Crane. His actions teach that there is one thing worse than sin. That is denial of sin, which makes forgiveness impossible.”

- [Q] Why is it so important that we admit our sin rather than excuse it?
- [Q] On what basis did David plead for mercy in Psalm 51:1–4?
- [Q] Imagine that you spoke to David later in his life about his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. Which of the following would best reflect his attitude:
 - 1) I know what I did was wrong, but we really loved each other.
 - 2) It wasn’t wrong if you look at the whole thing. After all, I did make her my wife, and God eventually blessed our marriage.
 - 3) I make no excuse for what I did. I sinned against Bathsheba and God.
 - 4) It could have been worse. At least I didn’t abandon Bathsheba after she became pregnant.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. What is the difference between the one you chose and the other options?



Teaching point two: We need to not only acknowledge our sin, but brood on it.

This is the heart of mourning. Hang on and plumb the depths of your sin until it becomes a hot reality, not merely a cold theological proposition.

Ask yourself:

- ◆ Why do I do that?
- ◆ What is that sin called, in its essence?
- ◆ What is it about God or his Word that I deny or disbelieve when I do that?

David said, "I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:3). To *know* my transgressions means that I've gotten intimate with my sin; I've done the hard work of knowing myself. *Always* means I haven't put my sin on the back burner or let go of mourning too soon.

A great deal of grace and joy are missed because we truncate the process of repentance. We move too quickly to absolve guilt and remove consequences. Don't "Kevorkian" shame before it's had a chance to grow into true repentance.

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8–10.

- [Q] According to these verses, what does brooding or sorrow over our sin do? How is repentance more than a passing mention of our sin?
- [Q] What is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? How do we know when we've brooded enough over our sin?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us recognize how lightly society takes sin.

Activity: Form groups of three or four. Give each group a section of a newspaper or a recent magazine and ask them to find an article indicating how our society makes light of sin. Allow about five minutes to find the article, then reconvene and ask each group to share a summary of the article they found.

Teaching point three: To truly mourn our sin, we have to be broken.

To be broken is the point of not being able to stand the depths of your sin; you despair of ever being whole, well, or healthy in yourself. By mourning, you show true desperation and brokenness for your sin.

Job, Isaiah, Peter, and Paul all experienced this kind of brokenness. Read about them in Job 42:6, Isaiah 6:5, Matthew 26:75, and Romans 7:24.

- [Q] What do these four men have in common? What about their words reveals their brokenness? According to these verses, what makes us broken?
- [Q] Each of these men had a powerful encounter with God, which left them feeling shattered. How can we have a similar experience?
- [Q] Why is brokenness essential to finding happiness in God?



Teaching point four: Those who mourn are blessed, because God comes to live with them.

The promise for those who mourn is that they will be comforted. God personally removes their sin as far as the east is from the west and cleanses them from all unrighteousness. If that weren't enough, he takes up residence in them, so they can experience his fullness.

In Psalm 51:11, David feared a fate worse than death. He said, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." Our word *comfort* comes from the word *Paraclete*, which is another word for the Holy Spirit. When God sent his Holy Spirit to dwell within us, he gave us the greatest possible comfort.

[Q] Read Psalm 103:10–14. Why must we understand mourning for our sin, if we are to understand these verses? How does God show us his love and compassion according to these verses?

[Q] Read Isaiah 57:15. What is contrasted in this verse? What is the same? What does this verse mean for us?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Ilion T. Jones says, "Repentance is not a fatal day when tears are shed, but a natal day when, as a result of tears, a new life begins."

Forgiveness is received by faith and overflows into joy when it has been appropriated by true repentance. True repentance takes time. Give it some this week. Learn how to mourn so that you can have joy.

[Q] How does repentance give us new life?

[Q] How can you give time this week to mourning for your sin and soaking in God's forgiveness?

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 3

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Joy of Mourning

Happiness is only found when we are willing to mourn over our sin.

We must truly repent to experience the comfort of God, because we will only find the meaning to life when we learn to mourn our sin. Our rush to be happy keeps us from dwelling on the pain and seriousness of our sin. We must resist our culture's aversion to guilt and sadness so that we can experience the happiness that comes from true repentance. This study will focus on that repentance and the resulting joy.

Scripture:

Job 42:6; Psalm 51:1-4, 11; 103:10-14; Isaiah 6:5, 57:15; Matthew 5:4, 26:75; Romans 7:24; 2 Corinthians 7:8-10

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

When G. K. Chesterton was asked, "What's wrong with the world?" he answered, "I am."

That's the heart and soul of the second Beatitude: Blessed and happy are those who mourn. In our world, happy and sad are contrasting opposites...they clash hideously. In God's world, happy and sad are color coordinates...they go together nicely.

The word *mourn* is the strongest of nine such words in the New Testament. Humanly speaking, we seek to avoid any feelings of sadness, because our happiness depends on it. But happiness is not circumstantial, material, or emotional. It's spiritual; for it follows on the heels of mourning our sin.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: To mourn over our sin, we have to point the finger at ourselves.

[Q] Imagine that you spoke to David later in his life about his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. Which of the following would best reflect his attitude:

- 1) I know what I did was wrong, but we really loved each other.
- 2) It wasn't wrong if you look at the whole thing. After all, I did make her my wife, and God eventually blessed our marriage.
- 3) I make no excuse for what I did. I sinned against Bathsheba and God.
- 4) It could have been worse. At least I didn't abandon Bathsheba after she became pregnant.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. What is the difference between the one you chose and the other options?

Teaching point two: We need to not only acknowledge our sin, but brood on it.

Teaching point three: To truly mourn our sin, we have to be broken.

Teaching point four: Those who mourn are blessed, because God comes to live with them.



PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Forgiveness is received by faith and overflows into joy when it has been appropriated by true repentance. True repentance takes time. Give it some this week. Learn how to mourn so that you can have joy.

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 4

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Rewards of Meekness

The meek are happy because they are the ones who inherit the earth.

The world seeks a false happiness. Most people have no idea that it's a blessing to be meek. Culture says, "Grab all the gusto you can," "assert yourself," "stand up for your rights." Our success-oriented society prizes self-aggrandizement. Jesus teaches that happiness and ultimate success come only to those with the opposite perspective. In this study we are going to discover what it means to be meek.

Scripture:

Genesis 13:8-9; Numbers 12:1-10; 1 Samuel 26:7-9; Matthew 12:34-37, 20:26-28; Philippians 2:6-7; James 1:19-20

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Matthew 5:5 says, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Humility and meekness run like rich veins throughout Scripture. It is the opposite of the Austin 3:16 approach that says, "I'm Steve Austin, and I'm going to kick your fanny." By turning from villain to hero, Austin skyrocketed to the top of the World Wrestling Federation. The meek inherit the earth? Not according to Austin 3:16. This is a reality in which nice guys finish last; you stomp your opponent; you look out for number one; and you fight for your rights.

This is a false reality of money, muscle, and human power. Jesus says the true path to happiness is not self-assertion, but submission. It is not willfulness, but willingness. The rewards of such meekness are anything but normal, but the meek inherit the earth.

The meek come to a wonderful, rewarding place in life where instead of:

- ◆ needing to lead, we can follow
- ◆ having to be first, we can go last
- ◆ keeping up appearances, we can be transparent
- ◆ rushing to judgment, we recall our own vulnerabilities
- ◆ touting our own competence, we can regard others more highly
- ◆ fighting for our rights, we can renounce them
- ◆ needing to control, we can complement
- ◆ getting the last word, we can listen
- ◆ needing to win, we have nothing to lose
- ◆ being touchy and defensive, we are not easily offended

Discussion starters:

- [Q] When you hear the word *meek*, what comes to mind? Do you think this is an accurate view of what Jesus is talking about?
- [Q] Why is it true that meekness actually shows more strength than power plays? Give an example.
- [Q] Name characters in novels or movies that are all about power. Name characters from the same that exhibit the kind of meekness Jesus values. Which is more prevalent? Why?
- [Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:
 - 1) Being meek means never speaking up for what I believe.
 - 2) Being meek means seeing others as more important than myself.
 - 3) Being meek means everyone gets a fair shake.
 - 4) Being meek means always letting others have their own way.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. How does that view affect your life?



PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our speech reveals whether we are meek.

Have you let your mouth know that you're a humble person? How often do you regret your words? How often does your mouth get you into trouble? How often have your speech patterns violated the "one mouth to two ear" proportions God hardwired into your skull?

Our speech reveals what's in our hearts. That's why James says, "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness...My brothers this should not be" (James 3:9-10).

[Q] Why is it so easy to praise God one minute and show anger to a person the next?

[Q] Read Matthew 12:34-37. How do our words reflect our heart? What do you think Jesus meant when he said we would be acquitted or condemned by our words?

Leader's Notes: *Jesus may have been talking about blasphemous words in this passage. He was speaking to the Pharisees who attributed Jesus' work to the devil.*

[Q] Read James 1:19-20. Why is it important that we be quick to listen and slow to speak? Why are angry words counterproductive? In what way are they the opposite of meekness?

Teaching point two: Our attitude toward service reveals whether we are meek.

How do you respond when people treat you like a servant? We are slaves of Christ and servants of all, but it's easy to resent being treated that way.

Nearly 1 million high school seniors were asked: How would you rate your overall leadership abilities?

- ◆ 70 percent said they were above average.
- ◆ 25 percent said they were in the top 1 percent.
- ◆ 60 percent said they were in the top 10 percent.

When asked: How well do you get along with others?

- ◆ 0 in 829,000 said "below average."

Lest you think only teenagers are so confused about this issue, college faculty were asked: How would you rate your competency in comparison to an average colleague? 84 percent answered: "Better."

Jesus, who is the only one that truly could answer that he's the greatest, instead took the form of a servant. Read Matthew 20:26-28 and Philippians 2:6-7.

[Q] Why did Jesus say that in order to be great, we have to first become a servant? What does it mean to be a servant? In verse 27, he even says we must become a slave. What characterizes a slave? How should our behavior be like a slaves'?



[Q] Why is it easier to do this knowing Jesus has already done it? What did slavery eventually lead to for Christ (Phil. 2:9)?

Teaching point three: Our attitude toward success reveals whether we are meek.

Do you have to be first to be happy? When credits are passed out, how concerned are you that your contribution is acknowledged? How do you handle the success of your peers? All these things are a test of your meekness.

Thomas à Kempis said, "Take delight in being unknown and unregarded. A true understanding and humble estimate of oneself is the highest and most valuable of all lessons. To take no account of oneself, but always to think well and highly of others, is the highest wisdom. ... We are all frail; consider none more frail than yourself."

It's interesting to note that according to *Harper's*, 61 percent of Americans earning less than \$30,000 per year believe that "the meek shall inherit the earth," while 36 percent of Americans earning more than \$60,000 believe this.

Abraham, Moses, and David demonstrated a different attitude toward success:

[Q] Read Genesis 13:8–9. What was Abraham's attitude toward the best land?

[Q] Read Numbers 12:1–10. What was Moses' attitude and how did God deal with Miriam's pride?

[Q] Read 1 Samuel 26:7–9. How did David show humility and trust his future to God?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The world will try to convince us that we must be first to be happy. Don't buy it. Remember God's not done with the earth yet. One day it will be redeemed and turned over to the submissive and meek, those who are under authority. Justice will be served. Those who bullied their way to the top will be supplanted by those they've stomped on.

It's hard to believe. It's hard to imagine a military general, a sales manager, or a politician revving up troops with stirring messages of meekness. But meekness is our challenge now, not later. It can't wait until after making your million or getting a promotion. God exalts humble people, and everything else is self-exaltation. "O LORD, by your hand save me from men of this world whose reward is in this life" (Psalm 17:14).

The essence of faith is to believe God exists and rewards those who earnestly seek him. Let us seek him meekly.



[Q] Revisit the multiple-choice question under Identify the Current Issue:

With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) Being meek means never speaking up for what I believe in.
- 2) Being meek means seeing others as more important than myself.
- 3) Being meek means everyone gets a fair shake.
- 4) Being meek means always letting others have their own way.

Has this study changed your answer? If so, why?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us to become meek.*

Activity: *Ask each person in the group to find a partner. Ask that partner to pray for one area that you need to find meekness in. This may be in your marriage, your job, your church, or your friendships. Spend about five minutes praying.*

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 4

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Rewards of Meekness

The meek are happy because they are the ones who inherit the earth.

The world seeks a false happiness. Most people have no idea that it's a blessing to be meek. Culture says, "Grab all the gusto you can," "assert yourself," "stand up for your rights." Our success-oriented society prizes self-aggrandizement. Jesus teaches that happiness and ultimate success come only to those with the opposite perspective. In this study we are going to discover what it means to be meek.

Scripture:

Genesis 13:8-9; Numbers 12:1-10; 1 Samuel 26:7-9; Matthew 12:34-37, 20:26-28; Philippians 2:6-7; James 1:19-20

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Matthew 5:5 says, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." ""

The meek come to a wonderful, rewarding place in life where instead of:

- ◆ needing to lead, we can follow
- ◆ having to be first, we can go last
- ◆ keeping up appearances, we can be transparent
- ◆ rushing to judgment, we recall our own vulnerabilities
- ◆ touting our own competence, we can regard others more highly
- ◆ fighting for our rights, we can renounce them
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- ◆ needing to win, we have nothing to lose
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Explain why you chose the statement you did. How does that view affect your life?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our speech reveals whether we are meek.

Teaching point two: Our attitude toward service reveals whether we are meek.

Teaching point three: Our attitude toward success reveals whether we are meek.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The world will try to convince us that we must be first to be happy. Don't buy it. Remember God's not done with the earth yet. One day it will be redeemed and turned over to the



submissive and meek, those who are under authority. Justice will be served. Those who bullied their way to the top will be supplanted by those they've stomped on.

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The essence of faith is to believe God exists and rewards those who earnestly seek him. Let us seek him meekly.

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- 4) Being meek means always letting others have their own way.

Has this study changed your answer? If so, why?

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 5

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Satisfaction of Righteousness

Soul satisfaction depends upon our hunger for the things of God.

Jesus tells us we must hunger for righteousness and that our souls will never be satisfied unless we seek God. The more we seek satisfaction from other sources, the more we lack it, because it can only be found in one person. Jesus' concept of hungering for righteousness is foreign to our passions, and yet it is the only source of true satisfaction. This study will investigate how we can focus our passions on God alone.

Scripture:

Psalm 107:8–9; Ezekiel 18:25–32; Matthew 5:6; Luke 1:53; Romans 6:18–23

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

We have differing physical appetites, but all of us have a common hunger for happiness. We spend most of our lives pursuing it, and for many of us, the hunger is never satisfied.

Read Matthew 5:6. "Hunger for righteousness" are not words we would naturally put together. It is like having a hankering for the Pythagorean theorem or Quadratic equation. The realities of Jesus' day made it even more difficult to understand, because his audience knew physical hunger. They lived hand-to-mouth, and for some starvation was a real possibility. "Give us this day our daily bread" was prayed earnestly in those days.

Jesus flips Maslow's hierarchy of human needs on its head (self-actualization, esteem, love, safety, physiology). Jesus says: Forget your bellies; being ravenous for righteousness is where it's at.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] When was the last time you were really hungry or thirsty? Was anything else more important than eating or drinking at that time?
- [Q] Tell about a time you thought you wanted to eat something, but then regretted it after you consumed it. How might this apply spiritually?
- [Q] Name something else you "hungered" for (really wanted). Did it make you happy once you got it?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We have to be hungry to be happy.

Righteousness is a legal term—something you do. It's also a relational term—something you experience, such as being right with God and others, living in a way that jibes with life as God made it, and knowing more of his reign and order because that's where life is.

The fourth Beatitude leads to radical change. It's saying, *I want life a different way! I want it God's way!* Statements that relate to this idea of hungering for righteousness may sound like this:

- ◆ Scott: "My life consists of drinking, drugs, and broken relationships. I need to change or die."
- ◆ George and Cindy: "Living together without the commitment to marriage just doesn't seem right anymore."
- ◆ Nick: "I want my family to know how much I love them. I want to help around the house and tell my mom I love her."



- ◆ Jim: "I want to be baptized to affirm my commitment to Christ and publicly denounce Satan and his tools."

All of these people recognize their limitations and realize that only Christ can redeem their situations. They adopt the attitude of "I can't wait to see what's next!" This is hungering for righteousness.

Pat Summerall, the well-known sports announcer, overcame alcoholism and became a follower of Christ in his late 60s. About prayer meetings and Bible studies, Summerall comments: "It's like an alcoholic looking for a drink. If he wants it bad enough, he can find it—no matter what. I'm like that when it comes to finding prayer services and Bible studies. No matter where I am working, I know that they're out there and I can find them." (*Sports Spectrum*, Nov/Dec 2001)

Read Psalm 107:8–9 and Luke 1:53.

- [Q] Are these verses talking about a literal or figurative hunger and thirst?
- [Q] Why use the hunger and thirst metaphor in the Beatitudes?
- [Q] What's the great assurance in all these verses?
- [Q] Why do we need to be hungry to be happy? How can we cultivate that hunger?

Teaching point two: God promises to satisfy that hunger.

The paradox is that those who hunger and thirst continuously will be filled continuously. As you yearn for more and more of his righteousness, he will bring it, by his very presence, in such a way that you will find it deliciously satisfying.

It all starts with hunger and thirst. Is it possible you're being satisfied by another source? A pursuit or person, activity or addiction, thing or thrill, hobby or habit, is taking up space God wants to occupy.

Frank Sinatra's daughter, Tina Sinatra, in her book *My Father's Daughter*, recalls her father's unceasing drive to succeed and make money, even when his health was at risk:

His health was in tatters and his life mired in financial wrangles, but my father refused to stop giving concerts, "I've just got to earn more money," he said.

His performances, sad to say, were becoming more and more uneven. Uncertain of his memory, he became dependant on Teleprompters. When I saw him at Desert Inn in Las Vegas, he struggled through the show and felt so sick at the end that he needed oxygen from a tank that he kept on hand. At another show he forgot the lyrics to "Second Time Around," a ballad he had sung a thousand times. His adoring audience finished it for him.

I couldn't bear to see Dad struggle. I remembered all the times he repeated the old boxing maxim "You gotta get out before you hit the mat." He wanted to retire at the top of his game, and I always thought he would know when his time came, but pushing 80 he lost track of when to quit. After seeing one too many of these fiascos, I told him, "Pop, you can stop now; you don't have to stay on the road."



With a stricken expression he said, "No, I've got to earn more money. I have to make sure everyone is taken care of."

Since his death, there have been constant family wrangles over his fortune.

Read Ezekiel 18:25–32.

- [Q] According to these verses, who is just and who is unjust?
- [Q] How can a person move from unrighteousness to righteousness (vs. 30–32)?
- [Q] What does it mean to repent?
- [Q] How do these verses relate to a hunger that only God can satisfy?

Teaching point three: God wants to help create that hunger in our hearts.

What do we do with a wrong hunger that is seeking satisfaction from something other than Christ?

- ◆ *Resist*: Forego that item. Fight its pull.
- ◆ *Persevere*: Those who try to quit smoking, change their diet, break off a relationship, or kick a porn habit know that the desire is intensified at first. It feels as though you'll never be free, that you'll always have this overwhelming craving. You resist a day or two—barely—and wonder how you'll do it forever.
- ◆ *Redirect*: Take your desire in a different direction. As you hunger and thirst, draw near the kitchen. Smell the sweetness of what God wants to give you. Get yourself to those places where God lives and grace flows: Worship, the Word, creation, family, small group, ministry team, evangelism, Lord's Supper, fellowship, teaching, service.

It's not that all other pursuits are wrong; it's that all other pursuits are wrong unless they flow out of the primary pursuit of God. Seek first the kingdom.

Read Romans 6:18–23.

- [Q] What does it mean to be slaves to righteousness (v.18)?
- [Q] Which statement best describes how I can gain a hunger for righteousness:
 - 1) I just use self-discipline. I'm determined to have a hunger for righteousness.
 - 2) I think God understands my failings. I simply try to live the Christian life, but don't worry about it much.
 - 3) I want to know Christ better any way I can.
 - 4) I ask Christ to give me a hunger and thirst for him.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. What difference does it make which statement you see yourself in? How does that view affect your life?



PART 3

Apply Your Findings

If you've been a Christian for a while, there was a time when you were addicted to a growing experience of God and his righteousness. Get back to that place. Soul satisfaction is guaranteed. There's more of God to experience than you have yet.

Star Wars creator George Lucas described how the young Anakin Skywalker became the evil Darth Vader:

He turns into Darth Vader because he gets attached to things. He can't let go of his mother; he can't let go of his girlfriend. He can't let go of things. It makes you greedy. And when you're greedy, you are on the path to the dark side, because you fear you're going to lose things, that you're not going to have the power you need. (*Time*, 4-29-02)

[Q] What is one area you need to let go in order for God to be your passion? If you don't want to share it with the group, find one other person to share it with who will hold you accountable.

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us recognize our passions and redirect them.

Activity: Write the following on three different pieces of paper:

- ◆ *My passion in life is to be successful in business. I'll do whatever it takes to make it to the top.*
- ◆ *My passion in life is to find the perfect partner in life. Once I find that person, everything else will fall into place.*
- ◆ *My passion in life is to be a great musician. Nothing will stop me from being the best in my field.*

Hand each paper to a different individual and have them read them aloud. After each one, discuss as a group what is good about their passion and what is bad. Ask how these passions could take on a different light with Christ as their main passion in life.

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 5

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Satisfaction of Righteousness

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Scripture:

Psalm 107:8–9; Ezekiel 18:25–32; Matthew 5:6; Luke 1:53; Romans 6:18–23

Based on:

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Read Matthew 5:6. “Hunger for righteousness” are not words we would naturally put together. It is like having a hankering for the Pythagorean theorem or Quadratic equation. The realities of Jesus’ day made it even more difficult to understand, because his audience knew physical hunger. They lived hand-to-mouth and for some starvation was a real possibility. “Give us this day our daily bread” was prayed earnestly in those days.

Jesus flips Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs on its head (self-actualization, esteem, love, safety, physiology). Jesus says: Forget your bellies; being ravenous for righteousness is where it’s at.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We have to be hungry to be happy.

Teaching point two: God promises to satisfy that hunger.

Teaching point three: God wants to help create that hunger in our hearts.

- [Q]** Which statement best describes how I can gain a hunger for righteousness:
- 1) I just use self-discipline. I’m determined to have a hunger for righteousness.
 - 2) I think God understands my failings. I simply try to live the Christian life, but don’t worry about it much.
 - 3) I want to know Christ better any way I can.
 - 4) I ask Christ to give me a hunger and thirst for him.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. What difference does it make which statement you see yourself in? How does that view affect your life?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

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Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 6

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Ecstasy of Mercy

*Jesus shows us that it's a joy to understand
and relieve the pain of others.*

The word *mercy* is not commonly used in this day and age. Many of us are never taught how to be merciful. That's why Jesus' instruction to us in the Beatitudes is so important. He defines mercy by his life and death for us and shows God's people how to put it into practice. There is so much pain in our world, it is easy to overlook it or to offer easy answers. This study explores how Jesus calls his followers to act with mercy, for only then will they experience the mercy he offers.

Scripture:

Isaiah 63:8–9; Jeremiah 22:16; Micah 6:8; Matthew 5:7; 2 Corinthians 1:3–7;
Ephesians 2:4; Hebrews 2:17, 4:15; James 1:27, 2:13–19; 1 Peter 1:3

Based on:

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

Matthew 5:7 says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Beatitudes one through four deal with who we are in relation to God; what God brings to us. Beatitudes five through eight deal with who we are in relation to others; what God brings through us. The fifth Beatitude is about the loss of judgmentalism and the development of mercy. Mercy is the first order of business. We are to be disposed toward mercy, because that is how God is disposed toward us.

The Hebrew word is *hesed*, which means *loving-kindness*, the covenant-keeping grace and mercy of God. God could have divorced us as his bride, kicked us out of the house as children, denied knowing us as sons and daughters, and withdrawn his Spirit. But he didn't! "His mercies are new every morning."

If we operate on the principle of "strike hard, strike fast, and show no mercy," we've drifted from the heart of God. Mercy proclaims whether or not you're living the Beatitudes.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] How does an attitude of judgmentalism work against our ability to show mercy?
- [Q] What kind of mercy has God shown us?
- [Q] How does mercy show whether or not we are living the Beatitudes?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We must profoundly understand God's mercy to us.

Until we understand our own sin and that we are worthy of punishment rather than reward, we will never be able to understand how merciful God is to us—that he withholds what we deserve and gives us what we don't deserve.

- [Q] Read Isaiah 63:8–9. According to these verses, how did God show his mercy to Israel?
- [Q] Read Ephesians 2:4 and 1 Peter 1:3. List the ways God has shown us mercy, according to these verses.
- [Q] Read Micah 6:8. What does humility have to do with mercy?



[Q] How do you think God sees you?

- 1) He knows I'm a sinner, but not any worse than anyone else.
- 2) Overall, he'd say I'm doing pretty well.
- 3) He sees me as sinful as a mass murderer.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. Which view sees themselves as most in need of God's mercy?

Teaching point two: We must empathize with others in order to be merciful.

Emotion is a critical part of mercy. There can be no mercy where there is no feeling. Train your emotions; give credence to them; dwell on them enough to consider how others feel in facing difficult situations: a car accident, divorce, debt, addiction, unemployment, or grief.

Patricia L. Miller, a former hospital staff person, writes in *Pentecostal Evangel*:

While at work in the emergency room, I learned to stop crying at the pain around me. Each day it seemed I was becoming insensitive to people and their real needs. Five years of emergency room exposure had taken its toll.

Then God intervened.

I was taking information for registering a young woman who had overdosed on drugs and had attempted suicide. Her mother sat before me as I typed the information into the computer. The mother was unkempt and bleary eyed. She had been awakened in the middle of the night by the police to come to the hospital. She could only speak to me in a whisper.

Hurry up, I said to myself, as she slowly gave me the information. My impatience was raw as I finished the report and jumped to the machine to copy the medical cards. That's when God stopped me—at the copy machine. He spoke to my heart so clearly: *You didn't even look at her*. He repeated it, gently: *You didn't even look at her*.

I felt his grief for her and for her daughter, and I bowed my head. *I'm sorry, Lord. I am so sorry*.

I sat down in front of the distraught woman and covered her hands with mine. I looked into her eyes with all the love that God could flood through me and said, "I care. Don't give up."

She wept and wept. She poured her heart out to me about the years of dealing with a rebellious daughter as a single mom. Finally, she looked up and thanked me—me, the coldhearted one with no feelings.

My attitude changed that night. My Jesus came right into the workplace in spite of rules that tried to keep him out. He came in to set me free to care again. He gave himself to that woman through me. My God, who so loved the world, broke that self-imposed barrier around my heart. Now he could reach out, not only to me in my pain, but to a lost and hurting woman.

As Patricia's story demonstrates, one reason God graces us with pain is so we are able to comfort others. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3–7.



[Q] What does it mean to you that God is a compassionate Father and a God of comfort? What should it mean about the way we treat others?

[Q] How can we let the comfort of Christ overflow into our lives? Where will the overflow go?

Optional Activity

Purpose: *To help us find ways to show mercy.*

Activity: *Read the following case studies aloud and ask the group how they could show mercy to each individual:*

- ◆ *Your neighbor has been difficult from the beginning. He has now erected a fence that is a few inches on your property.*
- ◆ *A single mom in your church can't seem to make ends meet. Her car has just broken down and she can't get to work.*
- ◆ *Your sexually promiscuous cousin has come down with AIDS.*
- ◆ *A teenager in your church was caught stealing from the offering.*

Leader's Note: *Showing mercy doesn't necessarily mean that we ignore wrong behavior. Discuss which of these situations may need to address ongoing problems as part of showing mercy.*

Teaching point three: We must understand others in order to be merciful.

Mercy doesn't only feel with another in a general sense; it moves to understand the particulars. There is an impulse to move into another person's experience, crawl into their skin, walk in their shoes. Consider: Why is the addict addicted? Why does this financial problem exist? Why is that spouse unfaithful? Why is that person involved in destructive behavior?

It is easier to make snap judgments and dispense quick fixes. We know the diagnosis is sin and we know the prescription is to stop sinning. This attitude sounds like this:

- ◆ Addicted? "You're undisciplined. Get in a support group."
- ◆ Financial problems? "You're materialistic and prone to poor judgment. Get on a budget."
- ◆ Rebellious kids? "You're bad parents, end of story."

That's not the end of the story. At best it is just the beginning of the story. In contrast, a person of mercy, like a priest of God, moves in to understand. Hebrews 5:2 says that a high priest is "able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray."

That means I deal with an adulterer knowing an adulterer is in me. I deal with a thief knowing a thief is in me. I deal with an addict knowing an addict is in me. In other words, the same sin "genes" live in me.

Even if we want to, this is difficult. It's messy because it means wading through someone's junk without being judgmental. It's complex because it means acknowledging that we don't have a magical quick fix.

Throughout Jesus' entire life he sought to understand us. That was why he faced temptation, was rejected, got tired, was disappointed, and "was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."



“He had to be made like his brothers in every way in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest” (Hebrews 2:17).

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

He didn't let my sins become the last word on me.

- [Q] Why are we prone to quick fixes rather than taking time to understand?
- [Q] How are mercy and understanding others related?
- [Q] Why do we need to understand our own weaknesses in order to understand another's weakness?

Teaching point four: We must provide others with relief in order to be merciful.

We must provide relief to others, rather than leaving them in their pain. It's easier to treat people like a headache, providing them with a quick prayer, a verse, and advising them to “ride it out; you'll feel better tomorrow.”

Jesus went to much greater lengths: touching lepers; dispensing grace to adulterers; eating with taxmen, even making one a disciple.

In Luke 5, Jesus demonstrates three acts of mercy:

- ◆ To the leper he says, “Be clean.”
- ◆ To the paralytic he says, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”
- ◆ To Levi the tax collector he says, “Come and follow me.”

Real relief is found at the cross.

Doug Nichols of Action International spent years on the mission field. During a period when he and his wife were back in the states so that he could get cancer treatment, they got a report of a great tragedy among children in Africa. He mentioned this to a waitress, when she asked why he looked so sad. Upon telling her the news, she said, “*Someone* should do something about that.”

When he got home, he told his wife the same news. Her response: “What are *we* going to do about that?” This is the Christ-like response.

Read James 2:14–19.

- [Q] Why isn't it enough to simply offer someone good wishes?
- [Q] How do good deeds give evidence of our faith?



[Q] What do our deeds tell us about our salvation?

Leader's Notes: *James is telling us our deeds demonstrate that we are saved, not that we are saved by our deeds.*

[Q] Read Jeremiah 22:16. Why does defending the cause of the poor and needy demonstrate that we know God?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Let the church be a place where the mercies of God are ministered in ridiculous fashion. "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27).

See someone in need and meet that need.

"Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!" (James 2:13)

[Q] What does it mean to be ridiculously merciful? How can we be more like that?

[Q] Think of one person you need to show mercy to. How can you demonstrate God's kindness to him or her this week?

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 6

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Ecstasy of Mercy

*Jesus shows us that it's a joy to understand
and relieve the pain of others.*

The word *mercy* is not commonly used in this day and age. Many of us are never taught how to be merciful. That's why Jesus' instruction to us in the Beatitudes is so important. He defines mercy by his life and death for us and shows God's people how to put it into practice. There is so much pain in our world, it is easy to overlook it or to offer easy answers. This study explores how Jesus calls his followers to act with mercy, for only then will they experience the mercy he offers.

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Matthew 5:7 says, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” Beatitudes one through four deal with who we are in relation to God; what God brings to us. Beatitudes five through eight deal with who we are in relation to others; what God brings through us. The fifth Beatitude is about the loss of judgmentalism and the development of mercy. Mercy is the first order of business. We are to be disposed toward mercy, because that is how God is disposed toward us.

If we operate on the principle of “strike hard, strike fast, and show no mercy,” we’ve drifted from the heart of God. Mercy proclaims whether or not you’re living the Beatitudes.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We must profoundly understand God’s mercy to us.

- [Q] How do you think God sees you?
- 1) He knows I’m a sinner, but not any worse than anyone else.
 - 2) Overall, he’d say I’m doing pretty well.
 - 3) He sees me as sinful as a mass murderer.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. Which view sees themselves as most in need of God’s mercy?

Teaching point two: We must empathize with others in order to be merciful.

Teaching point three: We must understand others in order to be merciful.

Teaching point four: We must provide others with relief in order to be merciful.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Let the church be a place where the mercies of God are ministered in ridiculous fashion. “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (James 1:27).

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Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 7

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Pleasures of Purity

Purity has a tremendous payoff in this life and the life to come.

To become pure in heart we need to see God as our reward for cooperating with his work. This study demonstrates that purity has a tremendous payoff in this life and the life to come. A passion for purity is not innate, but a desire for satisfaction and happiness is. Jesus calls us to a purity of heart that brings us the greatest of all joys: a vision of God himself. The sixth Beatitude says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

Scripture:

Psalms 19:12-13, 51:10, 101:2-3, 119:9-11, 139:23-24; Proverbs 4:23;
Matthew 5:8, 6:22-23; John 15:3; Philippians 1:6; 1 John 3:2-3

Based on:

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

The Bible defines the heart not like a valentine, not like Hallmark, full of squishy sentiment. The Bible presents the heart as the center of personhood, the seat of the will, the place that decides what you want. Jesus says it must be absolutely pure. For progress in the Christian life, you must stand on twin passions: Love of God's grace and contempt for your sin.

Without the right perspective you will despair. Purity is not moral perfection through personal striving. Purity of heart is singleness of purpose, a growing freedom from sin. It is about intention, determining direction before you move. Only God, by his Spirit, can produce it. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

Your job is to set your eyes on him and cooperate. With every step you take, God is giving you the capacity on the inside while drawing you on the outside. He is imminent: here inside, working in you. He is transcendent: sitting in heaven giving you a vision of his calling. As a father encourages his child to crawl, so God deals with us. He calls us by name, tenderly. God doesn't grab me by the diaper and plow my face through the carpet, saying, "Crawl, doggone it!" The child learning to crawl does better if he does not fuss and pout every time he falls. As God works to make us pure in heart, there are ways we can cooperate.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] What comes to mind when you hear the word *purity*? Do you think your definition of purity is biblical? What do you think is the biblical definition for purity?
- [Q] What does the heart have to do with purity?
- [Q] How does knowing God will work in us toward purity help you? How do you think he does that?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: To become pure, we need to pray regularly.

Hating sin doesn't come naturally, but hating sin in general is easier than hating *my* sin. It's easy for me to hate pornography or drunkenness. But I tend to see my desire to be first as a godly aspiration.

That's why we need to stay in touch with God. As I pray, I listen to what he has to say about my sin, and I confess it, putting me back on the right path. Otherwise, it is too easy to rationalize my sin without recognizing it as it leads me down the destructive path.

Read Psalm 19:12-13, 51:10, 139:23-24.



- [Q] What was David's attitude toward his own heart? What did he pray for according to these verses?
- [Q] What did he pray about his sin?
- [Q] Which attitude below best conveys David's attitude?
- 1) Sometimes I don't even know when I'm sinning. I need to be aware of that and ask God to remind me.
 - 2) I know right from wrong. It's just a matter of doing it.
 - 3) Purity is simply a matter of discipline.
 - 4) Even when I ask God for help, I fail.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. Can more than one of these be right? What is the difference between the one you chose and the other options?

Teaching point two: To become pure, we need to guard our hearts tenaciously.

Mark S. Wheeler shares this insight into purity in his article "Marks of a Servant" from *Discipleship Journal* (Nov/Dec 1987):

When the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius destroyed the city [of Pompeii in A.D. 79], many people were buried in the ruins. Some took cover underground, and the place became their burial chamber. Those who chose a high hiding place were also unable to escape destruction. But a Roman sentinel was found at the city gate, his hands still grasping his weapon. That was where he had been placed by the captain. While the earth shook beneath him, while the flood of ashes and cinders overwhelmed him, he stood at his post; and it was there he was found a thousand years later.

That's the kind of tenacity we need to have in the face of temptation. Our desire to please our "captain" should overwhelm every other desire.

- [Q] Read Psalm 101:2–3. According to these verses, what is key to remaining pure?
- [Q] Read Proverbs 4:23. How do we guard our hearts? What does it mean that it's the wellspring of our life?
- [Q] Read Matthew 6:22–23. What do our eyes have to do with remaining pure?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us recognize how our purity is attacked daily.

Activity: Distribute popular, secular magazines so that each person in the group has one. Ask them to look through them and find at least one example of an advertisement or article that discourages purity. Reconvene in five minutes and discuss their findings.

Teaching point three: To become pure, we must read devotionally.

Read Scripture with unmixed motives. Don't read the entire Bible just to say you did it. The point is not to get through the Word, but to get the Word through you.



C.S. Lewis in *Letters to Malcolm* says, “We—or at least I—shall not be able to adore God on the highest occasions if we have learned no habit of doing so on the lowest. At best, our faith and reason will tell us that He is adorable, but we shall not have found Him so, not have ‘tasted and seen.’ Any patch of sunlight in a wood will show you something about the sun which you could never get from reading books on astronomy. These pure and spontaneous pleasures are “patches of Godlight” in the woods of our experience.”

If we have this attitude, we won’t be able to wait to see what God has to say to us.

Read Psalm 119:9–11 and John 15:3.

- [Q] What do these verses tell us about God’s Word? Why is his Word essential to my purity?
- [Q] What kind of attitude do we need to have when we read the Bible in order to get something out of it (Psalm 119:10)?
- [Q] Have you ever found “patches of Godlight” when you are reading the Bible? How did that motivate you?

Teaching point four: To become pure, we must imagine creatively.

Imagination is the capacity to make the invisible real. Turn your mind’s eye toward Jesus. Begin the morning with “This is the day that the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it.” And “In the morning, when you awake, accustom yourself to think first upon God...and at night also, let him close thine eyes” (Jeremy Taylor).

Spiritually speaking, many of us “McGoo” our way through life, never seeing or envisioning the Lord. The pay-off is pure pleasure! You see God, now and in the future. You see good things as blessings, pain as a trial, temptation as an attack, resistance as victory, interruption as an appointment, recovery as a healing, and physical mechanics as divine mystery.

When we are face-to-face with Christ, one second will outweigh all pleasures that came before.

Read 1 John 3:2–3.

- [Q] How can our imaginations help us be pure?
- [Q] Why is hope so essential to maintaining purity?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The exciting thing about purity is that God wants it for us more than we do. He wants us to quickly realize our own limitations and allow him to transform us as only he can. He never asks us to do something he doesn’t give us the ability to do.

- [Q] Which of these keys to purity (prayer, guarding your heart, devotional reading, imagination) do you need to ask God to transform? Choose one to pray about this week. Tell someone which one you chose so they can ask you about it next week.

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 7

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Pleasures of Purity

Purity has a tremendous payoff in this life and the life to come.

To become pure in heart we need to see God as our reward for cooperating with his work. This study demonstrates that purity has a tremendous payoff in this life and the life to come. A passion for purity is not innate, but a desire for satisfaction and happiness is. Jesus calls us to a purity of heart that brings us the greatest of all joys: a vision of God himself. The sixth Beatitude says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

The Bible defines the heart—not like a valentine—not like Hallmark, full of squishy sentiment. The Bible presents the heart as the center of personhood, the seat of the will, the place that decides what you want. Jesus says it must be absolutely pure. For progress in the Christian life, you must stand on twin passions: Love of God's grace and contempt for your sin.

Purity is not moral perfection, but singleness of purpose, a growing freedom from sin. It is about intention, determining direction before you move. Only God, by his Spirit, can produce it. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

Your job is to set your eyes on him and cooperate. With every step you take, God is giving you the capacity on the inside while drawing you on the outside. He is imminent: here inside, working in you. He is transcendent: sitting in heaven giving you a vision of his calling. ""

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: To become pure, we need to pray regularly.

[Q] Which attitude below best conveys David's attitude?

- 1) Sometimes I don't even know when I'm sinning. I need to be aware of that and ask God to remind me.
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- 3) Purity is simply a matter of discipline.
- 4) Even when I ask God for help, I fail.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. Can more than one of these be right? What is the difference between the one you chose and the other options?

Teaching point two: To become pure, we need to guard our hearts tenaciously.

Teaching point three: To become pure, we must read devotionally.

Teaching point four: To become pure, we must imagine creatively.



PART 3

Apply Your Findings

The exciting thing about purity is that God wants it for us more than we do. He wants us to quickly realize our own limitations and allow him to transform us as only he can. He never asks us to do something he doesn't give us the ability to do.

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 8

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Exhilaration of Peacemaking

*When we make the sacrifices necessary to
bring peace in conflict, we do God's will.*

Happiness can be found through peacemaking. The seventh Beatitude says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." God is so delighted when we go against our natures and give up our rights for peace that he labels us as part of his family. This study will discuss what it takes to be a peacemaker. Our fallen world is marked by conflict in every dimension of life. God loves peace, so he sends us into the world to mend broken relationships.

Scripture:

1 Samuel 25:14–35; Ezekiel 22:30; Matthew 5:9; Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 1:24; James 3:18; Hebrews 12:14

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

This Beatitude offers the exhilarating promise that we will be “sons of God.” The word *son* speaks of a person's character (not gender or parentage). You will be a chip off the old block. Jesus, the Son of God, breaks down dividing walls, causes hostilities to cease, repairs breaches between people, and restores wholeness to relationships. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

I had a flaw in my thinking. I said to myself, *When faced with conflict, do the right thing; be like Jesus.* “When faced with conflict?!” The truth is, conflict is an intrinsic quality of life on earth. We live where peace does not reign: Iraq, Afghanistan, aborted babies, hungry children, lonely people, party politics, race riots, marital discord, to name a few. Wars on a world scale, and interpersonal conflict right here in this room. And part of us likes it that way. Just look at our television programs from comedies to talk shows—we love a good fight.

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Why is conflict so much easier than making peace?
- [Q] How does our society's emphasis on personal rights worsen this?
- [Q] Is conflict ever good?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We need to make peace a priority.

Peacemaking is the last character quality in the Beatitudes—the peak, the pinnacle. The height of a happy life is to wage peace!

A riot raged in the La Mesa Prison in Tijuana, Mexico. Thousands of inmates battled the guards with bottles and rocks, while the guards shot back with machine guns—until a small American woman in her 70s walked into the middle of the war, raised her hands, and signaled for quiet. Remarkably, calm fell on the prison.

That woman was Mary Brenner, who was raised in Beverly Hills. There she lived what she called “a glamorous life,” until she found Christ and followed him in a whole new direction.

Now she's known as Sister Antonia. She dresses in a nun's habit and lives in a sparse 10-foot cell inside the prison. She moved there 25 years ago to live among murderers, thieves, and drug dealers. Sister Antonia has poured out her life for these prisoners, nursing their wounds, getting them eyeglasses and medicine, caring for their families, and washing their bodies for burial.

Loving them doesn't mean she ignores their crimes. In her words, “There isn't anyone who hasn't heard my lecture. They have to accept that they're wrong. They have to see the



consequences. They have to feel the agony...but I do love them dearly.” She refers to each prisoner as her son.

Although she lives in a prison, the prison does not live inside of her. Her friends and the inmates all describe her incredible energy, joy, and hopefulness. She describes it as simply living out her calling. In a recent interview she said, “I wouldn’t trade this cell for any place in the world.” (“Antonia’s Mission,” *Readers Digest*, June 2004)

Read Romans 14:19, Ephesians 4:3, and Hebrews 12:14.

- [Q] What common phrase is repeated in all these verses? What does that tell you about the nature of a peacemaker?
- [Q] How does making peace build up both parties? What does it do to their relationship? How does it change the way each views the problem?
- [Q] Is it always possible to live in peace? What might you do when it’s impossible?

Teaching point two: We need to take the initiative to seek peace.

Being a peace lover is different than someone who appeases through wimpy niceness and conflict avoidance. Nor are we a peacekeeper who deters conflict through iron rule and personal force. A peacemaker is someone who creates wholeness, wellbeing, shalom (the Hebrew word for peace), as he goes about life.

Do we understand the stakes of conflict? Sixty-percent of homes experience domestic violence. One million cases of child abuse are reported each year. There are many more that aren’t reported. Two million wives are battered each year. Look at the huge number of divorces, suicides, runaways, and new drug users.

John Stott said, “I wonder if the comparatively slow progress towards world peace, world equity, and world evangelization is not due, more than anything else, to the prayerlessness of the people of God.” Pray for the situation. Then engage in creative intervention. Step in. Make a phone call. Set up a meeting. Reach out.

- [Q] Read Ezekiel 22:30. How can we stand in the gap?
- [Q] Read 1 Samuel 25:14–35. What did Abigail do to bring about peace? List everything she did that helped David rethink his decision. What principles can we learn from her decision?

Teaching point three: We need to be willing to pay the price of peace.

In 1 Samuel 25, we just read about the price Abigail was willing to pay for peace:

- a) financial (v.18)
- b) relational (v.19)
- c) emotional (vs. 20–23)
- d) physical (v.24)



There is always a price to peacemaking: relational risk, discomfort of confrontation, rebuke, eating humble pie, wading through the muck of chaos, bearing sins of others by forgiving without retaliating. Colossians 1:24 speaks of the exhilaration of suffering for the sake of peace: "I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church." When we enter Christ's sufferings, minister in his place, and wage peace in his name, we participate in his work of redemptive sin bearing. We don't redeem, but we bring Christ's redemption.

- [Q] Why is there a price to peacemaking? Share about a time when keeping peace cost you something.
- [Q] What does Paul mean in Colossians when he says, "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions"? Why did he rejoice?
- [Q] How is peacemaking redemptive?

Teaching point four: We need to make a plea for peace.

Communication is always a part of peacemaking. Peacemakers make a plea for warring factions to lay down their arms, for estranged spouses to soften their hearts, for doubting minds to believe God, for lost sinners to be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20 says, "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

A couple married 50 years is asked, "What is the secret to your longevity as a couple?" The husband says, "Well, we agreed a long time ago that if she ever had a grievance, she would just say it and get it off her chest. And if I ever had a grievance, I'd just go out and take a long walk. So I guess you could say we've lasted so long because I have lived a largely outdoor life." Are you like that? You drive 500 miles around an uncomfortable conversation? Are you guilty of avoidance?

Reread 1 Samuel 25:26–31.

- [Q] How did Abigail stay neutral instead of taking sides?
- [Q] Name the seven times she pointed to the Lord in these verses. What difference did that make?
- [Q] How did she warn David against sinning in her plea for peace (v.31)?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

We need to remember the payoff of peace. Notice the payoff for Abigail:

- a) God was glorified
- b) Everyone was satisfied
- c) There was peace for all



James 3:18 says, "Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) To make peace, I often need to give up my rights.
- 2) To make peace, there needs to be an equal amount of give and take.
- 3) To make peace, I have to be willing to be proved wrong.
- 4) To make peace will cause me to be loved and honored.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. Is more than one of them true? How does that view affect your peacemaking ability?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us apply peacemaking principles to everyday life.

Activity: Ask for volunteers to read each of the following case studies aloud. After each one, discuss as a group how peace could be made in a Christ-like manner.

- ◆ *Mike's neighbor sawed down a tree which fell onto Mike's shed, damaging the roof. The neighbor refuses to take responsibility. How can Mike make peace with his neighbor?*
- ◆ *Nicole's mother-in-law insists that Nicole and her husband spend every Christmas with them. How can Nicole make peace?*
- ◆ *Jill and Sam, a married couple, have differing views of how to spend their money. Jill would like a new kitchen and Sam would like a new car. How can they make peace?*

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 8

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Exhilaration of Peacemaking

*When we make the sacrifices necessary to
bring peace in conflict, we do God's will.*

Happiness can be found through peacemaking. The seventh Beatitude says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." God is so delighted when we go against our natures and give up our rights for peace that he labels us as part of his family. This study will discuss what it takes to be a peacemaker. Our fallen world is marked by conflict in every dimension of life. God loves peace, so he sends us into the world to mend broken relationships.

Scripture:

1 Samuel 25:14–35; Ezekiel 22:30; Matthew 5:9; Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 1:24; James 3:18; Hebrews 12:14

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

This Beatitude offers the exhilarating promise that we will be “sons of God.” The word *son* speaks of a person’s character (not gender or parentage). You will be a chip off the old block. Jesus, the Son of God, breaks down dividing walls, causes hostilities to cease, repairs breaches between people, and restores wholeness to relationships. Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: We need to make peace a priority.

Teaching point two: We need to take the initiative to seek peace.

Teaching point three: We need to be willing to pay the price of peace.

Teaching point four: We need to make a plea for peace.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

We need to remember the payoff of peace. Notice the payoff for Abigail:

- a) God was glorified
- b) Everyone was satisfied
- c) There was peace for all

James 3:18 says, “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”

[Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:

- 1) To make peace, I often need to give up my rights.
- 2) To make peace, there needs to be an equal amount of give and take.
- 3) To make peace, I have to be willing to be proved wrong.
- 4) To make peace will cause me to be loved and honored.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. Is more than one of them true? How does that view affect your peacemaking ability?

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 9

LEADER'S GUIDE

The Promise of Persecution

*While persecution may bring us passing physical and social harm,
it also brings lasting spiritual graces.*

The Christian life is full of paradoxes. None is more astounding than the fact that persecution can be a blessing. In America we generally do not suffer physical persecution for our commitment to Christ, but we may suffer social rejection and abuse and perhaps financial loss. This study recognizes that this is a price we must be willing to pay. When we do, and our devotion to Christ is firm, we will find it true that joy abounds for those who suffer for Christ.

Scripture:

Matthew 5:10–16; John 15:19; Romans 5:3–5; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 2:12

Based on:

"Happiness Is Serious Business," Series Builder by Greg Lafferty, PREACHING TODAY SERMON



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

When you must take a final exam, you spend time reviewing the material. Matthew 5:10 is your final exam on happiness: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Nothing will test your convictions about what happiness is and is not more than suffering at the hands of evil people and wicked world systems. This is as Jesus said it would be in John 15:19: "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

The persecutors might not beat you with whips, but they might verbally abuse you. They might not lock you behind bars, but they could incarcerate you in a prison of ostracism. They might not take your children, but they could steal their minds and affections. They might not kill your body, but they might kill your career.

Matthew 5:11 talks about insults, and those who say all kinds of evil about you. The word *persecute* means "to harass in a manner designed to injure, grieve, or afflict." People may let loose a torrent of profanity just because it bugs you; they may make clear you're not invited because you don't fit in; or they may make condescending remarks about your quaint and antiquated beliefs. It's hard to believe that Jesus described this as a blessed state, calling us to rejoice and be glad. Something wonderful is happening. What could it possibly be?

Discussion starters:

- [Q] What could persecution possibly have to do with being blessed?
- [Q] Why does Jesus say the persecuted get the kingdom of heaven?
- [Q] Name a time you felt persecuted because of your faith.

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Persecution brings us deeper assurance.

Most of us take the assurance of our salvation for granted. Yet if Jesus promised persecution, and Paul said everyone who lives godly will suffer, what does it say about us if persecution never happens?

"Believers" who continue to indulge in the world's pleasures, laugh along at the world's jokes, shrink back from spiritual conversations, back down from taking spiritual stands, or shun holiness because it might be a "turn off" to unbelievers must wonder whether their faith is legitimate.



But when that occasional persecution comes because of righteousness, because of Jesus, we not only convince others we belong, we convince ourselves.

Richard Wurmbrand was a Romanian minister who spent 14 years imprisoned and tortured by Communists. In 1945 he helped start underground ministries not only to Romanians but to invading Russian soldiers. One Sunday on the way to church, a vehicle drove in front of him, several men jumped out, and he was whisked away to prison. He was there initially for eight and a half years, three in solitary confinement. Authorities posing as released prisoners visited his family. They told the family Richard had died, and they had attended his funeral. In reality he was being subjected to torture and brainwashing. His sufferings included listening to repetitive Communist propaganda 17 hours a day, being placed in wooden boxes lined with nails, being moved in and out of refrigerator cells, and repeated beatings.

Richard said, "I was kept in solitary confinement in this cell for the next two years. I had nothing to read and no writing materials. I had only my thoughts for company, and I was not a meditative man. Rather, I was a soul who had rarely known quiet. I had God. But had I really lived to serve God—or was it simply my profession? Did I believe in God? Now the test had come. I was alone. There was no salary to earn, no golden opinions to consider. God offered me only suffering. Would I continue to love him? Slowly I learned that on the tree of silence hangs the fruit of peace. I began to realize my real personality, and made sure that it belonged to Christ. I found that even here my thoughts and feelings turned to God, and that I could pass night after night in prayer, spiritual exercise, and praise. I knew now that I was not play-acting. I believed."

Read Romans 5:3–5.

- [Q] How can we rejoice in sufferings? What can it produce in us?
- [Q] Why is hope so essential when we are going through difficulties? In what is our hope?
- [Q] How does the Holy Spirit comfort us (v.5)?

Teaching point two: Persecution brings us greater reward.

There are degrees of reward in heaven. Those who suffer for Christ are given even more in heaven. When you are persecuted you get numbered among the prophets!

You receive an eternal glory that far outweighs the suffering. You must believe this by faith. Happiness is not emotional. Until we believe that this life is simply preparing us for the next life, we won't understand persecution.

- [Q] With which statement do you find yourself agreeing most:
 - 1) I don't mind a little persecution, as long as it doesn't affect my family.
 - 2) Suffering makes no sense at all. I can see no purpose in it.
 - 3) It seems that if God loved me, he'd protect me from persecution.
 - 4) I try to remember that this life is not what it's all about.

Explain why you chose the statement you did. What difference does it make which statement you see yourself in? How does that view affect your life?

- [Q] Read Matthew 5:12. What is the payoff for being persecuted?



[Q] Read 2 Corinthians 4:16–18. How did Paul keep perspective in the middle of his sufferings? How did he see his troubles (v.17)? What made him see them as light and momentary?

Teaching point three: Persecution brings us stronger impact.

In Matthew 5:13–16, Jesus describes the effect of the blessed, persecuted ones as being like salt and light. Salt preserves from decay, flavors, and creates thirst. Light exposes darkness, illuminates the path of life, and awakens people to spiritual realities. You were made for impact!

Those who witness your manner of life, sometimes the very people who persecuted you, will turn to Christ and praise our Father in heaven.

Chinese Christian leader Brother Zhong tells this story:

I was attending a training course for my house church network's council members and youth leaders. The Public Security Bureau (PSB) raided us the first day. All the leaders were arrested.

The prison authorities shaved our heads and interrogated us. We were warned that the hardened inmates would beat us. So with much trepidation another brother and I entered our cell.

We were greeted by the sight of 16 other inmates, lined up in two rows and thumping their fists. My heart beat rapidly as I sent prayers up to God.

The leader of the gang asked, "Why are you here?"

"Because we are Christians," I replied.

"You don't beat people up?"

"No," I assured him.

"Do you sing?"

"Yes," I answered.

The leader ordered me to sing a song. I wept as I sang. The Holy Spirit moved in our midst, and by the time I finished singing, every prisoner was also in tears. To my shock, the gang leader then asked to hear the gospel.

After that, my cellmates hungered to hear the gospel every day. One Sunday, we held a worship service. The prison guard demanded to know who was behind it. He threatened to punish everyone if no one spoke up. I stood up and confessed.

I was forced to remove my clothes and stand at an inclined angle to the wall. The gang leader couldn't bear it anymore. He asked to be punished with me. All the others volunteered to do the same. The infuriated guard stormed out. I was moved by my cellmates' act. One of them, who had been there for three years, became a believer that day. ("China—Where God Is Behind Bars," TODAY'S CHRISTIAN, September/October 2004)



- [Q] Read 1 Peter 2:12. How would remaining faithful during persecution prove this verse to be true?
- [Q] Read Matthew 5:13–16. How does our light shine when we behave well when we're suffering? Give some examples of people who have done this well. What made them persevere?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Persecution and difficulty are our calling cards. Paul says in Philippians 1:29, "For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him."

It is critical to recognize the future nature of most kingdom benefits, because the happy Christian life is one of suffering, sacrifice, and cross bearing for the sake of future gain. It's foregoing the pleasures of this world for those of the next, tasting the approval of God now, while waiting for the full feast of blessedness that is yet to come, and saying that kingdom causes are worth more than larger retirement accounts, bigger homes, and more possessions.

- [Q] According to this study, what might need to change in the way you look at your earthly goals?
- [Q] Do you tend to boldly speak out about faith issues, or listen silently even when you disagree? What do you think you should be doing?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us understand our underlying feelings about God, which affect our happiness.

Activity: At the first study, the leader gave each person a note card, envelope, and pen, and asked him or her to write a note to God expressing how he or she feels about him. Redistribute the notes to each person that wrote them. Ask them to open the envelope and silently read what they wrote. Ask if anyone would like to share how his or her view of God has changed since the first study.

—Study by Greg Lafferty, with JoHannah Reardon



Study Through the Bible

The Beatitudes: Happiness Is a Serious Business - Study 9

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

The Promise of Persecution

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Teaching point three: Persecution brings us stronger impact.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

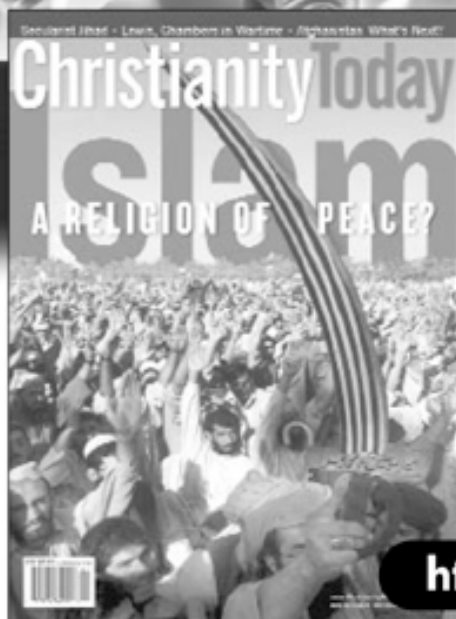
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