



Life Attitudes: One Way
Blessed are the pure in heart...
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Are you having trouble seeing God? I mean, out there, in the world, in your everyday life, are you having trouble seeing God? Is there any sense in which it seems like life is the same day in and day out? If you don't feel that way now, can you remember a time when life was like that?

Maybe you remember the movie, *Groundhog Day*. Bill Murray plays this self-centered reporter who gets stuck in one day. Life literally is the same day after day. He wakes up to the same Sonny and Cher song at the same time. All the events and conversations are exactly the same. At first he uses this to take advantage of people and events for his own gain. Eventually, he tires of that and living the same day over and over leads to uselessness and emptiness. Then he kills himself, only to wake up again the next morning in the same bed to the same Sonny and Cher song on the radio.

It's at this point that the reporter takes on a different attitude. We've been talking about attitudes lately. This whole series on the Be-Attitudes, some sayings of Jesus found in Matthew chapter 5, has been about how our attitudes determine our action. So this reporter in the movie, instead of having an attitude of self-centeredness, begins to take on new attitudes of helping others. And as he takes on this attitude, the dullness and emptiness of the day in and day out routines take on new life. He begins to see things in a new way. Instead of bringing anger and resentment and bitterness to others, he starts offering hope and joy and love and life. The inner attitude determines the outward action.

That's what all of these life-attitude sayings of Jesus are all about. Jesus is telling us about the kinds of attitudes that reflect God's attitudes. These attitudes will lead us to meaningful, joyful, purposeful life.

The problem is that there are lots of other kinds of attitudes out there and we think we are entitled to them. These other kinds of attitudes come from our circumstances and from a self-centered vision. Have you ever heard anyone say about someone else, "Look out. So and so's got attitude today." They don't generally mean that in a good way, do they?

We get in our own little worlds, our mind feeds us attitudes like apathy, entitlement, or resentment or selfishness, or greed. And it's when we have those attitudes in our heart that life becomes the same, day in and day out. It's when we have those attitudes that life loses its wonder and joy we have trouble seeing God. It's the self-centered attitudes that lead us away from life as God designed it and lead us into falsehood.

We begin to put on masks that hide our emptiness or our despair or our anger. We become like a Christmas tree...Now I'm not bashing Christmas trees because I love them! But a Christmas tree is not a healthy metaphor for life. Think about it...it's all decorated up on the outside, sparkling and beautiful in appearance, but it's dead on the inside. When we take on self-centered attitudes, life becomes about what things look like on the outside.

I'm not just talking about materially! Have you ever wanted someone to think you were interested when you weren't? Or that you care when you don't? Have you ever wanted to place yourself in the best possible light when you know that it's a slight bit deceiving? Maybe at a church fellowship you have wanted to appear more Christian, but at work or someplace else, you've wanted to appear less Christian. You know what I'm talking about now, right? I know exactly what I'm talking about.

What's really sad about being like that is that we care more about the appearance we want to put in front of people than we care about how we really appear before God. That's the spiritual problem.

Jesus talks about exactly this kind of thing in Matthew 23. He's talking to the most religious people in his society, the teachers of the law and the Pharisees. And he's not happy with them. He calls them hypocrites because

they are more concerned with getting the externals of the religion right than they are about getting their hearts and attitudes right.

PLACE SCRIPTURE OVER THIS PIC AND COVER UP “UNDIVIDED FOCUS”.



Jesus says to them, ***Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and the outside will be clean.***

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Matthew 23:25-28 (NIV)

That’s Jesus pointing out to us preachers and church-goers that sometimes our lives are like Christmas trees – all lit up and decorated to make us look good from the outside, even though we know that’s not what our life looks like from the inside. That’s living life from the outside in...and that, according to Jesus is living life in the wrong direction.



According to Jesus, there's only ONE WAY to life. Life is to be lived from the inside out. It all starts with the heart! When Jesus was talking to the Pharisees, he wasn't teaching them something brand new. He was reminding them to go back to the heart of their faith, which was faith from the heart. This is the kind of faith that Abraham had, that Moses and David had. Not one based on religious ritual, but on a relationship with God that transformed their heart.

And the life-attitude of Jesus that we're dealing with today tells us just how important the heart is. He says, ***Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*** Matthew 5:8 (NIV) Jesus says it is those with a pure heart, not a hypocritical heart, that will see God. According to Jesus, there is nothing more critical to the way you live than the attitudes of the heart. In essence, the heart is at the very core of your character and action.

We've talked about Christmas Trees maybe not being the best metaphor for life, but Jesus did use the image of a tree to describe life. He says in Luke



6:43-45, ***No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit.*** He goes on a few lines later to explain himself. ***The good person brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil person brings up evil things stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.***

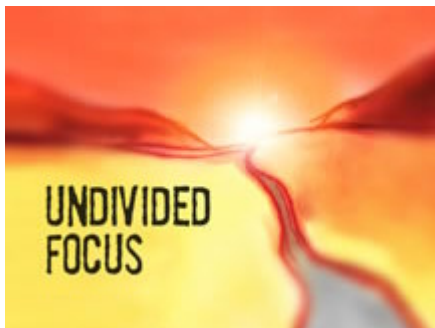
What Jesus is saying is that whatever we say or do flows out of us from the character of our heart. A flowering or fruit-bearing tree doesn't struggle to bear good fruit. It comes naturally from within. When we live life yielded to the

Spirit, in relationship with God, when our character is rooted in the living presence of God in our hearts – then our actions reflect the good fruit of God's spirit. All of life is a process of character development, of allowing God more and more space in our heart and leadership in our life – and the character or purity of our heart is the root of the fruit of our life.

Everything is a matter of the heart. So what can we do? How can we give God greater leadership in our life? What can we do to give God more room in our hearts? What can we do to be purer in heart?

First, let's be sure we understand this: Purifying our heart is not something we can do for ourselves. This is God's work! But we can give God the space, allow God to do this work in us. Jesus is going to wait for us to open the door, and then he'll come in and do his work of cleansing and healing and forgiving and purifying. So these steps I'm going to talk about today are just the things we can do to invite Jesus, to open the door, which will allow him to do his transforming work in us.

Let's take a look at I John 1:5-9 for a guide; ***This is the message we***



have heard from him and declare to you: God is light and in him there is not darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship (now that's a relationship) with him and walk in darkness (that means we allow unresolved, continual sin in our lives), we lie and do not live

by the truth.

Light is the absence of darkness. Wherever Jesus is, there cannot be darkness. So whenever we allow darkness to be present in us, the work of God and the presence of God are limited. Unresolved issues and wrongdoing that we do over and over, and don't want to face and keep hiding away in our heart, become a cancerous, destructive force that impedes God's presence, purpose and blessings.

So we need to **Acknowledge the sin and darkness** in our life. Cancer is not a word we like to hear, but there are spiritual cancers of the heart. They

are dark spots, places that inhibit God's ability to work. And as long as we hold onto these cancers, we block God's work in our life. If we can recognize them, acknowledge them, that is the first step in allowing Jesus to purify our hearts through forgiveness.

Some of these cancers of the heart:

- Pride Many times we're not even aware of our pride. In a little corner of my heart I let this pride thing go on. As long as there is pride in my heart, I believe in God but I don't need God. I act out of self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and lack of forgiveness. A lot of us have unforgiveness in our hearts. What we may not know is that unforgiveness is a fruit – an outcome – of pride. Pride is at the root of bitterness and unforgiveness. It is my pride that says that someone else is not worth forgiving; knowing that I'm probably just as much in need of forgiveness.

- Deception We've already talked about this today. Deception to others is painting a false reality. Deceiving yourself is denial. It's not wanting to see or believe a truth about yourself. We severely limit the light of Christ in our heart when we cling to the darkness of deception. And this is an especially dangerous cancer when we use it to cover up a sin or wrongdoing that we intend to do again and again.

- Selfishness Everything Jesus said and did was about moving out of a self-oriented view of life. He was constantly modeling a selfless life – a view of serving others. I just know that when I construct my life around the "me" desires, the self-interested Mark, then I begin to feel less and less of God's presence in my life. Why? Because I am intentionally moving my heart away from the light of Jesus' presence to the other objects of my desire. I am moving my heart toward darkness.

So to help us move toward a pure heart, we first have to get honest with ourselves and with God about what we have hiding in the closets of our heart. We need to examine our hearts, spot the cancers and acknowledge them. Jesus already knows what's there, so I'm not sure why we go to the lengths that we do to hide, but we do! And this first step of acknowledging our sin which means trusting that God can handle the hidden stuff. It means believing that God has the cure for the cancer of our heart.

Doesn't matter what it is...acknowledging means that you're ready to let God handle it for you.

Now continuing from I John 1,

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship



with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us

from all unrighteousness.

So the second thing we can do to open up our hearts to God's presence and light is **to accept the gift of forgiveness!** Now this is big! Remember that none of us deserve or can earn forgiveness. It has to be received as a gift. This gift comes to us through the cross. The cross is God's gift to us. Jesus came to pay the price for us. This is God's way of extending mercy and forgiveness to us. This is God's way of giving us a pure heart.

God's desire is that we could live a life free from the burdens of guilt and shame. That's why this is a matter of the heart to Jesus. Until we accept the gift of mercy and forgiveness, we have not allowed Jesus to clean the inside of the dish. It's not until we accept the gift of forgiveness that the heart is truly clean.

There's a promise in this passage from I John. That promise is for you and me. The promise is, that if we will be honest with God about who we are and what we've done, he will forgive us. No maybe's. No extenuating

circumstances. No exclusions. Jesus came to be God's gift of forgiveness. He endured the cross for our sins and rose triumphantly from the grave to share to give us mercy and forgiveness and new life.

So what about you? Are you ready today to open up your heart? Are you ready to trust God with something you've been hiding? Are you willing to believe that God's forgiveness is a gift especially for you?

Near to God are those who can acknowledge their sin and accept the gift of forgiveness. They have the light of God's presence in them.

I'm not going to pray today as I close this message. Instead, I want to invite you to pray and authentic, honest prayer for yourself. Examine your heart and receive the gift.