REACH – SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

OVERVIEW

For the next two months, we will focus on the character of Christ and specifically the core qualities that are provided by Jesus in The Beatitudes. I am going to offer you a menu of choices. Rather than give specific questions for each week, I am providing some brief commentary and related questions to each of the character qualities listed in The Beatitudes of Matthew 5: 1-12. You can select the ones that you appeal to you from this “menu of happiness.” Pace your group through whichever questions you feel might be most pertinent and meaningful to your group. And rather than trying to quickly skip through all (or even most) of them, take time to focus on a few. [And perhaps you can assign those topics/questions you won’t use in your group time as homework or personal devotional study.]

If you’ve never spent much time digging into this section of scripture you are in for a surprise. We all crave “happiness”, but how Jesus paints the source of happiness is far from the list that most would choose. We think happiness will be found in the security of riches, the ease of comfort and the satisfaction of days without trouble. Yet God-given blessing is not achieved through these worldly standards. Quite to the contrary, God’s blessing or “happiness” is provided through developing a Christ-like character that is right with God.

So, as we start a New Year – I am praying that we will learn from the lessons of character from Jesus. I pray that the message and meaning of these Beatitudes would transform our core value systems. And I pray that as we think through and discuss these promised sources of happiness, that each of us would be transformed into the kind of men and women who are truly blessed by God.

‘Menu of Happiness’

Appetizers

Before seeing what Jesus says brings happiness, let’s make up our own list. Have each member of your group write down something specific that brings them happiness. Or perhaps you could create a list based on this question: “What does the world say it takes to make one happy?”

Compile this list from others and read the list in entirety. Then, immediately after this “man-made” list, read Matthew 5:1-12. What observations do you make as you hear the contrasts between each list? What are the biggest surprises as you hear both lists? Do you think that the man-made list of Jesus’ original audience would have been much different from that which you collected? Why or why not?

Rather than making a selection of choices for the group, maybe you could take a survey and determine which of the beatitudes they would choose to discuss. As you consider these Beatitudes, which holds the most interest for you? And why?

Some translations substitute “happy” for “blessed”. Read the following and discuss how this commentator distinguishes these two terms.

“Happy” does not seem to capture all that is intended…primarily because modern usage of the word “happy” has devalued it. The term is an exclamation of the inner joy and peace that comes with being right with God…it is a happiness that transcends what happens in the world

Character of the Beatitudes
Main Entrees

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

What kind of person or what kind of character comes to mind when you think of someone “poor in spirit”? What other qualities do they possess?

Have you ever been in a financially bankrupt condition? Or have you ever been completely dependent upon someone else to cover your obligations? Have you ever needed someone else’s resources or connections to get you into an event? Discuss how these current scenarios could be similar to being “poor in spirit”.

One commentary provided this insight into being “poor in spirit”.

“This describes those who are humble before God. They have nothing to contribute and have come to the King as helpless and hopeless sinners. There is no arrogance in them, no self-righteousness, no self-sufficiency. They are free from their own pretensions and therefore are free for God...they can do nothing of their own power, possessions or merit to gain entrance.” [Bible.org]

Based on this insight, why is there a natural inclination to think we have some standing before God, rather than to acknowledge our spiritually bankrupt condition? What things do we try to include in our spiritual net worth balance sheet?

As believers in Christ – are we rich or poor? What would be the attitudes/actions of a “poor-though-rich” person compared to a “rich-though-poor” person?

Look up and discuss these passages which shed light on the distinction of having a character that is “poor in spirit”. What does each scripture say about developing a “poor in spirit” character?

2 Corinthians 6:10; 8:9

1 Timothy 6:17

James 2:5

Revelation 3:17-18
4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

To mourn is an outward expression of the deepest internal sorrow. It is the grief that results from the death of a loved one. Mourning involves a state of supreme loss, gut-wrenching sadness and deepest despair. How in the world can there be a state of happiness or blessing in a state of mourning?

With this background of “mourning” – has there been a time when you experienced or witnessed this type of mourning? What thoughts or emotions did you have at that time?

The only way to experience a sense of “blessing” in the state of mourning is to dwell on the promise, “for they shall be comforted”. Read these passages which link the state of mourning with the promise of comfort. What do we learn from these promises of comfort?

Isaiah 25:8
Isaiah 61:2-3
James 4:9-10
Revelation 21:4

“Shall be comforted” points to the future. There are no quick, instant cures for those who mourn. Comfort takes time. In your past moments of sorrow or mourning, how much time elapsed before the comforting process started?

Sometimes, when loss is so deep, comfort is never fully realized on earth. But it will be fully reached in heaven. When all is returned and re-created according to God’s perfect will and all is enjoyed without a taint of sin or a hint of death, then and only then will there be a sense of true blessing and unadulterated comfort. What can we do to remind ourselves (or others) of this future reality of comfort?

To “be comforted” is passive in form. In other words, the present hope of this future promise is provided by an outside agent beyond our own capacity. And, of course, this outside agent is God. He is the source of comfort beyond our own. He will be the one to come alongside and provide comfort when it cannot be self-produced. Read these three sections of 1 Corinthians 15 and discuss what each section has to say that can bring comfort – even in the face of death.

1-11
12-21
50-58
5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Meekness is one quality that Jesus used to describe Himself. (Matthew 11:29) Meekness should not be confused with passivity or weakness. The word was used outside scriptures to describe a wild horse which had been tamed – so consequently it speaks to strength under control. Meekness also is used in conjunction with those who are submissive or subservient.

Look up these scriptures and discuss how Jesus could respond in this manner, yet still describe himself as “meek” or “gentle”.

   Mark 11:15-19
   Mark 11:27-33
   Luke 22:63-71

Based on a correct view of meekness – do you yield easily or reluctantly to others? Do you find it difficult not to be large and in charge? When was the last time you had to conscientiously submit to someone else? Did you do so in a gentle way or did it take on another form?

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

What’s been the longest period of time you’ve gone without food? Or when do you remember being super hungry or extremely thirsty? What thoughts or feelings did you have during those times?

The object of strongest desire is righteousness. This means living in right standing before God (Innocent, holy or just). On a 1-100 scale, what’s been your strongest desire for righteousness? What factors contributed to this period of high measurement? Why does this hunger or thirst seem to fluctuate so greatly for most followers of Christ?

Look up these passages which also describe this appetite for righteousness. What can we do to stimulate this kind of insatiable appetite for godliness?

   Psalm 42:1-2
   Isaiah 55:1-2
Mick Jaggar sang that he couldn’t get any satisfaction, but Jesus promises satisfaction to the one who hungers and thirsts for righteousness. “Satisfied” means to be filled or gorged. In other words, the one who was empty and craving now attains full satisfaction and total contentment. How is this kind of transformation possible? Do you know of anyone who lived with this kind of satisfaction or a sense of being totally filled? What can we do different to increase both the hunger and the satisfaction of righteousness?

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Mercy is God’s active empathy and compassion to those who are guilty and needy. Before a Holy God, we are guilty without a shadow of doubt. Yet despite this condition, God chooses to move toward us in this undeserving condition and extend His kindness and goodness to us—freely and without reservation.

Look up how the LORD describes Himself in Exodus 34:6-8. The very first quality that He lists is “merciful”. Why is mercy such an important quality to understand? What would happen if the LORD were short on mercy? (See Lamentations 3:22.)

If you want to see the mercy of God on display, look to the nation of Israel. Nehemiah paints a quick summary of this people’s guilt and the LORD’s mercy in Nehemiah 9:9-21. In what ways do we resemble the same tendencies as Israel?

The merciful receive mercy. Do you think it is possible to be merciful without first experiencing mercy yourself? Why or why not?

In Jesus’ day, the antithesis of those who practiced mercy were the Pharisees. Instead of mercy, they demonstrated a legalistic self-sufficiency and self-righteousness. Read Luke 18:9-14 and discuss why this kind of proud attitude flies in the face of 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.

11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.