

**Life Attitudes: Bringing the Beatitudes to Life.**  
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**June 25, 2006, #1: I Can't - God Can, Matthew 5:1-3**

We're going to begin a new sermon series today, called "Life Attitudes". This series is going to be about bringing some sayings of Jesus, called the Beatitudes, to life for us. These are among the first utterances of Jesus' teaching in the book of Matthew. The Lord gave us eight Beatitudes, but Aaron is only giving me four weeks, so "we got to move it move it!" No, really we're just going to look at four of these eight Be-Attitudes.

"Be" attitudes is a great way to think about these sayings, because the attitude you hold within yourself determines your life outcome. Who you are on the inside determines your character, and your character determines your action; and all of this determines your identity, your eternal identity.

Now Matthew places these eight sayings at the very front of a big block of teachings and sayings of Jesus that run from chapter 5 to chapter 8. And he places these eight "Be" attitudes at the very beginning because they set up everything else. Almost everything else that Jesus says or does relates back to the themes of these eight sayings in some way. It's as if these eight phrases boil down the essence of Jesus teachings. Matthew is telling the readers of his gospel right off, "This is what Jesus was all about. This is what the kingdom of God looks like."

You're blessed when you're impoverished...

You're blessed when your broken and torn up...

You're blessed when your hungry...

Now, this is not what the crowd would have expected! I can see them sittin' on that hillside, shaking their heads, and saying to each other in their Larry the Cable Guy voice, "That ain't right"!

Because their world is not so different from ours... and these sayings, these "Be" attitudes are so at odds with the world that recognizes and worships strength and power.

So we're going to look at these sayings, just four of the eight over the next four weeks, and my hope is that we will use them to check our attitudes; those internal values that shape our character, action and identity. My hope is that we will allow the Holy Spirit today to reshape and transform our lives, rebuilding us from the inside – out.

So let's get started with the first Beatitude.

**Matthew 5:1-3**

1. Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,
2. and he began to teach them saying:
3. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

It would be really shallow to say that these are the "be happy" attitudes. Some versions of the Bible translate these sayings with "happy are those", which is a bit ironic to me since the Beatitudes have really very little to do with our happiness.

This is a lot deeper than human happiness. According to this Life Attitude, to get to where you want to go, you have to deal with your own poverty, your own impoverished spirit.

Now being happy is not necessarily a bad thing, but we can become confused and misdirected in life by the pursuit of happiness. We begin to believe that meaning is found through our happiness. We surround ourselves with things that will make us happy; toys, entertainment, all forms of stimulation. But the pursuit of meaning in the things that make us happy is really just self-absorption. And self-absorption is at the core of our brokenness and our sin. Self-absorption is when the self becomes the center of our reality, and whenever we put self, not God, at the center it is a spiritual problem. And the ultimate value in this cult of self is happiness – if not all of our lives, we make bit parts of our lives about the pursuit of pleasure. And all along, as we're trying to fill ourselves with all these things that don't satisfy what we're really searching for is love and acceptance and validation.

Don't you have your lists of the next thing that is going to make you happy. I do. Getting a truck, a few more tools for my shop, an I-Pod, a new surround-sound for the TV. How long do you want me to go? Cause I can do this all day long... Now I'm not the only one here, am I, that has a list like this? A list of things that I believe are going to bring me some measure of happiness. Maybe it's not a list of things, but a list of accomplishments; a list of successes.

In stark contrast to this self-lusting for happiness, we have what Jesus called "blessedness". To be blessed is much deeper than temporal happiness. Happiness is a state of circumstance. Blessedness is a relationship! Everything with God is about relationship. It is not about things, or success, or smooth sailing! Blessedness is the joy that comes from our relationship with God. One commentary I read suggested that instead of saying "blessed", we should say "Close to God" or "Near to the heart of God", because those expressions reflect the relational aspect of blessing.

But it's hard to be "near to the heart of God" when we're self-absorbed! Maybe you remember the Mac Davis song from the 70's that sort of epitomizes the spirit of self-absorption:

"Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble  
When you're perfect in every way.  
I can't wait to look in the mirror  
'cause I get better lookin each day.  
To know me is to love me.  
I must be a heck of a man.  
Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble,  
But I'm doing the best that I can.

Maybe I should have got me some hillbilly teeth....that would've done that song right!

Now there is a consequence to self-absorption in our life. And you may be thinking, "I'm not that self-absorbed". I was thinking the very same thing this week, and then I realized that I had this consequence, this outcome of self-absorption in my life. If you recognize this consequence in your life, then you need to know that self-absorption, or self-centeredness, is the root. And the consequence is "self-reliance".

You know what self-reliance is: "I can do it. I can handle it. I'm strong. I can stop anytime I want to stop." It's not that we don't believe in God. It's that we live a very large part of our week like we don't need God. It's not that we don't believe in Jesus, it's that we think we can do most of the stuff we do in life on our own. Ultimately, the illusion is that the good life is something we can attain for ourselves, by ourselves. We have somehow learned to separate life from spiritual life. We might even read our devotion at the start of the day and say our prayers, but then we separate that from the rest of the day, when we rely on our own abilities and resources. And it's only when we get in over our heads that we realize our dependence upon God. The real danger in self-reliance is that our relationship with Jesus moves from "savior" to "solution"; from "full-time" to "as needed";

So what Life attitude do we learn from this first beatitude? What is Jesus really saying, and how do we move out of self-absorption?

Well, here's what I think Jesus is really saying...here is a way to put it into our terms.

**Near to the heart of God are those who know the poverty of their own soul, for they shall find themselves at home with God.**

It is about self-renunciation; admitting our brokenness; claiming our dependence upon God's grace and mercy. It is being aware of our own powerlessness....our ultimate inability to bring meaning to our lives through our own strength.

There is a story that Jesus told that illustrates this so perfectly. It's in Luke chapter 15, and it is about an awakening...a self-renunciation. There was this son who had asked for and received his part of the inheritance from his father before his father had died. And he's out there, with money in his pocket, pursuing his happiness. Self-absorbed and self-reliant...until the day when his pursuit led him to emptiness, and he was in life over his head.

That's when his awakening came...he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have food to spare, and here I am starving to death...I will set out and go back to my father."

Where is life?...in happiness or blessedness?

If it's in blessedness, then it is independent of my circumstances or my ability to control. If it's in blessedness, then it doesn't come from my success or my ability to produce or prove myself.

If it's in blessedness, then life comes from my brokenness, from the poverty of my soul, from renouncing my way, from setting out and going back to my father and saying,

'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" That is a great identity - servant of God. I like that identity. Where does our legitimacy come from? Where does our acceptance come from? Where does our freedom come from? Self-absorption or self-renunciation? "So he got up and went to his father, but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him." Not judgment. "He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

Legitimacy and acceptance comes from God. And we receive it when we finally get it! This is something I can't do for myself. It's when we see the poverty of our own soul and renounce our self-centered pursuits that we are near to the heart of God. God is always near. God is always close. God is always faithful. But it is when we see our need, our spirit opens up to the healing, forgiving, loving presence of God – who is already there....who's just waiting for us to remove the barrier of our pride.

Jesus says, "Near to the heart of God are those who know the poverty of their own soul. They will find themselves at home with God."

David wrote a song to the Lord at a time in his life when self-reliance failed him, he was broken, and he saw the poverty of his soul. He wrote these words:

**Psalm 51:17**

**17.** The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

This is another place in scripture that reminds us that God is not seeking perfection from us, but relationship with us – Just as we are.

When we are ready to set aside our self-reliance and bring our impoverished soul to God, what we are saying is this:

I can't – God can.

I can't bring ultimate meaning to life – God Can!

I can't bring "blessedness" to my life – God Can!

I can't heal my broken spirit – God Can!

I can't – God can.

Maybe today you can see some little or big way that you are living a self-reliant life. If you can see that, if you can name that in your daily life, then you are looking at the poverty of your soul, because the root of that self-reliance is self-absorption...making ourselves the god that we love and serve.

And the really good news, according to Jesus, is that it is those who can see the poverty of their soul, who see their dependence upon God, who invite God to come and lead their lives, who ask for forgiveness...these are the ones who will inherit the Kingdom of God, who will find themselves at home with God.

And for today that is the Good News...