

Session 4 Mourning, Meekness, and Spiritual Hunger

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

We're continuing in our study on the Sermon on the Mount. Tonight we'll look at four different beatitudes. There are eight. We'll review the first one that we looked at the last session and then look at three more.

Let's give a quick snapshot of each one of them. In the next session we'll do the second four. We have a quick look at them. This is a little review for those who are just joining us for the first time.

THE GREATEST TEACHING ON GRACE, FROM THE GREATEST OF ALL TEACHERS

Paragraph A. The Sermon on the Mount is the most comprehensive statement about a believer's role in cooperating with the grace of God. Jesus is the ultimate grace teacher and this is His ultimate teaching.

The reason I say that is because some people think the Sermon on the Mount with its radical lifestyle is somehow different than the grace of God. I've heard people say, "I'm really into grace; I'm not sure about all that intensity in the Sermon on the Mount."

Jesus was the greatest grace teacher who ever preached. We need more faith teaching in the Church today. When we think of faith teaching, most folks think of healing or finances. You do teach on faith for that. I want to have focused faith teaching on walking in the grace of God for the eight Beatitudes. It takes faith to do that. We need faith in that arena.

Paragraph B. The eight Beatitudes. Most of you know them: being poor in spirit, spiritual mourning, walking in meekness, hungering for God—for righteousness, showing mercy, embracing purity, being a peacemaker, and enduring persecution.

YOUR SPIRIT WILL BE BRIGHT IF YOU PURSUE THE EIGHT BEATITUDES

Number one. The first four beatitudes go together. The second four go together. All eight go together. There's a progression and a connectedness of all eight. The first four are attitudes that the world sees as negative qualities: being poor in spirit, mourning, meekness, and being hungry. They say those are bad things.

Then—number two—the second four are attitudes that the world sees as positive: being merciful, pure, making peace, and enduring persecution with patience. There's no complaining at all! Jesus promised that we would be blessed. In one sentence, that means that we would have a vibrant spirit, with the anointing of God touching us where we feel connected to God and we experience His power. That's the most fundamental definition, in a practical way, of what it means to walk blessed.

We all want that; but so few believers walk with a vibrant spirit. They go to prayer lines; they go to counseling; they read self-help books about how they can get over their depression and be happy. We need to pursue the eight Beatitudes. Jesus gave us the insight on how to walk with a vibrant spirit. They're not poetry. Some people put them on a poster and say, "That's really neat." They're really the way of the kingdom.

I want to challenge you, as we're in the series, to take these eight Beatitudes with the utmost seriousness in your personal life. Don't be content; don't say, "I think I've got these down. I can kind of describe them and see how

they connect.” I’m not just talking about a theological exercise. I’m talking about focusing on these eight in a literal way, saying, “Holy Spirit, escort me into the reality of all eight.”

Each of these eight Beatitudes has several levels. There are several different levels of meaning and depth to them. We can enter into them in an introductory way, but we’re not content with that. We want to go deep. I want to tell you something: your spirit will be vibrant if you pursue these eight. Your spirit will be dull if you don’t, no matter how many worship services you come to or how many people pray for you. You’ll continue with a dull spirit.

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

Here’s a quick review. Being poor in spirit. We want to do these four together, but I’ll just review the first one. Paragraph A. This is being aware of our great need to experience more of the grace of God in our heart, our ministry, the Church, society at large. We’re poor in spirit, not just in our own life, but in our ministry. I look at IHOP-KC and say, “Lord there’s so much more.” I look at America and say, “Oh Lord there’s so much more.” I look at this generation; I say, “Lord, I’m desperate for all that You have for this generation.”

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom” (Mt. 5:3). Two of the eight put the promise in the present tense: “Theirs *is* the kingdom.” They’ll experience a measure of the glory of God right now.

WE DON’T HAVE THE STRENGTH TO MAKE OUR HEART GODLY

Paragraph A. This includes seeing ourselves as spiritually poor in terms of our experience when compared to how much God has made available to us. God has made available a far greater measure of grace than any of us are walking in. When we see that, it stirs us up. We say, “That’s not OK.” Being poor in spirit implies that we know we don’t have the strength to make our heart godly or spiritually alive. We know that, sort of. Technically everyone knows that. They don’t have the power to make their heart alive and vibrant. The way they live, they assume they do have the power. They go on without seeking the Lord in the way He describes and wonder why they don’t feel the power of God.

WE CAN’T INSPIRE OTHERS BY THE STRENGTH OF OUR CALLINGS

The poor in spirit say, “There isn’t a chance that we can enter in without seeking God, seeking help, outside our natural strength and our natural abilities. We can’t inspire others to walk with God in a deep way by our persuasive speaking, by our gifted music, by powerful personalities.” You can’t move another human spirit to walk with God with your own gifting or ability. No matter how good your music is, how clever your sermons are, or how great the drama is, our natural ability can’t move a human spirit. That’s really practical when it comes to a home. Mom and dad, you can’t move their little spirit to connect with God by just the sheer dedication of motherhood and fatherhood. It takes an anointing to touch them. We look to Jesus, but not just in the sense of acknowledging we need help. We acknowledge we need help, but we line ourselves up to seek it.

Being poor in spirit is not just the acknowledgement; it’s the acknowledgement with action. We respond the way the eight Beatitudes say because we can’t deliver ourselves or the people we love without continually connecting with the Holy Spirit.

The end of paragraph B. Here’s how we can grow in this beatitude of being poor in spirit. Someone says, “I want a greater sense of that.” Read what the Word says about how much God will give. Read the book of Acts.

Read different places in the Word. We read biographies from history, and see how much God did in and through others. The Lord says, “Is that what you want?”

I’m not talking about the measure of impact where Billy Graham touched a million people: “That’s what I want!” I’m not talking about the size of impact. I’m talking about the Spirit touching you and the anointing of the Spirit flowing through you.

When we read the Word and testimonies of history, biographies, and how far God is willing to go in touching the human heart, it makes us desperate. It makes us miserable living at the low level that we live in our spiritual experience.

“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED”

Top of page two. Let’s go to the second beatitude. “Blessed are those who mourn” (Mt. 5:4). No one could have thought these eight up. The only one that you might have guessed is, “Blessed are the merciful.” To the others, you say, “Huh?” Jesus laid them out and said, “This is the key to the human spirit connecting with God.” I’m talking about born-again believers connecting with the Spirit and not being content merely with forgiveness for their sins and a few external blessings. I’m talking about living connected with God. He starts with poverty of spirit; then spiritual mourning.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Mt. 5:4). The Lord says, “If you stay with it, in due time, little by little, I’ll touch you. I’ll comfort you. You’ll have a breakthrough.” The breakthrough comes progressively, little by little. The comfort happens over time. He says, “I promise you, you’ll have a breakthrough if you stay with it.”

Paragraph A. Being poor in spirit speaks of how we see ourselves. Mourning refers to how we feel about what we see. In poverty of spirit, we see our great need. There’s so much more God will give us, for our natural giftings and abilities can’t release the anointing to us, for us, or through us. Mourning is how we feel about what we see. When we see differently, being poor in spirit, we feel differently about our life.

“Blessed are they that mourn.” We feel pain; but not only pain. We still have confidence in God. We still have a dimension of joy. There’s a dimension of pain and a dimension of joy. Both truths are held in tension. It’s not one without the other; both of them have a place in a believer’s life, their entire life in this age. The goal isn’t to enter into joy that has no mourning, or mourning that has no joy. They seem like extremes on opposite ends, but both of them have a place in a believer’s life in every step of their spiritual journey in this age. Mourning is a spiritual mourning. It’s not talking about mourning because of difficult circumstances. You filed for bankruptcy and lost all your money. That’s tough; that’s intense. You have a horrible accident, or a loved one dies, and that causes mourning. That’s not the mourning He’s talking about here. It’s biblical to have mourning for that, but He’s talking about mourning for a spiritual breakthrough.

Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians 7. Jesus called it mourning; Paul called it godly sorrow. Here’s what he said: “Godly sorrow produces something in you. It produces repentance” (2 Cor. 7:10, paraphrased)—or a commitment to wholeheartedness. That’s what repentance is. Godly sorrow is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in you. You can ask Him for it and it will increase. You do that along with reading what the Word says that God has for you. That produces poverty of spirit, which leads to godly sorrow.

Paul says, “This sorrow produces something. It bears fruit.” Number one, it leads you to repentance. It stirs you up to be wholehearted in your pursuit of obedience. But it doesn’t stop there; it leads to salvation. Paul is talking to believers who are already saved in the initial sense of understanding the Word. He’s not talking about being born again; he’s talking to born-again believers in this context. He says, “This godly sorrow, when it works in you, will give you motivation for wholeheartedness, called repentance. It will lead you to the breakthrough. It will lead you to deliverance from a dull spirit.”

MOURNING IN THE SPIRIT IS THE GRACE OF GOD

In verse 11, Paul describes the zeal, or the vibrant spirit, that was worked in the Corinthians because of godly sorrow. You want to put your name on this verse. You want to say, “Holy Spirit, I want verse 11 operating in my life.” Verse 11 is what the breakthrough looks like at the heart level. It’s one of the best verses I know describing the spiritual breakthrough of the heart that godly sorrow produces. It produces diligence and indignation (2 Cor. 7:11). In other words, they said, “We hate our compromise. We want no place for compromise in our lives again.” They had indignation against their previous compromise.

How would you like it if when you failed something you were committed to in righteousness, instead of saying, “Ah man, next time try harder”—which I’ve said a number of times—what if you had a Holy Spirit indignation in your heart? You said, “I’m never going in that direction!” But the Spirit is helping you.

“What fear”—the fear of God—“what vehement desire, what zeal” for God (2 Cor. 7:11b). Beloved, that’s the breakthrough of the heart. Mourning, this mourning, is the gift of God working in you. It’s a gift of the Holy Spirit. It’s the grace of God. You can’t produce it. It’s the fruit of being poor in spirit, along with the Holy Spirit imparting it to you.

I’ve asked the Lord through the years, “I want godly mourning. I want greater grace to walk in the blessedness of spiritual mourning.”

The Holy Spirit would say something like, “Since you’ve asked for it, I’ll give it to you.”

He might say to some of you, “You’ve never asked for it, ever.” It’s a grace. There’s a blessedness that goes with it. It’s the fruit of seeing our poverty-stricken state, in terms of our spiritual experience, compared to what is available. It’s also an operation of the Holy Spirit. The two of them go together. Beloved, your desire for God, your very desire for God is His gift to you. The fact that you love Jesus; the fact that you’re troubled over the gaps in your life; the fact that it bothers you that you’re not consistent, is the gift of God working in you. It’s the proof that mourning is already working in you. We just want more of it.

Paragraph C. We mourn because we see how much God longs to give, and how much He has proven in history that He will give. We see the gap between our experience and what God promised He would do.

We say, “No, I can’t live like this.” Isaiah was undone when he saw the glory of God. He was undone. He said, “I have to make changes in my life.”

“DRAW NEAR TO GOD, AND HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU”

Paragraph D. James talks about spiritual mourning or godly sorrow. In James 4, he describes it in connection to drawing near to God. Drawing near to God is like the beatitude of hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

James connects this spiritual mourning with drawing near to God, which Jesus called hungering and thirsting after righteousness. James said, “Draw near to God. Read the Word. Fast. Pray. Position yourself to be touched, and I have a great promise for you: a breakthrough will touch your heart. You’ll get a breakthrough at the heart level. God will draw near to you. You’ll feel the breakthrough. You’ll feel His presence. He will give you understanding. He will give you a spirit of prayer. He will draw near to you if you stay with it” (Js. 4:8, paraphrased).

Then he switches gears here. James was zealous and tells them, “Cleanse your hands. Be serious about righteousness. Don’t dabble with compromise and say, ‘Boys will be boys; so what?’ Purify your hearts” (Js. 4:8b, paraphrased).

He didn’t mean you can make your heart pure, but do the human response that positions yourself to receive the grace for your heart to be pure. We all understand this word. He says, “You’re double-minded. You lack follow through in your spiritual commitments.” He’s talking to believers who love God. He says, “You lack follow through.”

“LET YOUR LAUGHTER BE TURNED TO MOURNING AND YOUR JOY TO GLOOM”

Verse 9. “What you need is the second beatitude, the grace of God to mourn over where you live and the lack of follow through in your spiritual commitments.” He said, “Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom” (Js. 4:9). He didn’t mean spend the next twenty years with gloom. We have to read this in the whole testimony of Scripture. There are many verses on joy, but there are a good number of verses on sorrow. I’m talking about spiritual sorrow, not sorrow because of a life tragedy. I’m talking about spiritual sorrow. We hold the two truths in tension, meaning at one moment of your life, maybe within the course of a day or week, you’ll sense this anguish to go deep with God. It’s painful and doesn’t feel good. Some people get locked into gloom, and they’re stuck there. Other people get stuck on joy without any desperation to go deep. Other people get stuck on the mourning and gloom without any sense of joy, any sense of confidence with God. We don’t pick one or the other; we want both dimensions of the grace of God in our lives. At different moments of our life, one of them is predominant over the other; and then it changes.

Someone says, “Every day it changes, every week it changes, every month it changes?” There’s no roadmap to this. It’s different for everyone.

We want you to know this. We need to be aware of what we are and what we have, not just aware of what we don’t have. “Blessed are those who mourn” focuses on what we don’t have.

Remember, this is Jesus’ teaching. You’re not going to come up with a better teaching than Jesus. I’ve seen a lot of people try. You can get a crowd to follow you, but woe at the judgment seat when you face Jesus. We want to be aware of what we don’t have; that’s called, “Blessed are those who mourn.” We don’t want to be aware of it at the expense of what we do have. I want to have confidence and joy in what I do have in Christ, and I want to mourn for that which I’ve not yet experienced so that I can go deeper.

WE’RE CONFIDENT IN WHAT HE GIVES US, BUT WE’RE HUNGRY FOR MORE

The end of paragraph E. We’re grateful for what we have. I’m grateful for whatever measure I have. I say, “Thank You.” The Lord might say, “If I lift My hand, you would be in utter darkness. You have no idea how much grace you have.”

Some believers say, “I just don’t feel God at all.” They don’t really want to hear facts; the fact is, they do. They’re so used to feeling a little of God’s presence that they don’t know what utter darkness feels like. It’s been years. If He lifted His hand, they would say, “My spiritual barrenness and depression was pretty alive compared to this.” We’re grateful. We’re confident in what He gives us. We love it, but we’re never content without reaching for more. I mean, I’m grateful for whatever measure He gives me, but I want more. When He gives me more, I say, “Thank You.” When He gives me more, I want another measure. Until the resurrection, that’s how it will go.

Paragraph F. This feeling of desperation, this holy discontent causes us to be extreme. That’s the point. When we have this holy desperation, we use our strength to reorder our life in pursuit of God.

Someone says, “I don’t have time to seek God.”

When you have holy desperation, everything else pales into second place. Someone says, “I don’t really have time to do the prayer thing. I’m not really into that.” I’m not even talking about IHOP-KC; I’m talking about in the generic sense.

I say, “I think in my heart that you haven’t experienced poverty of spirit or spiritual mourning. It’s blessedness to experience this.” Once this touches you, once it builds in you, you’ll have a holy desperation. You’ll be extreme. You’ll spend your money differently. You’ll spend your time differently. Your conversations will be different. You’ll order your life around seeking God with a new urgency. Without that mourning, without that pain, the urgency typically isn’t there.

REFUSE TO BE COMFORTED BY ANYTHING LESS THAN GOD’S HIGHEST FOR YOUR LIFE

Our culture so values comfort. I’m still in paragraph F. One of the primary values of the Western culture is comfort. Just for the record, I like comfort. I’m not putting comfort down. I like comfort, but here’s the problem. Because it’s so much a part of our culture, we have the tendency to seek it in a false way, in a counterfeit false comfort, and we have a tendency to give our friends comfort.

I told this story of what happened some years ago when my wife, Diane, was really mourning in the grace of God. She was reading the Bible every day; she was one of the godliest women I know, even back in those early days, as a young woman in her twenties. She was pressing hard after the Lord, and she said, “I’m backslidden. I don’t feel His presence, I don’t have a spirit of prayer, and I don’t hunger for the Word. I have to have a breakthrough.”

I was putting my arm around her to say, “No, you’re doing well.” That was foolishness. God was working on her. It was like, “Mike, don’t put water on the fire and put it out. Put gas on the fire, not water. Talk her into it, not out of it.”

Right when I was putting my arm around her to say, “Ah, you’re doing great,” some little, nice, human sentiment and flattery that was sincere but wrong, I accidentally prophesied instead. It ricocheted back on me. I heard myself say, “You’re backslidden!” Ahh! It completely bypassed my mind. I said, “So am I.”

She had tears in her eyes and said, “I know you are.” The shock was to me. I didn’t think either of us was backslidden five minutes before that conversation. Beloved, refuse to be comforted by anything less than God’s highest for your life. Don’t let some well-meaning, sentimental believer pat you on the back and put water on the fire. Get with believers who will put gas on the fire. Get with people who will say, “Yeah, you’re pretty dull. So am I. Let’s do something about it. Let’s not just talk about it; let’s do something and be accountable to each other.”

DON’T EVER BE CONTENT WITH YOUR DULL BARRENNESS

I’ve written here kind of a rough sentence, but I want to say it. There are a lot of believers out there—end of paragraph F—who have never been pained by their spiritual lack. They’re kind of content with their dull barrenness. They think it’s normal because everyone around them is that way. They’ll miss out on so much in God. Not sort of; they will. They’re not even aware that they’re stuck in barrenness.

Here’s the problem: the majority live that way. Don’t be intimidated by their proclamation of the grace of God that keeps them in bondage to their barrenness and their superficiality and dullness. They’ll talk grace all the time and they’ll live a carnal life. It’s a distorted grace message.

A lot of young believers, when someone says, “Grace, grace,” they say, “I don’t want to get into legalism.” They get thrown off; they get intimidated by this distorted grace message of a spiritually dull, spiritually barren, superficial believer with a dull spirit who is talking about grace.

I don’t want to learn about grace from someone who doesn’t have a vibrant spirit. I say, “Your version isn’t what I’m after. I want something that’s going to set me on fire in the inside. Give me a sustaining grace to press into God. That’s what I’m looking for.”

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

Top of page three. The next one: “Blessed are the meek” (Mt. 5:5). I have it written here—you can read it on your own—that poverty of spirit and meekness are related, yet they have important distinctions. Poverty of spirit is our awareness of our lack before God, but meekness is the awareness of our lack before people. That’s one part of meekness. There’s a distinction.

We need wisdom from other people. We’re not self-contained with all wisdom. I know we have the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit lives in others, and He wants us to be humble and teachable to learn from others. He has organized the body where we all need to reach across to other believers who have wisdom we don’t have, wisdom we can’t get, that’s in another person.

We have need. The Lord will teach the oldest believer through the youngest believer. We need to have a teachable spirit all our days.

CARRY YOUR GIFTING WITH GRATITUDE, WHETHER IT’S LARGE OR SMALL

That’s one part of meekness. There’s another part of meekness. It’s our indebtedness to God for giving us the resources: the wisdom, the motivation, the finance, the calling, the gifting. Another part of meekness isn’t just the indebtedness to His increase, but the revelation of His ownership over everything that He has given us. Meekness is tied to the revelation that He owns everything He gave you. He owns the gifting He gave you; it’s not yours. He owns the favor and the influence He gave you by giving you favor. That’s not yours; it’s Yours.

You can't take your financial increase or your favor of God in ministry or relationship; you can't become a powerbroker with this increase of God.

The meek understand that it belongs to Him. It never was theirs, ever. A lot of people, when they get increase of wisdom, gifting, favor in ministry, favor in relationships, finance, they become a powerbroker with their own increase as though it's theirs. They kind of pontificate; they let the others under them know the way it will be. "I'm the boss, it's my little sphere. I only have three people under me, but I'm the head of this little sphere. I want everyone to know that it's my dedication, my breakthrough; I'm the one who paid the price. It's mine."

The Lord says, "Excuse Me; that's not the truth. I've entrusted it to you." It's our indebtedness to God for giving us the increase of our natural gifting and the increase of the spiritual graces—both dimensions.

You may be the greatest singer; you may be the greatest technology guy.

You may be the greatest drama guy. You may be the greatest preacher, writer, mechanic, politician. Those gifts were given to you by God. Even the natural gifting, He increases. "It's my gifting! I paid the price! It's my music."

The Lord says, "Not really. Not really." Carry it as though it belongs to Another; not as a powerbroker, not like it's yours. Be tender with the people. Carry the gift with gratitude, whether the gifting is big or small.

Paragraph B. Our most natural mindset—all of us are born this way—is to see our resources as belonging to us. "I worked hard for the money." We see it as the fruit of our dedication, our hard work. "I practiced the instrument, I built the ministry, I raised the family, I built the business."

The Lord says, "Yes, your dedication played into it, but there's a far bigger story than your dedication. I gave you more than your dedication could have produced."

MEEKNESS IS THE MAGNET THAT ATTRACTS GOD'S FAVOR

Paragraph C. Some people think meekness is timidity. Meekness isn't a personality temperament of timidity. Timidity is rooted in the fear of man and in low self-esteem. It's not a spiritual grace. We see a guy who kind of shies around and we say, "He's humble."

"No, he's not humble; he's entrenched in the fear of man. That's not humility. Let's get him free."

Meekness—paragraph C—is having power over your selfishness and your preoccupation with yourself. That's meekness. It takes the power of God to do that. When we look at our life, our gifting, our finance, our influence or lack of influence, from high to low, we complain about the low, and we're powerbrokers when it's high. On both ends we're preoccupied with ourselves by nature. All of us think like this naturally; we came by it honestly from father Adam. There's the moment in your life when you didn't think it, when you had the most horrible failure. But as a rule, over the course of our life, we think we deserve better treatment than we're getting. We think people should treat us better. We should have more honor, more favor, and more recognition. God should make it happen, too.

Meekness is the power to break through from that centrifugal force, that gravitational force of being self-consumed. You can't do it on your own; it's the work of the Spirit. We can repent of it all day long, but there's

a gravitational pull on the inside of us where we think we're getting a bad deal with God. We know we're going to heaven, but we say, "How come we're not more anointed, more recognized, more wealthy, more favored?"

The Lord says, "Completely the wrong question!"

I remember hearing the preacher say, "It's not how much you deserve. The real question is how come you're not in hell and in utter darkness right now."

That's the real question. It's not, "How come I don't have more of the good stuff? It's, "How come you don't have more of the bad stuff?" That's the real issue.

When the truth of us is fully unveiled, we deserve the bad stuff by our natural choices. His favor is that you're in the kingdom. "I know I'm in the kingdom, but I've been praying for five years and I deserve a breakthrough."

The Lord says, "You're in the kingdom. Think about it. You should be on your way to the lake of fire. You're in the kingdom. I like you and you like Me. You have a destiny. You have a little more going on in your life, far more than you deserve."

It's the wrong question entirely. Most of us, myself included, make our first question the wrong question: "Why don't we have more of the good stuff?"

The real question should be, "Why don't we have more of the bad stuff?"

We don't see the whole truth. We imagine our dedication being more than it is.

THE ESSENCE OF MEEKNESS IS ROOTED IN WHO YOU'RE PREOCCUPIED WITH

Paragraph D. The essence of meekness: here it is. It's a very important concept. I'm saying I want you to note this so that you can go think on it later. The essence of meekness is rooted in who you're preoccupied with. The meek are preoccupied with Jesus as their source and as the owner of everything they have: even their influence, their sphere of ministry or their low sphere of ministry. When they see Jesus as the source and owner of everything good that they have, big or little, they have a grateful, servant spirit. They may have a huge stewardship, but they have a servant spirit with gratitude because they know it's not theirs. When they're preoccupied with themselves, which we all are, it's a miracle to break free of this gravitational pull in our being.

That's why it's blessed for the meek. We're preoccupied with the sense that we deserve more: more honor, more recognition, more money, more anointing, more favor: "Come on Lord, how much more do You want from me?"

The Lord says, "Wrong question. Totally wrong question!"

It results in a sense of entitlement. Here's how you can tell if you have a sense of entitlement. I didn't get this from a book! I got this out of my awareness of my own sinfulness. I said, "Ahh!"

Here's how you can tell: every time you complain or demand more privilege or honor, because of your great achievements, your dedication, your skill; you demand more honor and you complain you don't have it.

“Entitlement! Entitlement! Not meekness! Not meekness! Red alert! Not meekness! Dull spirit coming soon!” You probably already have it. There’s no vibrant spirit in that mindset.

Paul said it really clearly. Just so you know, this is torturing me to say this. I’m looking at myself and I have two more services to say this again. I have a bull’s eye on me. I’m saying, “Ouch!”

Paul lays it out in 1 Corinthians 4. This is Paul, the ultimate grace teacher, second only to Jesus. He says, “For who makes you different from another” (1 Cor. 7:4)? In other words, “Who makes you superior? “Why do you deserve more? Why do you imagine you’re getting the bad deal instead of having a servant spirit and gratitude for whatever measure you have?” He says, “What do you have that you didn’t receive anyway” (v. 4b, paraphrased).

“Well, yeah, but I was dedicated! I worked hard.”

The Lord says, “Yes, you deserve a two, but I gave you a ten.” Whatever standard that means.

Paul says, “What did you have in the natural or even in the spirit that wasn’t God’s free gift responding to your response?”

I mean, we do respond and He gives us more, but He gives us so much more than our dedication deserves.

The guy says, “I know I did receive it by grace. It’s all the Lord.”

Paul says, “Good; I have a question for you then. If it’s all the Lord, why are you carrying on as if it’s your dedication and you deserve more honor?”

He called it *boasting*. “If it’s all the Lord, why are you complaining and boasting about your position and place?” We boast, I boast, when I complain. That’s boasting. We boast when we use our increase thinking it’s ours, like a powerbroker to boss around the few who are under us. Because, we say, “It’s ours. It’s our music. It’s my ministry. It’s my family. I’m the boss!”

There’s a place for leadership. I’m not talking about not exerting leadership. I’m talking about having a spirit that’s less than meekness. That doesn’t have gratitude, a servant spirit, and generosity in it: carrying our increase with a lack of servanthood, gratitude, and generosity. “How dare they overlook me? How dare they resist me? Do they not know I’m the head of the worship team? Do they not know I’m the head of the home group? Do they not know I’m the head of this business? It’s my business! I started this business. I started this ministry. Do they not know I’ve lived in this ministry longer than anyone else? How dare they resist me!”

The Lord says that when you don’t have servanthood, a servant spirit and generosity in your spirit in the form of stewarding your increase, then you’re in need of meekness.

I could go on, but let’s turn to page four. We’re running out of time, but I want to encourage you to read through some of that. This is only introductory stuff; these truths have so many levels beyond what I understand. I talk to someone and they say, “Boy, you kind of understand that.”

I say, “Yeah, on the peewee level! Compared to what Jesus had in His mind, I’m at the beginning of the beginning of understanding these.” These things are massive, multilayered.

“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS”

Top of page four. The final one for tonight. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Mt. 5:6). It’s progressive, little by little. We’re called by Jesus to press into God.

Some people say, “I don’t like the pressing-in thing.” Well, it’s the teaching of Jesus. It’s His grace teaching. There’s no biblical teaching that doesn’t have us receiving the free grace of God to gain entrance into the family, and then in gratitude responding to that free grace by pressing in to experience more. That’s biblical teaching, New Testament 101. There’s no grace teaching that doesn’t hunger and thirst and press in for God and for righteousness. It’s pressing into God, because you’re not going to have a breakthrough of righteousness without connecting with the King of righteousness. He’s the Author of righteousness.

OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE GRACE OF GOD IS GOD’S RESPONSE TO OUR RESPONSE

We don’t just press in for ourselves; we press in for our loved ones. There are people I’m praying for. I’m pressing in for their breakthrough. You’re doing it. We’re pressing into God for our nation. We press into God for our cities in various ways. We’re hungering and pressing in to experience more.

Though our entrance into the family is free, our experience of the grace of God is God’s response to our response after we’ve entered into the family on the free grace of God. Then He relates to us based on our hunger in terms of how far we go in the spirit. We can be spiritually dull, stay in the kingdom, and be loved by God. He loves us all the same.

I want to experience more in the Holy Spirit. Not just outwardly: I want to experience it inwardly and outwardly.

“NOT THAT I HAVE ALREADY ATTAINED. . .”

Paragraph C. Paul, the great grace teacher, is speaking again. He says, “Not that I have already attained” (Phil. 3:12). He’s writing the book of Philippians at the very end of his life. He dies soon after this. Here’s a mature apostle in prison in Rome. He said, “I haven’t attained it yet.”

“You haven’t?”

“No, there’s more I want.”

“Whoa. Paul, you’ve written thirteen books of the Bible—fourteen if we throw in the book of Hebrews! You’ve had a couple of dynamic encounters with Jesus. That’s pretty intense! You made the book of Acts a whole bunch of times.”

He says, “I haven’t attained it. There’s more.”

“Wow.”

“I press on.”

“You do what?”

“I press.”

“Why?”

“I want to lay hold of everything that God laid hold of me for. I want everything. I don’t want to come short at all. I press. Because He laid hold of me for a certain destiny and I want more of it” (Phil. 3:12b, paraphrased).

Now, we don’t know what our full destiny in God is, but our destiny is an internal experience as well as an external ministry. A lot of people, when they talk about their destiny, only talk about how big their ministry will be. I say, “You have a huge destiny that’s internal, called the first commandment; is that on your mind?”

A lot of people say yes. That’s good. Here’s the point. Paul pressed in at the end of his life. The guy is in prison at the end. He isn’t drawing back. We say, “Paul, chill. What about chill, Paul?”

Paul goes, “I don’t do chill. I have a short amount of time before I step into the age to come and I’m pressing in. I don’t do chill. I’ll chill on the other side.” Whatever that means. I hear people talk about being chill all the time. I don’t know what exactly that means. There are probably 100 definitions. I know what Paul means. “I’m pressing.” He says, “I have to lay hold of that which I was laid hold of for.”

Then he goes in verse 14 and says, “I press in for the fullness of the calling in its internal and external dimensions” (Phil. 3:14, paraphrased).

Paragraph F. We care about righteousness. I’m shifting gears a little. We’re seeking righteousness. Well, we’re seeking the King of righteousness. He’s the source. He’s the vine and we’re the branches. He’s the One from whom we get our life.

I care about paragraph F. These are the small issues of the heart. Jesus laid out six different areas in the Sermon on the Mount: resisting immorality and anger at all levels. There are many levels to each of these six. We want a breakthrough of righteousness in our lives, but we want a breakthrough in the lives of others to whom we’re ministering. We can’t talk them into righteousness. There’s an anointing that we can operate in. We won’t necessarily know when we are. There’s a grace of God. Because a warmed heart causes other hearts to be warmed. If you get a warmed heart, you’ll impart fervor to others. I’m not saying you stir yourself up and talk to them really hard and fast. That’s not what I mean. There’s a fervency in your spirit, there’s a gripping of God, there’s an engagement of God. You’ll impart that desire to be engaged deeply with God.

HUNGERLESS, PASSIONLESS CHRISTIANITY IS A PRELUDE TO DEATH

Paragraph G. Hunger is one of the most important signs of life. You go to the hospital and the patient has no hunger at all. That’s bad. When there’s no hunger, there’s no life. You died. “How long did the guy have no hunger?”

“For days. He’s dead.” That’s why he has no hunger. That’s death. Before death there’s no appetite, which is a sign of extreme sickness if it goes on.

Here's the problem. There are a whole lot of believers who are in the spiritual intensive care unit, and they don't know it. They don't desire the Word. It's boring. They don't desire prayer. They'll go to the prayer room, listen to the music, but they don't talk to God. It's too boring. "I'm really fidgety, and I move around a lot." You're in spiritual ICU unit and don't know it. You have no hunger. You love God in the general sense. You're sick. Because so many others are sick, you don't think you're sick. You're on the verge of death.

"Well, I'm just into grace."

"No, you're in the ICU unit right now."

It's abnormal Christianity not to desire the Word and prayer and the presence of God. I know in the Western culture that's very normal. From the biblical point of view, that's abnormal, sickly Christianity. It's not normal. Hungerless, passionless Christianity isn't normative to God. The eight Beatitudes tell us the way out of it.

Paragraph J. Jesus said, "I promise you, if you'll stay with it, you progressively will be filled. I'll stir even you."

I'll end with a very short testimony of my personal life. I've said this many times over the years. I remember when I was eighteen or nineteen years old in college. My youth pastor said, "Mike, you have to read the Word."

I said, "Ahh!" The Word was so boring.

They said, "You have to do more than that. You have to pray."

The only thing worse than the Word was prayer. The only thing worse than prayer was fasting. They gave me all of them. It was horrible. I read the Word a couple of hours a day. I hated it. I hated it all the time. I said, "This is the most boring thing I've done in my life." I did it because my youth leaders told me to. I was miserable, though. The prayer was really bad. I would pray for three minutes. I would pray for an hour. After three minutes, I had fifty-seven minutes to go. It was torture. Then I started really praying, "God, You run Your kingdom and it's so boring. Couldn't You be more interesting?"

From heaven's point of view, the Lord was saying something like, "Now you're praying. Now you're doing it." I didn't think that was prayer. I felt bad about it. I was telling God, "Your stuff is boring. Your presence is boring. I have a lot to offer you. You're not taking me up on it." This is for real. I said, "It's Your business. I have a lot I could do for You."

Anyway, I didn't like the Bible and prayer. This went on for some years. Now I was about twenty-three years old. I'm pastoring. It was five years later. I had been staying steady in prayer, fasting, and the Word; but I didn't like it.

I was in a small group meeting one day with about thirty people. It was a question-and-answer time. They said, "Well, how do you enjoy the Word? What about the Bible?"

I made the most shocking statement. It just knocked the wind out of me when I said it. I said, "I really enjoy the Word because here's what I do." I was answering their question and I stopped. I said, "Oh my!" They were looking at me. I said, "I enjoy the Bible. I don't know when that happened!"

They were looking at me thinking, “Are you having a breakdown right now?”

“No, you don’t understand. Mike Bickle doesn’t like the Bible, but I do now. I don’t even know when! I have to end this meeting right now. I’m having an epiphany. I like the Bible!” I said, “God, it worked for even me.” I was convinced that I would be the only guy who pressed in and it would never work, ever. I would end up dying at ninety, not liking the Bible but gutting it out the whole time. I really believed it would never change. It was really boring to me.

Again, it was five years later. I don’t know when I started liking it, but I heard myself say, “I really enjoy the Word,” with tears coming down my face.

They were thinking, “Are you okay...?”

“No, I’m not OK right now.” I left and said, “God, I like the Bible. It worked for me. It worked for me, the main guy who would never like the Bible.”

I realize that was a long time ago. A lot of twenty-year olds say, “You’re Mike Bickle. You’re the IHOP guy. You have to like the Bible!”

No, I didn’t like any of it. If you had told me when I was twenty that I would be leading a prayer ministry, I would say, “That’s more bitter than death!” I mean it. That would have been torture. God hid it from me because I would have collapsed in anguish. That’s not a joke. That’s funny, but it’s not a joke. If He had told me at twenty years old, through an angel, “Yea, you shall lead a prayer ministry,” I would have said, “NOOOOOOO!!!” I would have fasted and prayed right then to break free. I mean it! I mean it! I’m not joking.

MINISTRY TIME

Let’s stand. I tell you, you’ll be filled. It will work for you. You stay with it.

You say, “I’m ADD!”

The whole world is ADD right now. Don’t do that one. Literally, the whole world is ADD except for about 1 percent of the people. They all work in libraries. I mean that. A lot of people cast aside their entire destiny under the umbrella of, “I’m ADD.” The earth is ADD. You have a destiny; go for it!

I want to respond first in the chairs because once we let our beloved Koreans, there isn’t going to be any space. No, wait, wait, wait. I said the K word. I said the K word. I want us to respond for about five minutes and then we’ll open it up. I love that. That’s hunger. No one has hunger like the Koreans. That’s glorious. That’s awesome.

I want to encourage you to say, “Lord, I’m going in this direction. I don’t care what it costs me. I don’t care how many years until I feel the response from heaven. I’m going in this direction. I don’t care if it’s years before I feel anything.” It won’t be years. I don’t remember when I started feeling it. I still to this day don’t remember when it started happening. It was somewhere in that first five years.

It won't take five years. It's the Beatitudes. It's not just Christian meetings; it's not just services; it's not just outreaches. It's the eight Beatitudes. That's the future for your life.