

Our problem is, in part, that we see happiness as an end in itself instead of as a byproduct of something else. That's why our quest so often ends in frustration and anxiety.

We hear the words of Jesus, "But seek first [God's] kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6.33), and his warning against assuming that the wide, easy and popular way will in fact lead to life and happiness (7.13,14).

What then, is true happiness? In John 17.3 Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent". "Eternal" here clearly refers to far more than the extent of time – it points to a quality of life. It is this quality of life that is true happiness. It is a result of our positive relationship to God. It centres, not on ourselves, but on God. To be part of God's "kingdom" is to have a life which centres on him and his purposes.

This is why Jesus describes happiness as belonging to those who know their spiritual poverty, who know sorrow because of the discrepancy between their lives and God's plan, who trust God and earnestly seek to please him, who are always mindful that they stand under grace themselves, who seek inward goodness, who are part of the family of the peacemaking God, who see the supreme worth of their allegiance to God.

Augustine wrote, "Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you".

Reflect:

- True happiness is a byproduct of our relationship to God. What does the community at large see in the lives of Christians?
- In what new directions has the Lord been speaking to us through this study – and through the earlier studies? What are we going to do about it?



10. *Blessed are You*

Reading: Matthew 5.3-12; 6.1-8,16-18

The words of the Master Teacher about happiness stand in sharp contrast to the attitudes and actions underlying so much of life in the world today – as they did for his first hearers. We are inclined to view his teachings as good, lofty ideals, but "not for me".

But, in fact, it is "for me". He was not giving special instructions to a little select band of followers. The crowds were there and his teaching was for all (note Matt. 7.28,29).

It is true that it is only with the final beatitude that Jesus gives the specific second-person application – "Blessed are you..." (5.11). But every other part of the Sermon on the Mount is personal (directed to "you"). At the end (7.21-27) Jesus makes it quite clear to all his hearers that true wisdom is for them now to live by what they have heard – not to do so is sheer folly.

There is one way of happiness (not several ways of varying effectiveness), and it is the way of happiness for everyone.

Reflect:

- "We are inclined to view Jesus' teachings as good, lofty ideals, but 'not for me'." Is this the commonly-held view of the teachings of Jesus? Why is that so?

Kingdom Lifestyle

Read: Matthew 5.3-12

Always remember that these eight statements of Jesus are Kingdom qualities. In reflecting on them, we need to keep in mind that, if we are Christians, God himself – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – resides within us (John 14.23-26).

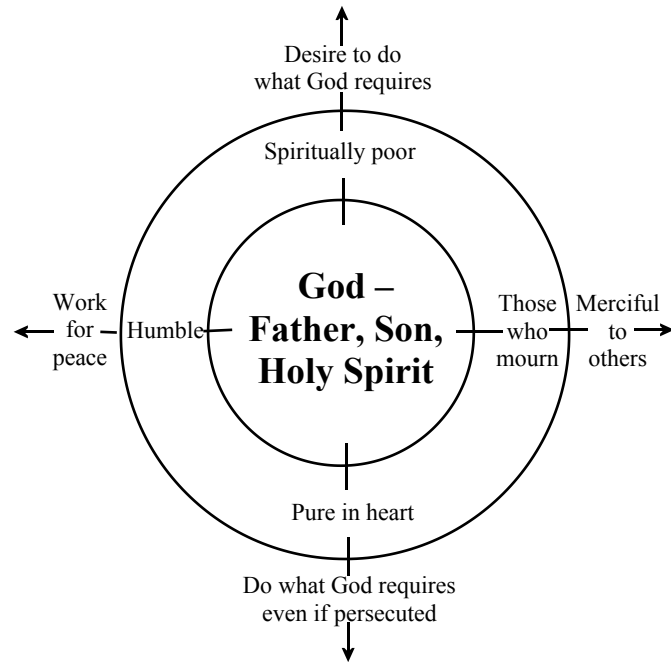
Some of these qualities relate especially to our inner life, our life with God – our inner personhood, if you like. That is the part of us that God alone sees and knows. Other qualities relate to our actions, our association with others – our outer personhood. This is what other people see us to be.

We shouldn't be too rigid about this division, but it is helpful to see these qualities in relation to one another.

Inner person | spiritually poor | mourn | humble | pure in heart

Outer person | desire to do | merciful | peacemaking | persecuted

Those who know they are spiritually poor but forgiven and accepted by God have an intense desire to do his will. Those who mourn over their own sins do not only receive God's comfort themselves but become the merciful ones. Those who are humble become the peacemakers. The pure in heart, because of their commitment to doing God's will, do what God requires, even if it means persecution.



Read: Matthew 6.1-8,16-18

In the time of Jesus there were people for whom religion was a big show. Almsgiving, prayer and fasting were three important religious duties and they did them all in a way that drew attention to themselves. Jesus called them "hypocrites" – the Greek word means "play actors" (Matt. 6.2,5,16). Their inner personhood and their outer personhood just didn't correspond.

It hasn't been possible here to deal with everything that needs to be part of our lifestyle – there are many aspects that will vary from person to person! What is important, however, is that the life of God by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and Spirit of God within us will transform us from within and flow out into every other aspect of our lives. This will lead us to

less dependence on possessions, a simpler kind of life, a greater desire to give, a greater care for people, and a whole collection of practical qualities. All because we are allowing the life of God within to permeate the rest of our life.

Reflect:

- In the diagram on the previous page, God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is at the centre. The Beatitudes are grouped in terms of those that relate especially to our "inner personhood" – our inner life, our life with God – and to our "outer personhood" – our actions, our associations with others. Recognising that this is not meant to be a rigid division, how helpful do we find it?
- The axes of our diagram are significant. The vertical axis relates to the doing of God's will; the horizontal to our relationship with others. Yet the centre is God himself. When asked about the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind," to which he added, "Love your neighbour as you love yourself" (Matthew 22.37-40). Think again about the Beatitudes in the light of the Law of Love.

True Happiness

It seems so simple, straightforward and logical that our happiness should centre on ourselves, resulting from a suitable ordering of our environment and circumstances. On this view, it becomes all-important to improve our lot materially in acceptable ways. Happiness, not holiness, is the goal, and there is little question any more whether something is right "in itself". The main "wrong" is in "getting caught".

We apply the law itself in two ways, becoming most insistent on preserving our own rights and interests at all costs. Our happiness must be fun and laughter and expressing our own personalities ("doing our own thing"), free from suffering, sorrow and hardship.

Of course, in this quest it is everyone for himself, and in the ensuing struggle for the "survival of the fittest" (whether expressed on the international scene, or in some local "rat-race") the illusory bubble seems to vanish before us. It seems so logical that we question our methods, our "system", but not our basic assumptions – and keep on trying.