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# THE PLACE TO START

## THE BIBLE IS FIRST AND FOREMOST GOD TELLING HIS STORY!

The big story is His story.

So where does the story start?

- **John 1:1-2:** *"In the beginning was The Word and The Word was with God and The Word was God."*
- The beginning of God's story tells us the key truth about God: God is a community of love. The Bible tells us that *"God IS love."* (1 John 4:8)
- **This is what love is: Persons who selflessly give to each other.**

## MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

- First, since you are made in the image of God, you are priceless.
- Second, since you are made in the image of God and are therefore priceless, you will only be truly happy knowing who this God is and living *His* way

God's story tells us two primary things about Him:

- **God is the original community.**
- **And this community shows us what real love is!**

The Scriptures have a name for this kind of happiness: *shalom*.

**The story of Jesus...**

- Matthew is the first book in the New Testament. So the *first book* records the *first words* of Jesus' public ministry: *Repent, God's Kingdom is at hand. (4:17)*



The first thing Jesus says is 'Turn around! Why? Because something REALLY good is in the other direction!'

- When God says, “My Kingdom is available to you” what He wants to say is, “Let ME love you!”
- **What Jesus’ audience heard when He said, “My Kingdom is available to you” was, “God is going to make things right. God can free me and restore me”**
- It starts with a promise: God will fix what is wrong...

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## THE KINGDOM MESSAGE

### Three responses to The Kingdom Message:

- *“I can have relationship with this God.”*
- *“I can be a part of a community of people who experiences God together.”*
- *“I need to share this Good News with others.”*

### Purpose, vision, and mission:

- Purpose (The ‘Why’ Word): **KNOWING GOD**
- Vision (The ‘Who’ Word): **GROWING TOGETHER...** as a community who experiences God
  - ▷ **To be in ‘Church’ means to be in God’s community.**
- Mission (The ‘What’ Word): **PROCLAIMING GOOD NEWS...** and making other Jesus-followers

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## GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

- A call to Jesus is a call to change.
- If Jesus begins his ministry with the word “Repent” then it has to mean that we are going in the wrong direction no matter how pleasant that direction is.
- The motivation to get *excited* about changing is right here: *“The Presence and Power of God – the Kingdom – is now available to you.”*

## The right direction: The Beatitudes [Matthew 5:3-10]

- 3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
- 4 *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*
- 5 *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*
- 6 *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*
- 7 *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*
- 8 *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*
- 9 *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*
- 10 *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

### Three ways to learn from The Beatitudes:

- First, as a **stepladder** to The Kingdom,
- Second, as the ultimate keys to happiness...
- Third, by summarizing each Beatitude with one simple word.

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## A LOOK AT THE LADDER:

- If we don't see \_\_\_\_\_ [Matt 4:17, The Kingdom is God's Community] we cannot understand \_\_\_\_\_ [Blessed are the poor in spirit];
- If we don't understand \_\_\_\_\_, we won't feel our need for \_\_\_\_\_ [Blessed are those who mourn];
- If we don't feel our need for \_\_\_\_\_, we will not live in \_\_\_\_\_ [Blessed are the meek];
- If we don't live in \_\_\_\_\_, we will lose our passion to \_\_\_\_\_ [Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness];
- If we lose our passion to \_\_\_\_\_, we'll have less desire to \_\_\_\_\_ [Blessed are the merciful];
- If we have less desire to \_\_\_\_\_, we won't delight in \_\_\_\_\_ [Blessed are the pure in heart];
- If we don't delight in \_\_\_\_\_, we will not have right \_\_\_\_\_ [Blessed are the peacemakers];



- If we don't have right \_\_\_\_\_, we will not be able to walk in \_\_\_\_\_ [Blessed are you when you are persecuted...]

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## FOUR SIMPLE LIFE QUESTIONS:

- *Do you really want to re-focus your life on knowing God?*
- *Do you really want to experience community with other believers?*
- *Do you really want to reach others with The Good News and help them follow Jesus?*
- *Do you really want to change?*

# DISCUSS AND PRAY

- 1) What is compelling about The Kingdom? When The Lord offers The Kingdom to us, what is He offering?
- 2) When we say God is love, we are saying that Each Person – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – gives love to the others. When we are ‘spiritually reborn’ after surrendering our lives to Jesus Christ, we receive God’s nature. His nature gives love. So the question we should be asking is not, “How will others meet my needs for community and relationship?”; the question is “Am I offering community to others?” What are the practical implications of this?
- 3) If knowing God is our ultimate purpose, what are the practical ways we come to know Him?
- 4) Why is the local church so important?
- 5) What does ‘repentance as a lifestyle’ look like?
- 6) How would you answer the 4 Life Questions?

# THE LOVE BEATITUDE

**Matthew 5:3** *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

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## KINGDOM FOUNDATIONS

- There are two key *Kingdom* foundations on which we need to build:
    - ▷ The Kingdom is the environment created by God’s nature and character.
    - ▷ The way we enter this Kingdom is by cooperating with The Holy Spirit.
  - When Jesus called His generation to ‘repent’, it not only meant “You are going in the wrong direction, turn around”; It meant, “Get back to your original.”
  - When Jesus’ audience heard that the kingdom was once again available to them, they would have understood that to mean ‘an opportunity to experience God’s glory and power.’
    - ▷ We experience God through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.
  - Repentance is a call to yield to The Holy Spirit. And the way we start yielding is by worshiping and praying.
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## THE HAPPINESS OF NEED

- You are happiest when you are poor in spirit.
  - ▷ To be ‘poor in spirit’ means **‘to recognize your need!’**
- You’re in the right place when you recognize your need.
- If you really see who God is and what He is like, you will understand your need.
  - ▷ For Jesus to start with *this*, He is saying that whatever life you’re living apart from God is not near as fulfilling as life with God!
- The coming of Jesus was the beginning of understanding that God is Community. When we see The God Community, the relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit, we see how very little we understand real love.
- We need love, but that very need makes us self-centered when we don’t even mean to be! In *The God Community*, every Person gets loved, because every Person is first giving love. *But the power for each Person to love comes from the fact that they are receiving love! So in all eternity, The God Community has been this perfect model of giving-receiving.*



- You've got to be loved first by God... You have to RECEIVE love before you can GIVE love... and that means you and I need to lay down our independence and admit our need!
- If God knows that you are in a place of real need, *and calls that happy it just shows how much He already loves you!*
  - ▷ That's why we can call this Beatitude, THE LOVE BEATITUDE.
- Congratulations! You recognize your need!

## PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

### Principle:

I am free to be honest about my need, because I know I don't understand love.

- You were not born evil; you were born *separated from God.*
- **LifeTruth:** Love is not primarily a feeling; it is a commitment to another's best.
- **John 15:13:** "*Greater love has no man than he lay down his life...*"

### Principle:

I am 'happy' when I recognize my need, because it means He loves me in spite of my shortcomings.

- If The Lord says you're happy when you recognize your need it's because when you're *not afraid to admit your need to God it shows that you know God has accepted you as you are!*
- **LifeTruth:** I never have to look elsewhere to feel valuable, for I am always loved at my point of need.
  - ▷ You never have to look elsewhere to feel valuable. *You are always loved at your point of need.*

### Principle:

By recognizing my need I take the first step toward receiving and giving love.

- Recognizing your need is the beginning of being able to receive love.
- If we don't recognize our need we cannot really experience love. Because it is the root attitude of independence that keeps us from knowing that we're loved. You can't really love unless you are freed from your "self"...

THE BEST WAY  
FORWARD

- ▷ By recognizing your need you take the first step toward depending on God.

- Why is such a negative statement like '*Happy are the poor in spirit*' so basic?



▷ *Because this is the beginning of love...*

- **LifeTruth:** Love doesn't begin with me trying to love; it begins with me receiving God's love.
- If love starts with you, it will ultimately be pride, not love.

**Principle:** *If I run my life, I will ruin my life.*

- The difference between **run** and **ruin** is one letter: "l" It is the 'l' that ruins your life when you try to run your life. The more 'l' try to run my life the more 'l' am trapped in the core problem: Me.
- **LifeTruth:** God sent His Son to save me from my 'self'; for my greatest enemy is my pride.
- The simple way to start being saved from your 'self' is to recognize your need!
- Love begins by surrendering yourself to be loved.

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**THE PROMISE:** *"Yours Is the Kingdom of Heaven."*

- When Jesus offers The Kingdom, He is saying YOU ARE SAFE WITH ME...
- **Why I can be happy?** Because I AM SAFE... for a God who accepts me so completely is a God I can feel safe with, because I know He is out to do me good.

*If I am having a hard time loving, it may be that I'm not convinced God loves me; and if I want to be convinced God loves me, I need to LET Him love me... by recognizing my need!*

# DISCUSS AND PRAY

- 1) The Bible is full of stories about God bringing people to a place of complete helplessness: Jacob alone by the brook (Gen. 32); Joseph trapped in a pit: (Gen. 37:12-28); Moses stuck in the desert (Ex. 2:11-25); David's only way out of a jam, pretending to be insane (1 Sam. 21:10-15, Ps. 34); Elijah fed by ravens (1 Kings 17)... What other stories can you think of, and why does God seem to make 'bringing people to the end of themselves' such a high priority?
- 2) Why is 'recognizing my need' the beginning of understanding love?
- 3) Read Romans 5:8 and 1 John 4:19. What does this mean to you? How can this truth rid us of shame?
- 4) One of our greatest struggles is to see ourselves rightly; having a right identity. How does living with a strong sense of personal need actually develop in us a healthy identity? It seems like a paradox but how does starting with the knowledge that we are 'poor in spirit' actually build in us the right sense of 'self-esteem'?

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# TAKING NEXT STEPS

- 1) Write down the areas in which you feel inadequate or inferior. Then thank the Lord that your weaknesses open your heart to receive God's love.
- 2) For the next week, every time you feel like a failure or feel ashamed choose to respond to God by saying, "Lord, this is a fresh chance for me to receive your love! And I DO receive it!" Note these times in your journal. Remember you will not want to respond like this. Your emotions will urge you to give in to those feelings of shame and failure. But God wants to not only reveal His unconditional love to you, but show you the power of your choice.

# THE GRACE BEATITUDE

**Matthew 5:4** *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*

## THE HAPPINESS OF MOURNING

- You are happiest when you mourn over your sin.
- You’re in the right place when you see sin as God sees it.
- Congratulations! You see how destructive sin is!
- Grace means: *God unconditionally accepts me*
  - ▷ It is because of God’s grace that we CAN deal with sin because we are no longer afraid of God’s displeasure. So, we can call this Beatitude the ‘GRACE’ BEATITUDE
  - ▷ When we see sin as GOD sees it, we can be more motivated to change because we see how much God loves us *in spite of our sin.*
- Grace means: *God does the changing, I do the yielding*
- When we see sin as GOD sees it, we can be more motivated to change because we see how much God loves us in spite of our sin.
- Congratulations! You are free to grow because you’re ready to change!

## CLIMBING THE BEATITUDE LADDER

- If we don’t understand \_\_\_\_\_, we won’t depend on \_\_\_\_\_: If we’re not DEPENDING ON grace it is because we haven’t understood love.

## PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

**Principle:**

God unconditionally accepts me, knowing every sin I will ever commit.



- *"The Cross means that when God saw us at our worst, He loved us the most!"*  
~David Seamands, *Healing Grace*

- **LifeTruth:** Repentance can become a lifestyle because admitting I'm wrong is no longer a threat.

**Principle:** Because God accepts me, I am not afraid to let Him change me.

- Why be happy about this? Because it says you are not required to fix yourself! The happiness comes from the relief that in being honest with God you will not be rejected and that you will experience His unlimited power (Kingdom of Heaven) to become what He created you to be.
- **LifeTruth:** Since I am not required to 'fix' myself, I can be honest with God knowing God will not reject me.
  - ▷ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

**Principle:** We no longer obey to get God's favor; we are free to obey because we've got God's favor.

- **LifeTruth:** If I don't see the insanity of my sin, I will not truly value the Cross; and if I do not truly value the Cross, I cannot be truly saved.
  - ▷ *"The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:18)*

**Principle:** Freedom begins when I recognize the lies I have built my life on, and I am desperate enough to change.

- *If we're not honest, we can build our lives on lies. One of the biggest stumbling blocks in our lives are the 'lies that we believe.'*
- *This is vital:* It is by being HONEST with God that you take the first step of depending on God.
- **LifeTruth:** Being honest about the lies I believe actually frees me from 'rejection.'

## THE PROMISE: *"You will be comforted."*

- Grace makes us safe enough to be honest. If we don't understand Grace, we won't be honest. If we are not being honest, then we haven't understood Grace. And unless we understand Grace we will never be able to develop healthy relationships.
- Why I can be happy: **I am released from regret**
- If we're honest about our past, we don't jeopardize our future... *We recover* our future!

If I am not depending on God's grace, it may be because I've not comprehended how little I understand love. But if I realize how impossible it is for me to love, then I will gladly depend on God's grace!

# DISCUSS AND PRAY

- 1) Read Matthew 5:21-22. Jesus teaches that if we harbor anger towards someone we have the seeds of murder in our hearts. This is an example of seeing sin as God sees it. Have you ever had the experience where you were aware of how damaging sin is?
- 2) Read Psalm 139:23-24. Why do think that David was so open to see his hidden faults? (See vv17-18). Why is it hard for us to be honest about our wrong attitudes and behaviors?
- 3) Read 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. What are some of the lies we believe? How can you tell when what you're thinking is a lie, or what the Scriptures call 'a vain imagination'? What are we to do with vain imaginations?
- 4) Repentance should be a daily experience that is as natural as worship. How can repentance become a daily lifestyle for you?
- 5) God's grace is the best news that we have the hardest time believing. Why? And how can understanding grace release us into the greatest inner freedom we can know?
- 6) Think about this last principle: "If I don't see the insanity of my sin, I will not truly value the Cross; and if I do not truly value the Cross, I cannot be truly saved." How does that grip you?

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# TAKING NEXT STEPS

- 1) Set aside some quiet time with God and pray the prayer David prayed in Psalm 139: "Lord, show me anything in my heart that is not right." Write down what you feel God is showing you. Then say out loud "I turn from these attitudes and lay claim to the truth of your grace that You unconditionally accept me!" Then take that piece of paper and destroy it! For God's grace removes our sin as far from us the east is from the west." (Psalm 103:12)
- 2) For the next week, make it a point to extend grace to the people who annoy or irritate you by quietly praying quick prayers of blessing over them. Describe in your journal what you felt like when you blessed them.
- 3) Look for one non-believer at school or on the job to which you can say, "I'm praying for you." Look for people you can 'go out of the way for' and extend 'grace' to them.
- 4) When you are attending Sunday Worship or your small group gathering, be intentional about being 'others-centered', especially those you may not know as well.

# THE HUMILITY BEATITUDE

**Matthew 5:5** *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."*

## THE HAPPINESS OF MEEKNESS

- **Psalm 32:9:** gives an excellent picture of 'meekness.' *"Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you."* (ESV)
- Being under the 'tutoring' of the Holy Spirit, in which He creates in us a heart that delights in being under His authority, is what meekness is all about.
- You are happiest when you allow God to manage your life.
  - ▷ **Proverbs 29:1:** *"A man who remains stiff necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed without remedy."*
  - ▷ Another word for meekness is *Humility*. That's why we can call this THE HUMILITY BEATITUDE.
- Humility: The person who strives to control nothing – and no one – but him or herself... The life that has relinquished control to The Lord... The person who has let go of his or her life.
- You're in the right place if you are depending fully on God.
- Congratulations! You've let go of control and have given it to God!

## CLIMBING THE BEATITUDE LADDER

- If we don't have a revelation of GOD, we cannot understand \_\_\_\_\_;
- If we don't understand \_\_\_\_\_ (and how utterly impossible it is for us to love selflessly) we won't feel our need for \_\_\_\_\_;
- If we really understand our need of \_\_\_\_\_ we will be motivated to walk in \_\_\_\_\_;
- If we don't feel our need of \_\_\_\_\_, we will not value \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ feels safe when you understand God's \_\_\_\_\_.



## PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

### Principle:

The pathway to personal confidence is dependence on The Holy Spirit.

- **Isaiah 26:3:** *"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."*
- **Ephesians 5:18:** *"Be under the Holy Spirit's control."*
- **LifeTruth:** The greatest measure of success is controlling my mind and emotions.
  - ▷ **Prov. 16:32:** *"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."*

### Principle:

The pathway to inner healing starts with dependence on God.

- If we 'get' God's grace, we will be free to be more honest with God and with others... And we will not shy away from depending on God.
- When we come to any relationship with an agenda, we set ourselves up for hurt.
  - ▷ *"Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. 6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light [He will defend you, you don't have to protect yourself]. 7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him [meekness]; don't be anxious over other people's successes, feeling like you're the loser in life! 8 Don't let your heart become agitated and angry, and run away from bitterness! Don't let anxiety rule you; it tends only to evil."*  
**Psalm 37:5-8 [Fry paraphrase]**
  - ▷ To 'commit' means to roll off onto God everything that would wound or worry you! *To 'commit' means 'I quit.'*
- **LifeTruth:** The sign that my heart is being healed is that I become more genuinely focused on others.

### Principle:

Teachability is the key to a successful life.

- **Proverbs 6:23:** *"For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and correction and instruction are the way to life."*
- **Proverbs 12:1:** *"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid."*

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- **LifeTruth:** To the degree I am teachable and easily correctable to that degree I will be successful, because being 'teachable' frees me from insecurity.

**Principle:** Humility is being quick to admit I am wrong and asking for forgiveness.

- When I offend someone, admitting I am wrong and being quick to ask for forgiveness shows how much I truly value humility.
- **LifeTruth:** When God is in control of my life I don't have to be defensive or self-justifying. (See Isaiah 54:17).
  - ▷ The truly broken person will not seek to defend himself when ridiculed or criticized. He does not seek to control his reputation but rather allows the Lord to be his defense.



**THE PROMISE:** *"You Will Inherit the Earth."*

- Jesus is saying that as you *respond* in humility you will so fulfill your purpose in life that it will be as if the earth is yours! And this should be a powerful motivation to want to change, to be transformed!
- **Why I can be happy?** Because I can experience POWER TO CHANGE.
- If the LOVE BEATITUDE tells me I am safe, and the GRACE BEATITUDE tells me I'm free to be honest, then this Beatitude tells me I will receive the power to change.

The *motivation* to walk in humility flows from our deep gratitude for His *grace!* If I'm battling pride – self-reliance, etc. – then perhaps I have not understood my need for grace.

# DISCUSS AND PRAY

- 1) How do I know when am not depending on The Holy Spirit?
- 2) How do I react when someone corrects me? Am I quick to learn from others?
- 3) How do I react when I've said or done something that has offended another?
- 4) How do I react when I'm asked to do something I am not gifted to do and have no desire to do?
- 5) Read 1 Peter 5:6-7. Do you see a connection between a lack of humility and anxiety? Why do you think this is?
- 6) "One of the ways we know that we are depending on God is that we will not resist letting Him change us. We will not hold onto our past, we will not be a slave to our memories; we will not come with expectations of our new job, our new friends, our new church in hopes that if they met our needs we will be healed." Do I need to come to the Lord and lay down any expectations I might place on others to meet needs only God can meet?

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# TAKING THE NEXT STEPS

- 1) Ask someone who has some authority or influence in your life (spouse, teacher, supervisor, pastor) to be free to communicate areas where they see a weakness in you.
- 2) Be 'others-focused' this week: encourage three people a day, and write in a journal how you felt and how they responded.
- 3) Note the times this week where you become anxious or worried. Ask yourself if you're anxious because you are trying to control your circumstances instead of depending on (trusting) God.

# THE WORSHIP BEATITUDE

**Matthew 5:6** *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; they shall be satisfied.”*

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## THE HAPPINESS OF HUNGER

- You are happiest when you're hungry and thirsty.
    - ▷ The word 'righteousness' is shorthand for **seeking** God AND His rule in your life.
  - You're in the right place when you have a desperate desire for God.
    - ▷ **Psalms 42:1-2:** *“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”*
  - *“Congratulations! You are desperate for God!”*
  - This picture of desperation for God, of panting like a deer after Him focuses me on one key word: **WORSHIP**. We can call this The WORSHIP BEATITUDE.
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## CLIMBING THE BEATITUDE LADDER

- If we've lost our passion to worship, it's often because we aren't depending on The Holy Spirit; If we're not depending on The Holy Spirit, it may be because we're not as convinced that we need God's grace; and maybe we don't sense our need of grace, because we've forgotten how impossible it is for us to love! And if we've forgotten how impossible it is to love, it's because we probably have lost sight of God's kind of others-centered love, *agape*. Put another way:
    - ▷ If we don't know \_\_\_\_\_, we cannot understand \_\_\_\_\_;
    - ▷ If we don't understand \_\_\_\_\_, we won't feel our need for \_\_\_\_\_;
    - ▷ If we don't feel our need for \_\_\_\_\_, we will not live in \_\_\_\_\_;
    - ▷ If we don't live in \_\_\_\_\_, we will lose our passion to \_\_\_\_\_;
- .....

## PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

**Principle:**

Life's greatest purpose is knowing God.



- **Phil 3:10:** *"that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings."*
- **Psalms 27:4:** *"One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple."*
- **LifeTruth:** The greatest measure of my life is my passion to know God.
  - ▷ **Jeremiah 9:23-24:** *"Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me."*

## Principle:

Worshiping God is the key to knowing God.

- To *know* in the Bible does not mean 'to be mentally aware.'
  - ▷ **Psalms 46:10:** *"Be still and KNOW that I am God".* The word 'know' means to *experience the One you love.*
- Worship is the act of treasuring God; of ascribing to him His worth, of telling Him that he is worthy.
  - ▷ **Psalms 27: 4:** *"One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple."*
  - ▷ *One thing...* To treasure God is to set aside the time to worship.
- **LifeTruth:** My greatest ministry is my ministry to God in worship.
  - ▷ **Ezekiel 44:16** talks of the priests 'ministering to God'... This is the way we do it: Worship.

## Principle:

Worship is the key that unlocks the power to obey God.

- **Psalms 22:3:** *"God is enthroned on the praises of Israel."* What this means is that worship opens us up to God's authority.
  - ▷ To put it another way, **worship opens us to the power of The Holy Spirit within that enables us to respond to Christ's Lordship.**
- **LifeTruth:** The #1 secret to God's kind of 'successful' life is learning to be led by The Holy Spirit...
  - When we worship we make our hearts sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

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- ▷ If we're sensitive to The Spirit we will be people of prayer.
- ▷ Prayer is the evidence I'm pursuing God.
- ▷ Now that you have been born again of The Spirit, you are a new Creation! You're no longer designed to live in a 'worldly' environment. *We were made for heaven.*
- ▷ Prayer is our air. *Prayer is the way we breathe in an alien environment.*
- ▷ The motivation to pray comes as we make worship our highest priority!

**Principle:** To worship fully means to praise God His way.

- Praise is not a suggestion; it is a command.
  - ▷ If I consistently refuse to praise God, then Jesus is not really my Lord.
- There are 7 Hebrew words for "praise." EVERY Hebrew word for praise has an action piece to it. This shows us that our body soul and spirit must be involved...
- **Hebrews 13:15:** *"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."*
- **LifeTruth:** Praising God in every circumstance is ALWAYS the first step to personal victory.

THE PROMISE: *"You Shall be Filled!"*

- Filled with The Presence of The Lord.
- **Why I can be happy about this?** Because I can know THE SATISFACTION OF BEING AWARE OF GOD'S PRESENCE.

My motivation to worship will stay fervent IF I continue to walk in humility; if I'm *not* motivated to worship, it may be that there is some form of pride in my heart.

## DISCUSS AND PRAY

- 1) What is 'worship'? How do we 'minister to God'?
  - 2) Is serving others just as important an act of worship as praising God?
  - 3) If I don't feel like worshipping, what should I do?
  - 4) What does it mean to 'worship the way God wants to receive it'?
- 

## TAKING NEXT STEPS

- 1) Go through The Psalms and pick one Psalm a day for a week, and keep a journal of all the characteristics of God you see in each Psalm. Write out how each characteristic impacts you.
- 2) Set aside time each day for the next week to 'minister to God.' At the end of each day, reflect on the attitudes of your heart that day. Were you more patient? Kind? At peace? Did you seem to have greater faith?
- 3) Do a quick survey of The Psalms. How many physical actions of praise – like clapping, bowing, lifting hands – can you identify? If you are a part of a family of believers that is open to these expressions, make a point to publicly worship God in some of these ways. (Always remember: when we worship in the congregation of God's people, we worship in concert with them. *We clap together; we shout together...*)

# THE FORGIVENESS BEATITUDE

**Matthew 5:7** *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”*

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## THE HAPPINESS OF MERCY

- You are happiest when you are merciful.
  - The truth that captures this idea of ‘mercy’ best is the word ‘forgiveness’... So this Beatitude we can call The FORGIVENESS BEATITUDE.
  - You are happiest when you forgive a wrong.
  - You’re in the right place if you’re struggling to forgive.
  - This Beatitude points to something besides ‘wounding’... Often, we’re not so much wounded as *offended*. Showing mercy is just as relevant when we’re irritated as when we’re hurt.
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## CLIMBING THE BEATITUDE LADDER

- The previous Beatitude was The WORSHIP BEATITUDE... The ‘hunger and thirst Beatitude.’ *If we’re hungering and thirsting after God then we will experience greater inward power to forgive those who wrong us.*
  - If you have a hard time forgiving, go back and focus on worship.
  - Congratulations! You’ve been wronged and you’re not resentful!
  - Before we can focus on developing healthy relationships, we must first develop a heart of mercy.
- 

## PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

**Principle:** Forgiveness releases your future.

- **Matthew 18: 21:** *“Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”* **22** *Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”*



- **LifeTruth:** I can trust God to make things right His way.
  - ▷ **Genesis 18:25:** *"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"*
  - ▷ God has the right to execute justice through blessing rather than vengeance.
- Forgiving takes great trust in God, that He will make things right. That's why a lifestyle of hunger and thirst – the WORSHIP BEATITUDE – precedes the call and action to show Mercy.

**Principle:** I am free when I am free of offense.

- God is so committed to us being in unity that He gives *every one of us* as His children the Holy Spirit.
- Because Satan knows that God prizes unity, his #1 strategy against us is to get us to become offended at each other.
- Offense comes from two major roots:
  - ▷ Misplaced expectations
  - ▷ Anger over boundaries (Luke 17:1)
- **LifeTruth:** Offense leads to disloyalty and disloyalty leads to betrayal.
  - ▷ **Hebrews 12:15** says, *"See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no **"root of bitterness"** springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled."*

**Principle:** Showing forgiveness is the first way we share God's Good News.

- God HAS been reconciled to the world through Christ's sacrificial death. God isn't mad at the world!
- *If we treat unbelievers as enemies, they will respond like enemies.*
- Have we ever thought about the FIRST GREAT COMMISSION Jesus gave? **John 20:23:** *"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them they are not forgiven."*
- If we forgive others it releases the power of the Holy Spirit to open them to the possibilities of divine grace.
- Forgiveness is rarely easy, but it can be *easier*, if we see the issue from Christ's perspective:

*"Father Forgive Them For They Know Not What They Do..."*

THE BEST WAY  
FORWARD

**LifeTruth:** There is a power in forgiveness to release others.



- ▷ Forgiveness is a cosmic issue, it's not just personal. It is a key part of God's cosmic plan of releasing this planet from its bondage.

## Principle:

Mercy and forgiveness are the most powerful healing agents of insecurity.

- Extending forgiveness is an act of empowerment. When you forgive you are the one in a place of strength in the broken relationship! Forgiveness shows that you are *not* being controlled! Thus, forgiveness frees you more and more from insecurity.
- **LifeTruth:** Mercy calls us not just to forgive an offender, but to rejoice when he is blessed.
  - ▷ It calls us to let God love and bless a person to the point where they are secure enough to be open to see their mistakes. This *shows* an amazing facet of God's character:

God's lavish love makes us so secure that conviction is not devastating.
- Unless we allow God to develop in us a love for mercy, we will not value life to the depth God does.

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## THE PROMISE: "You Will Receive Mercy."

- **Why I can be happy?** To receive forgiveness is to receive freedom. For example, when we have wronged someone and they *forgive us*, they are freeing us from guilt and shame. *This Beatitude promises a big benefit: Freedom!*
- And remember our stepladder: The POWER to FORGIVE flows from our commitment to worship.
- If you find it hard to forgive someone, don't try to muster up feelings of forgiveness. Go back and express extravagant worship to God...

His Presence will eventually so overwhelm you that you will WANT to forgive simply because you are overcome by God's love.

## DISCUSS AND PRAY

- 1) When you have had a hard time forgiving someone who hurt you, what did you do? Have you discovered that a lifestyle of worship makes it easier to forgive others?
- 2) Do you think it is difficult for people to recognize when they are offended? Why is it so hard to recognize it? What do we need to do to stay 'un-offendable'?
- 3) Even Jesus-followers can develop anger towards The Lord that they don't recognize. Do you resent God anywhere?

**Idea:** We can more easily forgive injustices when we understand the principle: What a man sows that will he also reap.

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## TAKING NEXT STEPS

- 1) God has the right to execute justice through blessing rather than judgment... How? Instead of judging the one who hurt you, He may bless you super-abundantly! But if you only seek vengeance, you may be blind to the ways God wants to heal your heart and provide justice through blessing you rather than judging them! Or He might accomplish justice by blessing the one who hurt you so that their hearts can be more secure to receive the conviction of the Lord. *Think of someone who you have a hard time showing mercy to, and bless them in some way: post an encouraging word on their FB; take them to coffee; text them a Scripture.*
- 2) One of the ways we actually develop a heart of mercy is through encouraging others. Hebrews 3:13 says, "Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." *Encouraging others actually keeps our hearts soft toward The Lord.* Over the next week be intentional about encouraging other people.
- 3) Another way we develop a heart of mercy is by learning to value people. At the next Sunday gathering of your church, look for an 'un-connected' person and spend a few moments with them.
- 4) Spend some time sharing your heart with God. Let Him show you if there anyone you are 'cool' towards or have some resistance toward. Ask The Holy Spirit to show you if there is any root of offense toward them.

# THE OBEDIENCE BEATITUDE

**Matthew 5:8** *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”*

## THE HAPPINESS OF OBEDIENCE

- There is a connection between right motives and right action. If I want to glorify God I will delight in obedience. That’s why I call this The OBEDIENCE BEATITUDE.
- You are happiest when your motives are pure and you strive to obey.
- You’re in the right place if you are not seeking your own desires, but rather seek only God’s.
- Congratulations! You are no longer seeking your agenda!

## CLIMBING THE BEATITUDE LADDER

- If we have less desire to \_\_\_\_\_, we won’t delight in \_\_\_\_\_. If our commitment to forgive grows thin, perhaps it’s because we’ve lost our passion to \_\_\_\_\_ – the 4th Beatitude. And if we’ve lost our passion to worship it may be because we’ve stopped depending on The Lord – \_\_\_\_\_, the 3rd Beatitude... and so on.
- If I’m growing dull in my hunger to obey, it may be because there is some unforgiveness in my heart.

## PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

### Principle:

The greatest measure of my heart’s purity and the greatest evidence of my intimacy with God is my quick obedience.

- **John 15:14:** *You are my friends if you do what I command you.*

- **LifeTruth:** My commitment to obey God is measured by my commitment to study the Word.

- ▷ **Psalms 119:11:** *“Your Word have I hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you.”*



## Principle:

Purity of heart means to have one motive for everything I do: to let people see Jesus in me.

- **John 3:30:** "He – Jesus – must increase; I MUST decrease."
- **LifeTruth:** Jesus is beautiful, and to the degree I let The Holy Spirit conform me to Jesus to that degree I will be attractive to others.
  - ▷ Your willingness to change determines your intimacy with God

## Principle:

To be pure in heart means 'to fear The Lord'; and to fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalms 111:10)

- The Fear of God is to hate sin; to love what God loves and hate what God hates. (See **Proverbs 8:13**)
- The 'fear of man' is to be prompted to think things and do things because of people, not God.

## Principle:

Obedience to Biblical truth is freedom

- **John 8:32** "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
  - ▷ The meaning here is not just 'having a mental agreement with truth' but 'acting on truth.'
- **LifeTruth:** I become addicted to obedience as I learn to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit
  - ▷ **Ephesians 4:30:** 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit with whom you were sealed the day of redemption'
  - ▷ **1 Thessalonians 5:19** says that we can also quench the Holy Spirit, too. We grieve the Spirit when we let anger rule us, and we quench the Spirit when we let fear rule us.
- We were designed to be a home of The Holy Spirit, and as we learn to be sensitive to His still small voice, the joy of learning to listen to The Spirit brings so much pleasure that we delight in obedience

# THE PROMISE: *"You Shall see God."*

- **Why I can be happy?** Because I can know THE CERTAINTY OF GOD'S PRESENCE!
  - ▷ *God reveals His character to those who obey.*

Purity of heart and the desire to obey God [6th Beatitude] flows from keeping our hearts free from offense [5th Beatitude]

# DISCUSS AND PRAY

- 1) Proverbs 29:25 says, "*The **fear of man** lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.*" Think about comparing 'the fear of God' with 'the fear of man' by asking yourself the question, "*Am I being motivated to have this attitude or take this action by people? Or by God?*" What are ways in which 'the fear of man' affects us? Here is a partial list: We are afraid...
    - ▷ Of what people think of us,
    - ▷ Of losing our relationship with someone so we manipulate him/her,
    - ▷ Of failure or of even coming in second,
    - ▷ That if we don't compete at all costs we will not become winners,
    - ▷ That if we don't say enough nice things people will not like us,
    - ▷ To lovingly confront someone because we're afraid they'll reject us
  - 2) What keeps us from daily desiring to 'be like Jesus?'
  - 3) It has been said, "*You will not understand obedience to God until you no longer need explanations or results*" What do you think that means?
  - 4) It has been said that focusing on obedience to God is just 'legalism.' What do you think of that statement? How would God respond to that statement? In Deuteronomy 28:1-2,15 God says He blesses those who obey Him and does not bless those who don't. (Read Deuteronomy 28 and reflect on what happens to those who obey and those who don't. How do we rest in God's grace on one hand and diligently obey on the other?)
  - 5) Here's one simple thing to ask God for: Ask Him to show you any hidden motives. Say, "Lord, would you show me anything of 'self' in me? Any self-promotion, fear of rejection, or a desire to be seen? Show me any 'hooks' that the enemy might have in my heart."
  - 6) Think about Moses' request in Exodus 33:18 while he was leading Israel through the desert to The Promised Land: '*Show Me Your Glory!*' That's an amazing request when you think that Moses had seen The Red Sea part, a Pharaoh humbled, and Mt. Sinai erupt in fire! But Moses wanted something beyond Promises, Power, and even The Security that came from God's Presence. He wanted intimacy with God Himself! Friendship with God. For that kind of 'friendship' there is no price too great!
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# TAKING NEXT STEPS

- 1) If you feel any confusion in your life, or feel like you've lost your sense of direction or purpose, go back to the last time you felt God speak to you. If you haven't been obedient to the last command He gave you, make a commitment to follow through and do what God told you.
- 2) Read Deuteronomy 28 and reflect on what happens to those who obey and those who don't.
- 3) If you know how to use a Concordance, go through The Psalms and Proverbs and list all the blessings that come to those who 'fear the Lord.'

# THE RELATIONSHIPS BEATITUDE

**Matthew 5:9** *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called God’s children.”*

## THE HAPPINESS OF TENDING RELATIONSHIPS

- To be a ‘maker of peace’ doesn’t just narrowly mean being ‘a resolver of conflicts.’ To be a maker of peace is to bring ‘shalom’ to people – in your life, AND wherever God sends you and WITH WHOM-EVER God connects you. So to be a ‘peacemaker’ is to focus on creating harmony in your relationships. Paul the Apostle would later call this ‘preserving the unity in the bond of peace’ in his letter to The Ephesians. And this is why I call this beatitude The RELATIONSHIPS BEATITUDE.
- Happy are you when you are a peacemaker.
- You are happiest when you bring peace to people.
- You are in the right place when relationships are more valuable to you than your own interests.
- Congratulations! You have learned the importance of reaching out!

## CLIMBING THE BEATITUDE LADDER

- *“How do I do this?”* you might ask. *How do I learn how to really value other people?*
- This may be one good reason why the RELATIONSHIPS BEATITUDE is number 7. If we don’t apply the first six Beatitudes we can’t effectively deal with the roots of rejection and become whole enough to build healthy relationships.
- By applying these first six Beatitudes we break the cycle of rejection and can then become actively available to reach out to others. I live as a ‘peacemaker’ when I am proactive in reaching out to others.
- So let’s do a ‘countdown’ of the last 6 Beatitudes *backwards*, beginning at #6...
  - ▷ Do I delight in \_\_\_\_\_ God? If not...
  - ▷ Do I desire to \_\_\_\_\_ those who hurt me? If not...
  - ▷ Do I still have a passion to \_\_\_\_\_? If not...
  - ▷ Am I daily seeking to \_\_\_\_\_ on God? If not...
  - ▷ Do I understand my need for \_\_\_\_\_? If not...
  - ▷ Do I recognize my total inability to \_\_\_\_\_? If not...

THE BEST WAY  
FORWARD



- ▷ I can repent, turn back around, and say “God, I yield to your loving rule... I can’t love, but you can create your love in me!”
- As I simply receive God’s love, I recognize my total **inability** to love; and thus understand my need for grace; which should motivate me to depend on God; which should constantly fuel a passion to worship; which should empower me to forgive those who hurt me; which should develop in me a delight in obeying God... WHICH THEN ENABLES ME TO DEVELOP HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS!
- If we don’t delight in \_\_\_\_\_, we will not have right \_\_\_\_\_.

## PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

### Principle:

My love for The Lord Jesus is shown in the way I treat my relationships.

- **John 15: 10-12:** *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*
- **LifeTruth:** Tending my relationships is more important than accomplishing my personal goals.

### Principle:

Commitment to ‘community’ is the key to my transformation.

- **LifeTruth:** If God Himself is a community of Three, then I can only develop as a person when I walk with others in community.
- What does that commitment look like?
  - ▷ Preserving Unity, which is the key to staying sensitive to God’s Presence (John 17:21);
  - ▷ Serving my local church family in areas where they need help;
  - ▷ Tithing, which allows the church family to stay functioning as a church family.

## Principle:

Honor is the language of love.

- **Philippians 2:3-4:** *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*
- **LifeTruth:** We enter relationships to give not to get.

## Principle:

Serving is the way I discover my purpose.

- You reach your potential in the healthiest way by first serving others. You can reach some of your potential by focusing on yourself, your goals, your plans... but you won't realize *all* of your potential and you won't get there in the healthiest way.
- **LifeTruth:** Serving is just as key to experiencing God's Presence as worship.
- Being a 'peace-maker' is actually being a 'shalom-bringer'
- We might call this making 'discipling others' a core call

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## THE PROMISE: "You Will be Called Children of God."

- Why can I be happy? I will *experience* the power of a new identity.  
The 7th Beatitude builds on the 6th Beatitude: If I'm experiencing problems in relationships, it may be because I have been less motivated to obey God's word.

## DISCUSS AND PRAY

- 1) We said that commitment to 'community' is the key to our personal transformation. Why is walking in 'community' so essential? Why aren't we more committed to 'community'? Why is experiencing 'community' within our local church so important? Can we get community anywhere? Or is 'community' that we customize real New Testament community?
- 2) How do we honor others? In what ways do we dishonor others?
- 3) Peacemaking is a whole lot more than resolving conflicts though it is that; it is fulfilling the ministry of reconciliation. Paul talks about the ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5:18. What does the 'ministry of reconciliation' mean?
- 4) Why is 'serving others' so important as a step towards realizing your own purpose? Why do you think serving in your local church is so important?
- 5) Jesus calls us to 'love one another.' Many are actually afraid of that command, because they think people – even Christians – will take advantage of them. They are afraid of getting 'used.' Is 'love' about making others feel good about themselves? Or is 'love' doing what's best for them (which sometimes means drawing boundaries)?

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## TAKING NEXT STEPS

- 1) Here's one thing to turn from: Repent of living and thinking that you're more important than others. Simply pray, *"Lord, I turn and walk away from self-focus and I turn and walk toward being focused on others."*
- 2) One of the best descriptions of 'life in community' is Acts 2:42: *Being together in studying The Word* (They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching); *partnering together in the mission of proclaiming The Good News* (They devoted themselves to 'fellowship', a word that also means 'ministering together'); *serving one another* (They devoted themselves to breaking of bread); and *experiencing God together* (They devoted themselves to prayers). Do a personal inventory: are you walking in these elements of 'community' presently? In your journal, list the ways you are experiencing 'community' now and where you would like experience more community in the future... more 'mission together' or 'praying together', and so forth.
- 3) If you are not presently serving in a ministry within your local church or within your mission organization, begin asking The Lord where He might release you to serve.
- 4) Be intentional about honoring people in your life: family, friends, fellow employees, even brief encounters with others.

# THE FAITH BEATITUDE

**Matthew 5:10** *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness” sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”*

## THE HAPPINESS OF REACHING OUT

- *While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Immediately they left their nets and followed him. [Matthew 4:18-20]*
- You were made to influence other people, and you’ll never be truly happy unless you are.
- This Beatitude assumes that you will be motivated to interact with people that aren’t your closest friends.
- Jesus is describing a person who has an inward confidence that is supernatural; A person of *great faith!* This is THE FAITH BEATITUDE.
- You are happiest when you’re influencing people.
- You’re in the right place when you are being persecuted for righteousness, because it shows you that God has worked deep faith in you.
- Congratulations! You’ve discovered the lifestyle of faith!

## CLIMBING THE BEATITUDE LADDER

- Here is where again I need to stress the stepladder approach to the beatitudes. If we build our lives the way Jesus teaches us, then we will know this kind of supernatural confidence, this kind of faith.
- This kind of faith comes from the fact that I am:
  - ▷ Walking in a \_\_\_\_\_ (Beatitude 7),
  - ▷ Eager to obey \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ (Beatitude 6),
  - ▷ Keeping \_\_\_\_\_ out of my heart (Beatitude 5),
  - ▷ Maintaining a lifestyle of \_\_\_\_\_ (Beatitude 4),
  - ▷ Fully \_\_\_\_\_ on God (Beatitude 3),
  - ▷ Embracing His \_\_\_\_\_, especially when I fail (Beatitude 2).

THE BEST WAY  
FORWARD

- And if I am just too wounded, or just too burned out, that I don't care about God's grace anymore I can AT LEAST remember that I can ALWAYS comeback and start with recognizing my need! And the moment I say, "God I am poor in spirit" I am actually opening myself up to God's love... I am actually saying, "God loves me." (Beatitude 1)...
  - ▷ Saying these 3 simple words will **ALWAYS start a new work in your heart, even when you don't feel anything!**

## PATHWAY PRINCIPLES

### Principle:

We show that we're walking in faith as we persevere in prayer.

- Persevering prayer is prayer that recognizes God's power, more than seeking God's answers. Jesus told a story about a persistent widow in **Luke 18:1-7** and ends by asking this question: *And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?"*
- **Matthew 7:7:** *"Ask and keep on asking, and it will be given to you; seek and keep on seeking, and you will find; knock and keep on knocking, and it will be opened to you."*
- **LifeTruth:** Prayer is the way I keep tasting God's kind of love.

### Principle:

We show that we're walking in faith when we seek those who are lost.

- **Luke 19:10:** *"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*
- **LifeTruth:** My greatest impact is the people I bring closer to God.

### Principle:

We show that we're walking in faith when we use our gifts to reach out to others. God has an original design for you.

- *"I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you."*  
**(2 Timothy 1:6)**
  - ▷ A large part of the way God has designed you to experience Him is by using your gifts to serve Him

- **LifeTruth:** My greatest gift to God is fulfilling His original design for me. If I walk in faith I will function in my gift.

## Principle:

Finally, we show that we're walking in faith when we work to see justice done.

- *"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)*
- **LifeTruth:** Success is being able to face the opposition of Satan and the hatred of the world with joy.

## THE PROMISE: "Your is the Kingdom of Heaven."

- *How would you like an ironclad guarantee in life that you would fulfill your purpose? In Luke 12:32, Jesus told his followers, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*
- One of the core meanings of The Kingdom is The Rule of God. God's rule means that He is in authority over everything... including your past and your mistakes.
- When we hear the word 'Kingdom' we should not only hear that God is The Ruler, but also hear that He is The 'Guarantee.'
- **Ephesians 2:10:** *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them....* **Philippians 1:6:** *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*
- **Why I can be happy?** Because I can live in confidence!

## DISCUSS AND PRAY

- 1) Ask yourself how you can *influence* others toward the love of God. Is your circle of influence growing? Are you reaching out to new people in your life? If not, where might you be able to ask The Lord to help you adjust your priorities and schedule?
  - 2) Is it difficult to believe that God loves you? Think of this: What Satan tries to do is to keep us from admitting God loves us. Every time we say, "God loves me", we are relinquishing control of our lives. When we relinquish control of our lives it opens us up to Grace, which opens us up to humility, which opens us up to worship, which opens us up to forgiving, which opens us up to wanting to Obey which opens us up to wanting to be faithful in relationships, which opens us up to a life of supernatural confidence and faith!
  - 3) Do I know what my God-given design is and what spiritual gifts are? What steps can I take to discover this?
  - 4) A heart for justice begins with a heart for un-loveable people? Do I have a heart to reach out to people that I may not naturally have an affinity with? Do I have a heart to help the poor and seek to alleviate suffering in my community?
  - 5) The Bible says, in *Hebrews 11:6*, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*" Why is faith so important to God? How does The Lord 'build' our faith?
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## TAKING NEXT STEPS

- 1) Seek to share something about God with at least one stranger or unbeliever this week, and then describe your experience in your journal.
- 2) Ask some of your family, friends, and spiritual leaders what they think your strengths are.
- 3) Think about the needs in your community and ask your pastor(s) how you can help meet those needs.
- 4) Identify one of your biggest weaknesses... fear, anger, impatience, passivity, etc. Then find 3 Scriptures in the Bible that describe the opposite of that weakness. Declare those Scriptures over yourself in prayer every day for the next week and let God build faith in you.