

Session 1 Pursuing a Kingdom Lifestyle

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

Father, we come to You in the name of Jesus, and we ask You for the Spirit of grace. We ask You for living understanding. We ask You for inspiration from Your word to touch our spirit in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, Matthew 5, 6, and 7 is one of the most important passages of Scripture that gives us insight into where the Holy Spirit is leading the Church. I call it a road map that gives us understanding into where it's going. This is the thing the Holy Spirit wants to talk to us about. It's the conversation that He wants to have with us and it's one of His favorite subjects: the Sermon on the Mount.

Now it's called "the Sermon on the Mount" because Jesus gave the sermon on a mountain. It's just that simple. However, it's the most concise and precise presentation of what He wants in terms of kingdom life. It's the clearest description of a kingdom lifestyle.

Now the Holy Spirit wants to talk to us more about this. As a rule, He'll talk to us if we start the conversation. Usually He'll wait until we start the conversation, and He'll talk as long as we keep talking. And He'll go as deeply as we want on the subject, but He won't normally bring up the subject. Every now and then He brings it up Himself, and when that happens it's normally bad news. However, the rule of the kingdom is that He waits until we engage, and then He says, "OK, I'll stay in the conversation with you."

And I want to tell you this: the Sermon on the Mount is one of the subjects that He likes to talk about most. It's one of the top subjects, and He has so much to say if we're interested in the conversation.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Paragraph A. I refer to the Sermon on the Mount as "the Constitution of the Kingdom of God." It's the most comprehensive statement by Jesus on how a believer cooperates with the grace of God. Now the grace of God is offered to us freely, but in order to experience it, we have to cooperate. And receiving the free grace of God involves more than just acknowledging the truth of the benefits that the Lord is offering to us. We must participate in order for those benefits to touch our mind and to form our emotions.

THE FATHER WALKS IN ALL THE LIGHT THAT HE POSSESSES

Now the primary calling in these three chapters is found in Matthew 5:48. If there's one verse that is the absolute pinnacle of what all the others point to, it would be Matthew 5:48. Jesus said, "Be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). Now what that means is that we're to walk in all the light that we have in the way that the Father walks in the light that He has. This is something that a brand-new believer can do. What Jesus is saying is, "Walk in all the light that God has given you, because the Father walks in all the light that He possesses." Now He possesses all light, all truth, but He walks it out. There's nothing that He doesn't fully walk out in terms of His plan, His character, and His wisdom.

And so the exhortation in verse 48 is that we would embrace a lifestyle of hundred-fold obedience. Now a new believer doesn't have much light, but they're to walk in all the light that they have. And as we obey the light,

the light increases, and as the light increases, our responsibility increases. And so does our ability to encounter God; it increases as well.

One guy says, “Well, if I obey the light and get more light, I have more requirements and more responsibility. That doesn’t sound like a very good deal to me!” Yes, it’s because your ability to experience and encounter God and to feel God’s presence and to understand Him also increases when the light increases. And so we’re to set our heart to walk in hundred-fold obedience to the light that we have. Again, that light increases as time goes on.

Now this is what the Lord wants, and there are many implications to setting our heart in this way. Setting our heart isn’t the same as attaining. We commit ourselves to obey in these specific areas; we come up short, we admit it, we repent, we ask for forgiveness, we recommit ourselves to obeying in that area, and we push delete on yesterday’s failures so that we have the confidence of a first-class citizen standing before God with full confidence. We fail again, we acknowledge it, we declare war on it, we recommit ourselves to obey, we push delete, and we have confidence again in the present tense. That’s the pinnacle; the high point of the sermon is that it would motivate people to have courage that they can walk in all the light God gives them. And again, the light increases as we obey more and we see more, but then we feel more and experience more as well.

WHAT IS THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT LIFESTYLE?

Paragraph B. Now we talk about the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle here at IHOP-KC quite a bit. And what do we mean by “the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle?” The heart of it I would sum up in this one sentence here in Paragraph B. Jesus calls us to walk out the eight Beatitudes. There are eight Beatitudes that we’re going to look at in a moment: blessings on the peacemakers, the pure in heart, etc. That’s the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle summed up in a sentence.

Now those eight Beatitudes are being poor in spirit, spiritual mourning, walking in meekness, hungering for righteousness, showing mercy, embracing purity, being a peacemaker, and enduring persecutions. Now these eight Beatitudes are invaluable, because we’re not aiming in the dark.

We have a clear target of what God wants. This is remarkable: I mean, the helpfulness of having this clarity. We can have confidence in knowing what God is after in our life so that we’re not aiming in the dark but rather at the right targets.

WALKING IN THE PROMISES RELATED TO THESE EIGHT BLESSINGS

Now each one of these eight Beatitudes has a virtue and a blessing, a promise. The word *blessed* means *happy*. Happy are those who are poor in spirit (Mt. 5:3). Now the biblical view of happiness is to have a vibrant spirit. The biblical view of happiness isn’t based on circumstances being easy and going well. If our spirit is vibrant, our circumstances can be difficult but we still have a happy spirit. However, if our circumstances are easy and our spirit is dull, we’re not happy. And so Jesus combines a very specific virtue or character trait that He wants us to develop. And He puts it together with a specific promise, and He says, “When you pursue the promise and the virtue together, there will be a vibrancy in your spirit called blessedness, or happiness.”

This is to be our life target, these eight virtues, and to walk in the promises related to them. Now these virtues and their promises we experience progressively, little by little. We grow in our experience of them as we seek the Lord and commit ourselves to walk in them. However, we can also diminish in our experience of the virtue and the blessing as well by neglecting or refusing to focus on these eight Beatitudes.

Now most of our problems in life even as believers are rooted in our neglect of these eight Beatitudes. And Jesus, the Master Teacher, is giving us insight. He says, “You want to see things in order. These eight are what you must focus on to have your life in order from God’s point of view and for things to work right in a kingdom way.” That doesn’t mean everything will be easy when we’re responding rightly.

“BLESSED ARE THE MEEK, FOR THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH”

Let’s read them. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:3). “Blessed are those who mourn” (v. 4). Now that’s spiritual morning, by the way. That’s not mourning over a crisis in our life related to our circumstances. Mourning is a legitimate response, but that’s not what He’s talking about here; this is spiritual morning.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Mt. 5:5). To be meek is to be humble; the two words are interchangeable. Now this is a remarkable promise that Jesus is quoting from King David, who was the first person to say this in the Bible (Ps. 37:11). Inheriting the earth means to impact it, or to be involved in the government of the earth.

Now most of this “inheriting the earth” is in the age to come; when literally the saints will be in the government of every sphere of life. They’ll have the full rein of the government, and this is actually what He’s talking about in fullness. However, there’s a significant release of this promise right now in this age. To “inherit the earth” means to impact it, to influence it, to have a sphere of God’s government over it, even if you’re only impacting three people; part of God’s government over the earth is touching those three lives.

What Jesus is saying is, “I will give the government of the earth, the influence of the earth, to the meek.” Right now we look around and most of the government of the earth isn’t under the hands and the influence of people who are meek. Some of it’s in the kingdom, but most of it is not. However, the day is coming when the entire earth will be fully inherited by those who walk in meekness in this age. They’ll have all the positions of responsibility and authority.

“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS”

Verse 6. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Mt. 5:6). They hunger for a breakthrough of righteousness in their personal life, but also for a breakthrough of righteousness in society and in the Church, and in their ministry as well: that righteousness would be imparted to others through their influence.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt. 5:7-8). I can’t imagine anything more dynamic than verse 8, the ability to see and encounter God; to experience Him more and to reflect His glory and to express His likeness. That’s all wrapped up together in seeing God. Those nearest the throne, the seraphim, and the twenty-four elders, see God the most. And that is the highest privilege, to be able to see God, to encounter Him, to experience Him and to express His likeness.

“BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD”

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Mt. 5:9). Even unbelievers will say to peacemakers, to those who heal relationships, “You look like your Father. There’s a family resemblance. You act like we imagine God acts.” That’s what is said about the people who are peacemakers.

And then the eighth is this: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:10).

Now these eight Beatitudes answer the cry of the philosophers throughout the ages. The question has been asked, “How are we suppose to we live? How do we achieve happiness? How do we achieve greatness? How do we please God? How do we do things in this life that carry over and are remembered in the life to come, in the age to come?” Those are questions every human being wants to know. “What is the purpose of life? What am I suppose to do down here anyway during my seventy years here on the earth?”

In one sermon Jesus answers those questions in a very specific and intentional way. Even more specifically, in eight verses He answers those questions. Now the Holy Spirit would say, “I want to talk to you about these eight, but I’ll wait for you to start the conversation.” Part of my goal today is to exhort you to take each one of these eight and make it part of your dialogue with the Holy Spirit. “Holy Spirit, teach me what it means to mourn. Teach me what it means and then empower me, inspire me, help me to actually do it. Teach me what it means to be poor in spirit. Help me walk this out.” And the Holy Spirit has an application of this for our individual lives. And these eight Beatitudes also have a corporate application for families, and churches, and for even society. Each one is vast in their implications.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

This is just a quick read. We could meditate on this sermon our entire life and still there would be much that we wouldn’t see; it has that many layers to it.

Paragraph C. Now we won’t go through the overview of the three chapters, but I wanted to give you a sneak preview; because we’ll be focusing on the Sermon on the Mount for some weeks to come. And so I just want to stir you up to begin thinking, “Sermon on the Mount”: to read it and be familiar with it.

Now just about everyone is familiar with the fact that it exists, that it’s really important, and we know what they mean, a little. However, I want us to bring our awareness and our focus and our understanding of these three chapters to another level as a spiritual family. And so this is a quick overview; we won’t look at this whole paragraph. I want to encourage you to get the feel of the “big picture,” where the whole roadmap is going.

Paragraph C. Again, to repeat, the Sermon on the Mount is a call to walk out the eight Beatitudes. As we pursue hundred-fold obedience, being perfect as our Father is perfect, we’re striving to walk in all the light that we have.

Now we do this by resisting six specific temptations. Jesus identified six temptations in a very strategic way. He said, “You’ll only develop in the eight Beatitudes if you continually resist these six temptations when they knock on your door.” But it’s not enough to say no to the negative. We also have to pursue five very specific kingdom activities. And so we say no to the negative and yes to the positive, and it’s very specific here. However, it’s not enough just to say no to the negative and yes to the positive; we need to do it with a spirit of confidence. Because we can say no to sin and yes to kingdom activities and still, if our spirit is filled with fear and we don’t have confidence that God is watching, that God cares about what we’re doing, and that He’s our source, then we will be tripped up.

Because in Matthew 6, Jesus is saying, “If you do the five positives, and resist the six negatives, you’re seeking your destiny in God in these eight Beatitudes, but you do it specifically with the right biblical mindset with respect to your money and possessions.”

Because in chapter 6, He addresses the anxiety, the fear that God isn’t watching, or won’t intervene to help us. So it changes the way we say no to the negatives and yes to the positives. And so Jesus addresses the issue of having the confidence that God’s eyes are on us, that He will reward us and He will provide for us.

Then one more point is made in chapter 7. Chapter 7 is mostly about the relational challenges that happen when we pursue chapters 5 and 6. When we seek to walk out what Jesus said in Matthew 5 and 6, the eight Beatitudes, saying no to the six negatives and yes to the five positives, when we do that, it creates relational challenges. Because some of the people closest to you don’t want you doing those things, and so they say, “I’m not in agreement with that. I don’t want to give up my personal rights. I want to attack my enemies. We have to get in unity here!”

And you say, “No, we’ll do it the biblical way.”

And they say, “No, I’m in disagreement.”

There are tensions that are created when an individual wants to walk this out. And in chapter 7 it’s not only about relational tension, but that is the primary subject: the relational challenges that come up when you seek to walk these things out.

EIGHT BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS IN THE GARDEN OF OUR HEART

Paragraph D. Now these eight Beatitudes I liken to eight beautiful flowers in the garden of our heart. God wants these eight beautiful flowers—meekness, purity, etc.—to come to full blossom in our life. And again, the Holy Spirit is saying, “I will help you.”

Now these eight Beatitudes define love. They define the kingdom lifestyle. They define what real ministry impact is, meaning ministry impact is about the quality in which people are inspired and instructed to embrace these eight Beatitudes. We could have 25,000 young adults at the onething conference and have a great time. The media could be great, everyone would be excited, phenomenal music, the whole place packed out, all the bills are paid, everything is going swell. But if they’re not motivated, if they’re not stirred up to walk in these eight Beatitudes, the conference hasn’t been a success from God’s point of view: no matter how much money or how many people or how much enthusiasm there was, it’s not a success.

Now we don’t have to say “the eight” every time. We don’t have to use the terminology of these eight, but this is what ministry impact is measured by from God’s point of view. This is how spiritual maturity is measured from God’s point of view. And so if you want to see how you’re growing, every five or ten years look back and measure your spiritual growth by your growth in these eight Beatitudes.

Now the good news is that whenever God gives a commandment, there’s always the promise of the enabling to obey the commandment. When God says, “Blessed are the pure in heart,” He’s saying in essence, “I’ll help you to be pure.” When He says, “Be perfect,” He’s saying, “I’ll help you to be perfect. I’ll help you to walk in the light that I give you.” There’s a promise of enabling that goes with every command of God; that’s good news.

WATERING AND WEEDING THE GARDEN OF OUR HEARTS

Paragraph E. Again, this is a little repetitive, but I want you to get this clear, particularly in these next few weeks as we examine the Sermon on the Mount in more detail.

Now these eight “flowers” need to be cultivated. They don’t grow automatically in our life. They grow progressively, but they can be diminished as well if we don’t focus on them. It’s like watering and weeding a garden. Now by weeding the garden we’re removing the hindrance to the growth of these flowers that comes in the form of the six temptations. We resist them; we remove the weeds, the hindrances to our growth. We must remove the weeds. Again, it’s very strategic; these aren’t arbitrary. Jesus thought these things through thoroughly. And it’s not enough to remove the weeds. In a garden where you get all the weeds out, the garden still won’t grow properly if it’s not nourished properly. And so we have to water; we have to add the things that enhance and provide for the growth of that garden.

WORKING THE MUSCLES OF STAYING COMMITTED TO THOSE WE LOVE

Now each of these has a number of levels. There’s a whole range of meaning and implications for each one of them. And the Holy Spirit will speak to each one of us in different seasons of our life with a different measure of clarity. And He will always help us in what He highlights.

Number one: anger. Now anger ranges from subtle anger, which is defensiveness and criticism rooted in anger, to the most extreme anger, which is murder and everything in between. He says, “I want you to resist the spirit of anger in every way that I reveal it.”

Then He addresses immorality, and then the disregarding of the marriage covenant. Jesus said, “It’s very important that the marriage covenant is honored.” Not only for the sake of marriage, though that’s what He’s focusing on, but when a man or woman honors the covenant even in the midst of great difficulty, it will affect all the other relationships in their life as well, because they’ll have a kingdom view of relationships even when they’re tough. Jesus is saying, “You honor the marriage covenant even when it’s tough.”

Now the Bible makes it clear through the lips of Jesus that adultery breaks and nullifies the covenant. But if a person’s spouse commits adultery, they’re free from that covenant. That’s another subject for another time, but here’s the point. The muscle that we work in honoring that covenant changes our paradigm of relationships, and we view relationships through God’s eyes in every sphere of life through working the muscle of covenant relationship in marriage.

He talks about resisting the temptation of making false commitments, demanding personal rights, and living with a spirit of retaliation. There are six specific issues and Jesus identifies them and we’ll address each one of these in the weeks to come by the grace of God.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES RELEASE THE GRACE OF GOD IN OUR LIVES

Number two: Jesus highlights the kingdom activities, the nutrients that we put in the garden. We can’t just pull the weeds and expect the flowers to grow; we have to put in nutrients. These five kingdom activities are identified by Jesus: prayer, fasting, giving, serving, and forgiving, or blessing our enemies. Because the fullness of forgiveness isn’t just to release them from their debt, but actually to seek redemptive blessing of God upon their life, as Jesus explains in Matthew 5.

These five kingdom activities are spiritual disciplines. Now some people think that spiritual disciplines are opposed to the grace of God because they're confused about the doctrine of grace. There's a very distorted view of grace that's popular in our nation today, and has been for some time.

The finished work of Jesus on the cross provided many benefits for us and they're free. He loves us and forgives us, and there are many things that He wants to do to us and through us in this life. Those benefits are provided and the work has been done for us. However, for that work to be released in us to where our mind and our emotions line up with it, where we can feel and understand and be vessels to release the fullness of what God's grace has provided, we have to cooperate with God so that our mind and our emotions come into unity with the grace of God. We cooperate with God. That's called "spiritual disciplines." I call it "grace-empowered discipline."

There's no presentation in the New Testament of the grace of God that's not connected to the disciplines that cooperate with grace. The grace is freely provided, but our experience of the grace requires our cooperation with it. Jesus did everything necessary for us to have an increased experience. And now we have to respond so that we actually do.

LIVING WITH A VIBRANT SPIRIT EVEN IN THE PRESENT AGE

Now if we don't respond much, we will still go to heaven. And in the resurrection we will see all the benefits, but beloved, I don't want to spend decades with a dull spirit claiming everything is free but never entering into the experience of it in my mind and my emotions. And I live with a dull spirit throughout my life and then die and enter heaven only to discover that everything there is alive. I want to live with a vibrant spirit now. I want to understand God now. I want to live in the fullness of what He wants to release through me now. And that requires that we respond to the grace of God in the way that Jesus describes here.

These five kingdom activities aren't optional. They're not earning the love of God. We do these five because God loves us, and He freely loves us, and that gives us courage to press into Him in these five ways. Now some people try to earn God's love by these five kingdom activities, and that is a non-biblical concept. However, just because a few people are in error in the way we approach this, we don't throw out these five kingdom activities that Jesus insisted on. And I tell you, Jesus taught about the grace of God better than anyone. And He requires our participation with grace and our cooperation with it in these five ways.

Now people over the years have come through here and told me, "Wow, you're into radical Christianity!"

I say, "What do you mean?"

"Well, you have a fasting day. People join you in fasting! You give money above and beyond what some others do; it's so radical!"

I say, "No, it's not radical; this is Christianity 101. This isn't a radical view of Christianity. This is the only biblical view of Christianity. There's not another version of Christianity that's biblical."

People could have large ministries and not pursue these five things, and they can still be born again. However, what they're proclaiming is not New Testament Christianity. And so I'm not interested in the fact that

thousands might not want to go there, or maybe millions. They may not want to pursue this, but there's no other version of Christianity. This is normative for every believer, not just for the fiery, "Rambo" believers.

"BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"

Let's just go very briefly through each one of these eight Beatitudes. These are the character virtues, and there's a promise that as we grow in each one, vibrancy will increase in our spirit. And there's a blessing in the age to come as well and not just a blessing in this age.

First, Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Mt. 5:3). Now being poor in spirit means that we're poverty-stricken in a spiritual sense. In other words, we see our great need that God has more for us that we're not experiencing. And in and of ourselves we can't experience it without His help, but we set our heart to experience all that God has for us.

Now the way we become poor in spirit is that we learn what God wants to do to us and through us. And when our vision increases with respect to what God wants to do to us and through us, then we see the gap between what God wants to do with us and what we're actually experiencing. We look at our own human resource and we say, "I can't close the gap!" I mean, God wants to manifest His presence on our heart that we would have a vibrant spirit. He wants to manifest His presence through us as we impact others; meaning when we serve and impact others, He wants a spirit of inspiration and understanding to touch them, too. He wants this presence of God released in His church at large.

We look at that and we say, "Wow! There's a big gap between what God wants for us individually, through our ministry, in the Church, in society, and what actually happened. Wow! We need to see change come. Things as they are aren't good enough, and we don't have the power in ourselves to correct it. So Lord, we need your breakthrough! We're reaching for more. We're reaching for the fullness."

Now I began to grow in my understanding of what God wanted to do through reading biographies when I was younger. I read a lot of biographies in my late teens and early twenties. I read them and said, "Wow! I didn't know God wanted to do this." Then I found those very truths in the Bible. You're supposed to read them in the Bible first and then find them in other places. I did it backwards; I read them in the biographies and then found them in the Bible and said, "What about me? I want a vibrant heart. I want the presence of God in my ministry to inspire others and to empower them. And I want to see it in the Church!"

Then I began to get the vision for revival. The vision for revival left me poor in spirit. I said, "I can't make it happen," and the Lord said, "That's the point: keep the vision high, but be aware that business as usual won't be good enough." Prophetic preaching that makes known what God wants to do with His people and in His church produces poverty of spirit. That's how it starts.

DON'T ALLOW ANYONE TO EXTINGUISH YOUR FEELING OF GOD-CENTERED ANGUISH

Paragraph B. Here's what happens. When we see more, when we have poverty of spirit, then we feel differently. We feel pain about it, and we mourn. This is spiritual mourning. We feel the pain of the gap and we say, "It's not OK." We refuse to be comforted by any substitute. No, I want a vibrant heart. Even if you're touching three people in your ministry, it doesn't have to be thousands. I want people inspired and moved by the presence of God when I minister, when I serve them and when I talk to them.

When I talk about His manifest presence, I'm not talking about manifestations. I'm talking about their hearts being moved and inspired by His presence being released through us, and we feel pain about it. And it's a desperate feeling, but we feel desperate enough to be extreme. We say, "OK, I'll rearrange my life. I'll spend my time, my money, and my energy differently. I feel so desperate, I can feel the pain of this."

Beloved, this mourning is a gift of God to you. Don't let some well-meaning guy come along and give you false comfort and extinguish this feeling of anguish to have more, because you know that God has more for you and to do through you. Many well-meaning people will come along and offer you some false comfort. However, when this gift of God is operating in you called *mourning*, I tell you, it's worth it, and you couldn't get it for a million dollars. You can't buy that kind of gift. Your desire for God is actually His gift to you. It's a precious gift.

THERE'S SO MUCH MORE TO HAVE WE HAVEN'T ENTERED INTO

Now this is an offensive thing to some people. It's offensive to them when you say, "There's so much more to have and we're not entering into it."

Some guys get really offended by that. I remember on two occasions hearing with my own ears a statement made by two famous ministries a couple of years apart. These men had millions of people following them. The Lord was moving in a certain way, and they made this horrifying statement: "This is as good as it gets!"

And I thought, "No way!" I said, "No, this is good, but this isn't as good as it gets."

And they were offended by the idea that there was not only more, but much, much more on God's agenda than what we were walking in. And they thought, "Well, are you saying that I'm deficient?"

And I said, "Yeah, there's nothing wrong with being deficient. We're humans! That's not a big deal. Is this a new idea, that you're deficient?"

"Are you saying that this isn't good enough?" I'm grateful for what's happening, but there's so much more on God's agenda.

Anyway, some people don't like this, so just be aware of that. However, it's a glorious operation of God, and a lot of people would like to give you false comfort and extinguish that fire burning in your soul. I remember I almost did this once to my wife. We were in our early years of marriage. We've been married thirty-five years, so this was way in the early years. We were reading biographies in our twenties about all of these men and women of God. We were stirred up and we had a vision for a vibrant heart, to feel God, to understand God, and to be able to impart to other people His presence by the things we said and did.

And so I came home one day and she was in a prayer time and she was all sad. She said, "Oh I feel miserable; I feel so backslidden," meaning, "I'm not imparting any of this stuff I'm reading." And Diane is one of the most guileless and godly women; even in her twenties she was just a picture of seeking the Lord.

And I said, "What are you talking about?"

And so I was putting my arm around her and saying, "No, no! Don't do that; don't say that. You're amazing."

And as I put my arm around her the Holy Spirit just kind of bypassed my thinking, you know, and you have to be kind of careful with that claim, but I heard myself say something exactly opposite of what I was about to say. I was going to say, “No, you’re amazing. I mean, you’re going hard after God.”

And I put my arm around her and I heard myself say, “Yes, you’re backslidden and so am I.”

Her head was down and she had a tear in her eye and she said, “Yeah, I know.” I mean, she knew I was backslidden, too.

I was thinking, “How long have you known?” She didn’t even look up. And I wasn’t planning to say that at all. Literally, I said, “Yes, you’re backslidden and so am I.”

And she said, “Yes, I know we are. Let’s get a vibrant heart.” And that’s what she was talking about. She said, “Let’s go for something so real that when we talk to people, they get moved to God at a whole new level.”

I said, “Wow!”

That was a key moment in our spiritual life, because we took that very seriously together.

BECAUSE OF THE PAIN WE REFUSE EVERY SUBSTITUTE AND COMFORT

Paragraph B. And so the mourning is feeling the extremity of this pain. Because of the pain we refuse every substitute and comfort. We don’t want to lower our vision to get comforted. We want to keep the vision high and we want to feel the ache.

Now this mourning isn’t the only emotion you feel; it’s a key emotion, but you still have joy, you still have confidence and gratitude for what God is doing in and through you. And so it’s not only mourning, but mourning is a key part of our emotional chemistry when the Spirit is touching us.

Now some people, all they have is mourning: they have no gratitude, no joy, no sense of confidence with God. And so they have the beginning of this, but they need some other truths alongside it in order to balance it.

MEEKNESS IS POWER UNDER CONTROL

Paragraph C. Walking in meekness. Now, to put it simply, meekness is not weakness. It’s not weakness. Meekness is power under control. When a horse that’s very powerful is bridled and trained, it’s said to be *meek*. It uses its full force under the restraint of the bit and the bridle and the reins. The power is not diminished, but focused. And when we’re meek, it means that our power is restrained under the Holy Spirit’s values and direction. That’s what *meekness* means. We come under that yoke of the Holy Spirit’s leadership. You don’t lose any of your strength, but you use your strength differently; you aim at different targets as He directs us like the rider would direct the horse.

We use our resources and our authority under the Holy Spirit’s leadership. Not just to increase our sphere of influence and our sphere of blessing, but we use our power and our resources to benefit others, with no regard to it coming back to us; that’s meekness.

Now meekness has more than that; meekness is in reference to a teachable spirit. The most learned man or woman, if he or she has meekness, will be listening and learning throughout life: preoccupied with God's agenda for others, and not just the self. A meek person doesn't draw attention to himself or herself. Jesus addresses this very strongly right here in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6. He says, "Don't sound a trumpet to show everyone how dedicated you are. Don't sound the trumpet in the synagogue, in the meetings where the saints gather, and don't sound the trumpet out in the streets just as you come and go" (Mt. 6:1-8, paraphrased).

He said that several times. Not in the gathering, and not out in the street: don't sound a trumpet to let everyone know how dedicated you are, how much you give, how much you fast, how much you pray, how zealous you are for God, how sensitive you are to the Holy Spirit. Don't draw attention to yourself. Don't blow the trumpet or put out a neon sign that says, "Look at me, I'm in the meeting! I'm in the room. I'm out in the street! Am I not dedicated? Am I not generous? Do I not fast and pray a lot? Do I not move in the Spirit? Am I not zealous? Look at all the fanfare that I make to show my zeal, isn't it amazing?"

Jesus says, "Don't do that! Don't do that."

Now we all know about the guy who walks into the room, whether the room is ten or a thousand, and everyone in the room knows he's in the room because he makes sure that everyone knows he's in the room. Jesus says, "No, go the other direction. Draw attention to Me and to others in meekness. And the meek shall enter into My government a little in this life but in fullness in the life to come."

WALKING IN THE GRACE OF GOD INVOLVES PRESSING INTO GOD

Paragraph D. Hunger and thirsting for righteousness. Walking in the grace of God isn't passive. Walking in the grace of God involves pressing into God, hungering and thirsting; it's not passive. Again, it's this distorted view of grace that says, "Well, you know, I'm just going to receive what is already done." Yes, it's done and you need to receive it, but you receive it by positioning yourself to press in. Press in with all your might. Jesus called it hungering and thirsting.

Now there's nothing more focused than a man who is famished with hunger or thirst. They're very famished! They won't take any substitute if they're on the verge of death because of hunger or thirst. You picture a man coming out of the desert or being rescued at the last moment who hasn't had water for days; he's parched and just hours away from death. The thing that he wants most is for his thirst to be quenched.

"Hey bro! How are you doing? I was thinking we could plan our schedule today, maybe catch a few movies, maybe go out and get something to eat. I have some ways we can make some more money. Hey, there are some new networking opportunities going on."

And the man is thinking, "You know what? Tell me all that later. Those things are all cool, but quench my thirst; I'm about to die!"

A thirsty man is a focused man. Jesus says, "I want you focused. I want you passionate, not passive. I want you going after it," because a thirsty man will lose sight of everything going after quenching his thirst. Again, it's this idea of the grace of God, and Jesus is the best grace teacher that has ever existed.

He's saying, "I want my people thirsty. I want them passionate. I want them passionate in the sense that they're expending all of their strength seeking Me; not just letting things happen as they will. They'll use what's within their power to seek Me, that their minds would be filled with the Word and their emotions transformed by the power of the Spirit."

Some people have the idea that, "Well if God wants my mind and my emotions changed, He has my address and He can change them."

And the Lord says, "No, the work that I did for you I want to do in you, but not without you cooperating with Me. I want you to feel and understand so much more, but you have to hunger and thirst for Me."

THE MORE MERCY WE EXTEND, THE MORE WE WILL RECEIVE

Paragraph E. Relating to others in mercy. Now the way that we relate to people in mercy is that we're tender to people in their failure and we're tender toward people in their need. There's a failure dimension and there's a need dimension. We look at the plight of the fatherless, not just in our nation but in the nations. And we see that and we feel merciful and we feel touched, and it's not like, "Oh, that's just too bad." There's a mercy dimension related to needs and injustice and there's a mercy dimension related to being tender with failure.

The way we become tenderer with people's failure is by seeing how tender God is to us in our failure. And Jesus said, "There's a relationship between your tenderness towards people and the tenderness you'll actually receive."

God says, "I'll even give you more mercy as you show mercy. I've given you mercy sufficient to make you merciful, but I'll actually increase your experience of mercy from Me directly. And I'll even raise up others around you to be merciful to you."

WE WILL NEVER EXHAUST OUR ABILITY TO INCREASE OUR CAPACITY FOR GOD

Being pure in heart: I just can't imagine anything more glorious than seeing God in a greater capacity. Now we will grow in our capacity to see God and to encounter Him forever and forever. We will never, ever exhaust our ability to increase our capacity. Those who are nearest the throne see Him the most, the most privileged and honored.

Now when we see God in this age at whatever measure, we actually experience Him more and we reflect His likeness more. We express His glory more, but we want to be pure in our thoughts and in our motivations. We want to expend energy to cultivate purity in our thoughts. And it takes energy, because our thoughts by nature and our motives by nature are impure. It takes a clear, definitive, focused cooperation with God for purity to grow in our thoughts and our motivations. And when the Holy Spirit highlights something, we don't want to be defensive; we don't want to blame-shift. We don't come up with religious answers for why it's OK to be impure. We want to say, "Thank You, Holy Spirit; now help me!"

And the Holy Spirit says, "If you do that, you'll see God more. You'll feel God more. You'll express God more."

Job said it so well, and we've quoted the verse many times: "I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look on anything that stirs up lust in my thinking" (Job 31:1, paraphrased). Beloved, we want to make a covenant

with our eyes and maintain that covenant. And if you fail in the covenant, don't fall into condemnation; just call it failure, recommit to it, receive forgiveness, push delete, and be fully committed again to the covenant.

THE RISK AND REWARD OF BEING A PEACEMAKER

Paragraph G. Becoming a peacemaker: a person who invests time, energy, and risk—that's a key word, *risk*—into healing broken relationships. You get Brother number one and Brother number two together, whether they're born again or not. This is healing relationships at many levels. It takes time. It takes energy. It takes listening. It takes love and care to be able to do that.

Now I've done a bit of that over the years and so have many of you. Here's the risk involved. Brother A explains why he has a conflict with Brother B, and Brother B has a different version of what happened, and it takes hours and hours and hours. And so finally we summarize it, and you say, "Brother A, you change these two things," and, "Brother B, change these two things." I've seen this many times: they don't change either, they stay divided, and now they're both mad at me! And I say, "Lord, what good did *that* do?!"

And the Lord's answer is, "It's good because love is an end in itself." You know, God loves for love's sake—for His own sake, because He is love (1 Jn. 4:16). The reward of love is love itself. God loves, and many times there's no response and no reception, but love is still glorious when it's expressed.

And the Lord's answer to us would be, "Even if they don't reconcile, you're an expression of My likeness. You're showing the family traits. You're showing what it's like to be like Me."

And so reconciliation takes a lot of time and energy. I believe with the financial crisis that's mounting up in the years and, I believe, even decades to come that there will be more and more civil unrest related to governments and economics. Peacemaking will be one of the most important ministries in the neighborhoods and around the earth. And even when we don't bring Brother A and Brother B to resolution and peace, we've still learned a lot about the process and we've been transformed and even trained in the exercise of it. However, again, love is an end within itself; even if it's not received, it's love for love's sake under the glory of God.

Paragraph H. Enduring persecution. Now when we take a stand for the kingdom and we lead someone to the Lord, when we pray for the sick and take a stand for righteousness, there's a counterattack: the enemy strikes back. Because what you're doing is moving in his domain and taking things from him. He says, "No! Those are mine!"

We say, "No they belong to God and we're invading the realm of darkness and we're bringing the gospel of truth." And the enemy in a limited way can strike back; in this age his time is limited, but there's a counterattack.

And Jesus is saying, "Don't be offended. Don't be a victim. Don't quit."

You know, the man says, "I took a stand for righteous and no one went for it. It's not worth it anyway. Everyone is mad. Everyone has written me off! I quit!"

Jesus says, “No! Take a stand for righteousness for My sake. Not because it will make you popular or make your ministry bigger or make things better for you. As a matter of fact, things might get worse circumstantially. Don’t draw back in fear.”

Know that you’re blessed. The glory of God will rest upon you if you maintain your stance even when being persecuted (1 Pet. 4:14).

THOSE WHO PROCLAIM THE BEATITUDES WILL BE GREAT IN HIS SIGHT

Paragraph I. Matthew 5:19. Jesus says this. Now this is only about five or six verses later; He’s on the same subject of the eight Beatitudes. He says, “If you do these and you teach them, you’ll be called great in My sight. You might not be called great by men in this age. However, when you stand before God, if you do these eight and you impart them, if you take a stand for them, if you focus in on them, if you invest labor into them, I’ll call your dedication great in the age to come when you stand before me” (Mt. 5:19, paraphrased).

Now we say, “Our dedication doesn’t seem that great!” but the Lord is so kind in His evaluation. I mean, He’s so kind.

And so I’ve read this verse, Matthew 5:19, and I say, “Wait a second: if I teach the eight Beatitudes and pursue them in my own life and I labor to get other people to buy into them, You’ll do *what?*”

“I’ll call you great when we meet face to face.”

Beloved, I love you, but I’m doing this this morning for me! Well, I’m doing it for you too, but I really take this seriously. He says, “Don’t just do it; convince others to do it.”

I say, “I’m in! I’m in!” And so for some years I take time and energy to get people to buy into this stuff, because the Lord takes it personally. He says, “I will take personally the way you love Me by standing for those things.”

“IF YOUR EYE IS GOOD, YOUR WHOLE BODY WILL BE FULL OF LIGHT”

Paragraph J. Final paragraph. If we do this, we will have a vibrant spirit, referred to as being full of light. Jesus says the lamp, or the source of light for the body is the eye, the spiritual eye. Here’s what He says: “If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light” (Mt. 6:22). “Your whole body” means your whole person, your whole personhood. You’ll have a vibrant spirit if your eye is good.

If your eye is bad, you won’t have a vibrant spirit; you’ll have a dull spirit plus some. And He said, “That’s what I promise you.”

Now what does it mean to have a good eye, really simply? It means that the primary vision for your life is to pursue these eight Beatitudes. Yes, say no to the six negatives and pursue the five positives; all that goes together. You say yes to these eight Beatitudes and you focus on them with all the other dimensions that go with it. And you teach them: that’s your primary life vision. Now you may never teach publicly on a microphone, but you’ll teach twos and threes, ones and twos. You may teach children, teach your neighbors, teach your friends. Encourage people: tell your story; tell your struggle. You’re teaching people by just sharing in a casual context. Jesus said, “If your main life vision is that you’ll have light, you’ll have a vibrant spirit.”

Many believers that I know, many, many, many, they're in verse 23. Their eye is bad, and that's not their life vision; it's way down the list. Their life vision is to have more money, more friends, a bigger ministry, and an easier life and enjoy Jesus in the process the best they can. Beloved, that's called a bad eye. That means their life vision is out of kilter, out of order. Jesus is kind of an addendum to their "American dream" pursuit of having things bigger, nicer, easier, with more friends and more ministry.

Jesus said, "I want to promise you something: you'll have a spirit of dullness and darkness in your mind and emotions. The only way forward is what I'm presenting to you."

Amen. Let's stand.

MINISTRY TIME

And so Lord, we say yes; we want these eight. We want to realign our eye to where it's good.

I want to encourage you to stand as we ask the Lord to touch us. Lord, I say yes; I want a good eye. I want to be full of light.

Now this is progressive; it's not all at once. Again, for these weeks to follow I want to realign, to plumb line our spiritual community to the Sermon on the Mount. This is where a vibrant heart comes from, full of light. I want more than I have right now. I want to experience the light and I want to impart the light. I want more. You want more. I want to encourage you to just close your eyes just for a moment so you're not distracted and talk to the Holy Spirit.

"Holy Spirit, I want to line up. I want to make this number one." You can say this in different ways. It's called loving God with all your heart. You can say it however you want, but I want to go after these eight as the number one goal of my life and I want to make them known.

"Holy Spirit, teach me."

The Holy Spirit says, "Talk to Me more; I'll talk to you about them if you'll talk to Me about them. If you'll talk to Me about them, I'll talk to you."

We're saying right now in a new way, "Holy Spirit, I will talk to You more about these eight Beatitudes."