

Our Unusual God: Part 5

The bible tells us in the book of proverbs that the fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom. That is significant when you understand that wisdom is being skillful at living life. The bible tells us that the key to skillful living is our relationship with God. But before we can have relationship with God we must of necessity understand who he is and what he is like. As we have seen, everyone has some kind of concept about God. The following are some letters that kids wrote to God.

Dear God, instead of letting people die in having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you have? Jane

Dear God, maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms. It works with my brother. Larry

Dear God, in school they told us what you do. Who does it when you're on vacation? Jane

Dear God, if you watch me in church on Sunday, I'll show you my new shoes. Mickey

Dear God, did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident? Norma

Dear God, I went to this wedding and they kissed right in the church. Is that OK? Neil

Everyone has some concept of God because His existence has been written within our hearts. The story of Helen Keller is the story of a normal child who, at the age of 18 months, was suddenly shut off from the world when she became both deaf and blind. You wonder what someone who could neither hear nor see would be thinking. When Helen Keller was 10 years old, her father asked a famous pastor named Phillip Brooks to tell her about God. When he had his first conversation with her, he was moved by her response. Helen said that she had always known there was a God, but she had not known His name. How could a girl who can neither hear nor see know about God? The fact of God is written in our hearts. The question is not whether there is a God. The question is what is God like? Someone has said, "The world is a kind of spiritual kindergarten where bewildered infants are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks."

For the last four Sunday mornings before Christmas and New Year's, we have been trying to learn to spell God with the right blocks. In doing so, we have found that our God is an unusual God. He is unusual in the sense that He does things that we would not expect him to do. For example, we have seen that God sometimes allows us to go through difficult situations in life in order to teach us and bless us. That doesn't make sense to us. It is certainly not something that we would do for ourselves. C.S. Lewis

wrote in his book “The Problem of Pain,” “we want, in fact, not so much a father in heaven as a grandfather in heaven – a senile benevolence who, as they say, likes to see young people enjoying themselves and his plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, a good time was had by all.” God doesn’t act that way. He is more interested in our holiness than our happiness. For the last two sermons in this series we have been looking at what the bible calls the Beatitudes’. In those Beatitudes’ we see the Lord’s words concerning what a truly blessed life looks like.

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit

To say that someone is “poor in spirit” has nothing to do with their personality. The poor in spirit are not necessarily introverted people. Neither are they people who have a low self esteem. The apostle Peter had a very outgoing personality, but he learned to be “poor in spirit.” People who are poor in spirit have come to the place where they recognize they need God. They know they need Him, not just in the difficult times of life. They know they need God when things seem to be going great, and it is that understanding that causes them to depend on God in the big things and in the small things 24/7.

2. Blessed are those who mourn

This is not the kind of mourning that takes place in our world because of the hard trials we may endure. Neither is it because you did something wrong and got caught. This is mourning is in the form of godly repentance. When you see yourself being spiritually empty, when you recognize your sin, you mourn over that sin.

3. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Meekness is not weakness. The word “meek” is actually a picture of “power under control.” Moses was a powerful man who had been groomed to be a leader by the Egyptians from his earliest days. If you wanted to pick a fight with someone, it wouldn’t be Moses. He was a strong man, but his power was under the control of God. Meek people are yielded to God. They don’t explode and “go off” on people. They are too strong for that.

4. Blessed are the hungry

Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.”

Healthy people have a healthy appetite, and it is the same in the spiritual world. Few things demonstrate the fact that someone is spiritually healthy as much as the fact that he is hungry for more. That will never happen as long as you think you are o.k. where you are. If you are content to be where you are spiritually, you’re not going to hunger and thirst for something you think you already have. I said one of the things you can do to become more spiritually hungry is to force feed yourself. When you least desire spiritual

food, that's when you need it the most. It is when you don't feel like going to church or Bible study that you need it the most. You can also increase your spiritual hunger by spending time with people who are more spiritually mature than you are, people who will challenge you to strive for more just by watching them live life in a godly manner. It is also very good to read the biographies of godly men and women in the past. For example, Alexander Maclaren was a Scottish pastor who lived from 1826 to 1910. It was said of Maclaren that he fed on God's word, not as a book for sermons, but as the source of his spiritual life and power. He meditated long hours and sought to understand the heart and mind of God." I need to read about people like that. Then there was J. Hudson Taylor who said, "All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them." Find out what it is that makes you hungry for God and then do it. Your spiritual growth will never be more than your hunger for it. Jesus said to the degree that you hunger, to that degree you will be filled.

5. BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy."

What is mercy? Mercy is not just feeling sorry for someone. In fact, James 2:15-16 teaches us that when we see someone in need and only feel sorry for them, but do nothing to help them, we've really done them no good at all. Mercy is "love in action." How do I practically show this mercy?

a) If I am merciful, I'll be patient with the peculiar

That's a nice way to say, be tolerant of oddballs. Rick Warren says, "I believe into every life a few weirdo's must fall." When you are evaluating how merciful you are, think about how you treat people who seem a little strange to you. Mercy produces tolerance. 1 Thess. 5:14 says, "...encourage the timid, help the weak, and be patient with everyone." It helps you to be patient with strange, obnoxious people to realize that many of them are in a lot of pain. Someone said, "usually behind every peculiar action there is a need for attention, caused by loneliness, hurt, or depression." Merciful people are accepting people. Romans 15:7, "accept one another in the Lord, as Christ has accepted you."

b) If I am merciful, I'll forgive those who have fallen

Ask yourself this question: When someone makes a mistake, do I rub it in, or rub it out?

Colossians 3:13- "Be gentle and ready to forgive; never hold grudges. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others."

It's interesting that when someone is merciful to you, it feels so right. But when you're called to give it, it is so hard to do so. When we are sinned against, we don't want to

show mercy. We want justice. Kind of like the lady who had her photograph taken and upon seeing the proof complained to the photographer. He said, "Ma'am what's wrong?" "Wrong? Why this picture doesn't do me justice." To which he looked at her and said, "Ma'am you don't need justice, you need mercy."

A merciful person is one who can forgive the fallen. All of us are prone to fall to certain kinds of temptation. Maybe you can't understand how someone could have an ego problem, and he can't see why you struggle with gossip. Maybe you cannot conceive how anyone could ever steal, but you have no problem with lying. How do you treat the fallen? Merciful people don't point a finger, they lend a helping hand.

c) If I'm merciful, I'll help those who are hurting.

Proverbs 3:27- "Do not withhold good from those who need it, when it is in your power to act."

1 John 3:17-18: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but does not help him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

John Wesley's motto: "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can." When someone is hurting a merciful person doesn't mind getting involved!

d) If I am merciful, I'll do good to my enemies

Showing mercy to your enemies is exactly the opposite of what the world says. The world says, "When people hurt you, hurt them back. Don't get mad, get even." God says, "No." Jesus said in Luke "If you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even the pagans do that. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the most high, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your heavenly Father is merciful."

The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10, is an excellent example of mercy. The Samaritan was half Jew, half Gentile, and the Jews hated the Samaritans, and the Samaritans hated the Jews. It is a Jew that is beaten up on the road. Two of his fellow Jews walk by, refusing to get involved. It is his enemy, a Samaritan, who puts love in action by dressing his wounds, taking him to an Inn, staying until he has made it through the critical stages of his injuries and then paying for his full recovery. Jesus says that the merciful will receive mercy. This is the Boomerang Blessing. You give mercy, and when you need it, you'll receive it.

5. Blessed are the pure in heart

Did you know that when God looks at you He pays little attention to your outward appearance? That might be hard to hear because some of us spend so much time on what we look like. But God looks past what we look like and focuses on our heart because that is who we truly are.

The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. 1 Sm. 16:7

All a man's ways seem right to him, but the Lord weighs the heart (Prov 21:2).

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8

The Greek word for "pure" was used for grain and flour that had been carefully sifted – cleansed of all impurities. It was used when describing milk that had not been mixed with any other liquid. It is not diluted or watered down. It was pure. God is saying, "I don't want you to just look good on the outside. I want you to look good on the inside-in your heart. So this beatitude could be translated, "Blessed is the man who is genuine in heart, who is authentic, who is not a phony.

A couple from Bakersfield, CA purchased a new boat, but they were having serious problems. No matter how hard they tried, they couldn't get the boat going. After an hour of trying to make it go, they putted to a nearby marina, hoping someone could tell them what was wrong. A thorough check on the topside of the boat revealed everything was in perfect working condition. Then, one of the marina guys jumped in the water to check underneath. He came up choking with laughter. Under the boat, still strapped securely in place, was the trailer! Ridiculous! But not more ridiculous than wondering why your Christian life isn't working any better than it is when you have sin attached beneath the surface of your life that needs to be removed.

The greatest blessing of having a pure heart is the ability to draw near to God. People with pure hearts have the capacity to draw near to God that someone without a pure heart will never experience-within their spirit, they are able to "see God.", because such a man will see God."

6. Blessed are the peacemakers

Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God."

We live in a world characterized by strife. We see its effects at every level of society. Lady Astor once said to Winston Churchill, "If you were my husband, I'd put poison in your coffee." Churchill responded, "And if you were my wife, I'd drink it." History reveals that most peacekeeping efforts by and large have failed. In fact, in nearly 4000

years of recorded history, the world has been at peace a total of only 286 years including over 8000 treaties made and broken. Peace is merely that brief glorious moment in history when everybody stops to reload.

A peace-maker is simply someone who helps people to get along with one another. There are 2 kinds of people in this world: “thermostat” people and “thermometer” people. A thermometer reflects the climate of the room. If the room is cold, it’s cold. If the room is hot, it’s hot. But a thermostat can change the climate of the room. By its setting a thermostat can change a cold room into one that is warm, or a hot room into one that is cool. A peace-maker is a thermostat person. He can change the relational climate from one of strife to one of peace. God wants peacemakers in His church. God wants peacemakers in the workplace. God wants peacemakers out in the world. Jesus said the peace-maker will be called the sons of God. Why is that? Because being a peace-maker is a God-like thing to do, and He wants us to be busy about doing it.

6. Blessed are the persecuted

This Beatitude tells us happiness is not found in the avoidance of pain.

Mathew 5:10-11, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹²Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In our current society, suffering for Christ often only means that you are considered strange. We need to understand, however, the tide is turning and more and more actual persecution seems to be coming our way. What are you going to do if it comes to the place where it really cost you something to be a Christian? Jesus said, if it comes to that, you are in good company because that is what happened to the prophets throughout history.

When you take the Beatitudes as a whole, they are saying one thing-the truly blessed people in this world are those who live for God’s kingdom. In his book, ANATOMY OF AN ILLNESS, Norman Cousins tells a revealing story about Pablo Casals, the great cellist. Cousins describes meeting Casals shortly before his ninetieth birthday. It was almost painful for Cousins to watch the old man dress. Arthritis, emphysema, the frailty of advanced years had taken their toll. The hands swollen, the fingers clenched. How could a man in such condition ever hope to play his beloved music again.

And yet, even before eating Casals made his way slowly and with much difficulty to his piano. There a miracle took place right before Norman Cousins' eyes. As he describes it, "The fingers slowly unlocked and reached toward the keys like the buds of a plant toward sunlight. [Casals'] back straightened. He seemed to breathe more freely." He began with a number by Bach which he played with sensitivity and control that would have been the

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envy of a young and agile pianist. He then launched into a Brahms concerto, and his fingers seemed to race above the keyboard. "His entire body seemed fused with music," Cousins wrote. "It was no longer stiff and shrunken but supple and graceful and completely freed from its arthritic coils." By the time he walked away from the piano he seemed to be an entirely different person from the tired old man who struggled out of bed and into his clothes. He stood straighter and taller. He immediately walked to the breakfast table, ate heartily, and then went out for a stroll on the beach. That man was transformed by his purpose.

The purpose behind the Beatitudes is that people would live for the Kingdom of God. There is no greater purpose. Jesus is saying, "This is the way I want the subjects of my kingdom to live." And when you live by these principles, the result will be a life that is blessed.