

How to be happy: Be humble

Message for Sunday, September 29, 2019
by Bruce Fraser
based on similar message by Rick Warren

Children's Message:

I have a card with me—it's about 3" by 5"—and it's really wonderful! Can you guess why?

I'll tell you. I had a meal at someone's house a while ago, and for dessert they served a delicious strawberry pie. Yumm! Was it ever good! But there was a problem: if I ever wanted to have that pie again, I'd have to come back to their house. They're fine people, and I'd be glad to go back anytime. But I don't think they want me coming for dinner every week!

So what I did was ask, "Can I please have the recipe for that strawberry pie?" So now I can make it myself whenever I want it.

I asked the person who made the pie for the recipe. I didn't ask the neighbour next door, or my neighbour. I asked the person who knew how to make it. Does that make sense?

Well, following Jesus is like that dinner. Jesus offers us the very best kind of life. And he gave us the recipe for it! That's what we're looking at today: Jesus tells us the key to be happy in life.

In today's Bible passage, Jesus says "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Another Bible puts it this way, "Happy are those who realize their need for him."

We all need Jesus in our lives, to help us live the right way. Let's pray, and ask for his help.

Thanks to Harvey and Patsie Moore for this idea, in their book *The Mysterious Marvelous Snowflake*.

Message: "How to be happy: Be humble"

I titled this message "How to be happy." Out of curiosity, I asked my good friend Google if this is something people are interested in, or should I choose a different topic. So I typed into Google "How to be happy." I got over 9 billion results! That's right: billion, with a "b." There are only 7 billion people in the world. I'd say it's safe to say everyone is interested in this topic.

1) You get to choose how you will live

Many people hope to find happiness in doing things or having things make them happy. It's called "when and then" thinking:

- When I get a job, then I'll be happy.
- When I get a new car, then I'll be happy.
- When I get married, then I'll be happy.
- When I get divorced, then I'll be happy.

The Bible has the story of one person's search for happiness. It's found in Ecclesiastes, chapter 2. King Solomon was the wealthiest person in the world at that time. He succeeded in just about everything he put his hand to. He had everything a person could possibly want.

Ecclesiastes 2:1, 10, Good News Bible:

I decided to enjoy myself and find out what happiness is...

Anything I wanted, I got. I did not deny myself any pleasure.

The result:

Ecclesiastes 2:11, Good News Bible:

Then I thought about all that I had done and how hard I had worked doing it, and I realized that it didn't mean a thing. It was like chasing the wind—of no use at all.

The popular idea is that we find happiness in doing or having nice things. But God's way to find happiness is having the right attitude.

In Matthew 5, Jesus gives eight keys to being happy. It's not a treasure hunt, where you have to follow the clues and finally arrive at your destination. According to Jesus, happiness is not found "out there" somewhere; happiness is an attitude we choose to live by.

According to my Bible dictionary, the word "blessed" essentially means the same thing as "happy." So the Good News Bible translation reads these verses as "Happy are those who mourn" and "Happy are those who are merciful to others" and so on.

But some of these sound like they don't make sense: "Happy are those who mourn." Really? "Happy are those who are persecuted." That sure doesn't sound like the recipe for happiness. I think what Jesus is teaching us is that our happiness does

not depend on our circumstances. You can learn to be happy even in times of trouble.

If you have to have everything perfect in your life before you can be happy, will you ever be happy? No! Jesus says your happiness does not depend on what's happening *around* you, but what's happening *in* you. We choose what attitude we will live by. We can choose to be grumpy, or we can choose to be happy.

Like I said, Jesus gives us eight keys for being happy. We're going to look at them over the next eight weeks (actually nine, because we'll take a break for Thanksgiving Sunday). Today we'll look at the first one.

Matthew 5:3, New International Version:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

What does Jesus mean by "poor in spirit"? I love the way Rick Warren answered that question:

He's not talking about low self esteem. He's not talking about putting yourself down all the time. Jesus did not die for junk; he died for people. You have value, you have worth, you have significance... He's talking about humility, admitting that I don't have it all together, realizing that I haven't arrived, realizing that I haven't learned it all.

The Good News Bible has this translation:

"Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor."

The New Living Translation puts it this way:

"God blesses those who realize their need for him."

Consider the opposite. The opposite of "poor in spirit" is arrogance or egotism. If you're full of yourself, you're never going to be happy. That's because there's always something that threatens to take you down a notch.

To summarize: "poor in spirit" basically means "humble." Jesus tells us that humility and happiness go hand in hand.

2) How can humility increase my happiness?

a) Humility reduces stress

When you're humble, you don't have to have all the answers. When you realize the universe does not depend on you to solve all its problems, that lifts a great weight off your shoulders. When you're humble, you don't have to fake it and pretend to be someone you're not.

All of us live with the tension between the way we *want* to live, and the way we *actually* live. Being humble means you can accept the unpleasant truth that you do not live up to the ideal. God is the ideal, and it's OK that you're not God.

3) Humility improves relationships

Does anyone here love to be around people who are arrogant and proud? People who are always right, never wrong, always better than you? I didn't think so. That kind of attitude destroys relationships.

Humble people, on the other hand, are much more pleasant to be with. When you tell a story, they don't have to tell a better one. When you become interested in others you become interesting to others. Humility doesn't mean you put yourself down; it means you look up to others, and see the good in them.

In 1994 Thurman Thomas was a running back for the Buffalo Bills football team. He was a star athlete, but that day he sat on the team bench, bent over, holding his face in his hands. The Super Bowl game had just finished. He had fumbled the ball *three* times in the game at crucial moments, destroying his team's chance of winning the championship.

He felt a tap on his shoulder. Looking up, he was surprised to see Emmitt Smith, the star running back for the other team, the Dallas Cowboys. Smith had played an exceptional game and had been named the Most Valuable Player. Smith was carrying his small goddaughter on his arm, and he said to her, "I want you to meet the greatest running back in the NFL, Mr. Thurman Thomas."

Humility improves relationships!

When you're humble, it's easier for you to say the three most difficult sentences:

- I'm sorry;
- I was wrong;
- I need help.

I read that Francis of Assisi, the monk back around the year 1200, had a method for staying humble. Any time someone praised him, he had a fellow monk tell him all his faults.

He had to ask a fellow monk, because he never married. Most of us don't need to go get a monk! We laugh at this but, listen, this is important. Women, it is not your job to keep your husband humble. Men, it is not your job to keep your wife humble. That's God's job. Ruth Graham said about her husband Billy Graham: "My job is to love Billy; God's job is to keep him humble." In your marriage you need to be a supporter and encourager. Let God do the humiliating. He can do it easy enough.

When I'm full of pride I bruise very easily. I'm sensitive to other people's comments. On the other hand, when I'm walking humbly before the Lord and just being who I am, being honest and depending upon God, insults brush off. If you find someone who is very sensitive to criticism it's because they haven't learned this first principle of happiness, being humble.

4) Humility releases God's power

Matthew 5:3, New International Version:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Would you like to have God's power in your life? Jesus says that when you are humble, the kingdom of heaven is yours. All that God has to offer is available when you are humble, when you depend on God instead of on yourself.

You need Jesus Christ in your life. You need God's power to make it next week. If you think you don't, you've got trouble coming. God's power is available to you.

But you've got to ask. You've got to admit that you need his help. Do you wonder why you're tired all of the time? Maybe it's because you're doing everything by your own strength. But when you live

day by day with Jesus in your life, then you can say with Paul:

Philippians 4:13, New Living Translation:

I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.

Next Steps:

- Pray: Confess any pride you have in your life. (Hint: it's a lot easier to get rid of pride this way, than having God surgically remove it through failure and humiliation!)
- Have a look in the mirror. No, not at the wrinkles. Look at the real you. Admit it, you're not the person you'd like to be. And that's OK.
- Now offer yourself to God, asking God to work in you and through you. Depend on God's power, not your own.

Prayer:

Would you pray this prayer in your heart with me?

God, there are so many areas in my life where I'm not the person I should be. Whether it's at work or at home, with children or with spouse or with friends. And certainly not in my relationship with you.

I admit that I need your help in my life. Not just one little problem, but I need you everywhere. I need your power, your wisdom, your love, your forgiveness.

I am so glad that you show us the key to happiness. Help me to be humble, especially in my relationships. May I lift up and encourage others, rather than focus on myself.

Thank-you, Jesus. Amen.