

THE FIRST STEP TO HAPPINESS
Don't Worry - Be Happy!
Part 1 of 8
Rick Warren

Matthew 5:3-12

1. The popular idea of happiness:

Having _____ (Eccl. 2:1-26)

(Solomon) "I decided to enjoy myself and find out what happiness is ..." (vs. 1 GN)

Dead Ends:

* Accumulating _____ (vs. 7-8)

* Experiencing _____ (vs. 3, 10)

* Achieving _____ (vs.4-6, 9)

"All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." (vs. 17)

2. **God's way to happiness:**

Having _____ (Matt. 5:3-12)

"The Beatitudes" - 8 Secrets of Happiness

"BLESSED" means

The point of these "contradictions":

My happiness is not determined by what's happening _____ me but rather
what's happening _____ me!

3. The first step to happiness:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (vs. 3)

How Humility Increases My Happiness:

* It reduces _____

* It improves _____

* It releases _____

"God gives strength to the humble, but sets himself against the proud." James 4:6 (LB)

"Happy are those who know their need for God, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs!"
Matt. 5:3 (Ph)

"Now that you know the truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice!"
John 13:17 (GN)

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Matthew 5. What would it take to make you happy? They asked that question of 52,000 Americans in *Psychology Today*. These were their answers: friends or social life; job; being in love; recognition and success; sex; personal growth; good financial situation; having a house or apartment; being attractive and beautiful; the city I live in; my religion; recreation and exercise; being a parent, marriage; your partner's happiness. The interesting things about this is most of the attempts to find happiness are through external situations instead of internal.

The popular idea of happiness is this: having the right circumstances. It's what I call "when and then" thinking. "When I get out of school, then I'll be happy." "When I get a job, then I'll be happy." "When I get married, then I'll be happy." "When I have kids, then I'll be happy." "When the kids leave home, then I'll be happy;"

The classic chapter on the search for happiness is Ecclesiastes 2. Solomon, in verse 1 said, "*I decided to enjoy myself and find out what happiness is.*" If you want to save yourself a lot of time, go home and read Ecclesiastes 2. Solomon said, I tried it all and I found three dead ends: accumulating things, experiencing pleasures, achieving success. They were all dead ends and those are the three things we spend our life trying to get. He was the wealthiest, he had all kinds of pleasure, he was the most successful man of his time.

We think that by accumulating things we're going to be happy. "If I could just win the lottery, then I'd be happy..." Someone asked Howard Hughes, "How much does it take to make a man happy?" He said, "Just a little bit more." T.V. lies; you can't buy happiness.

We experience pleasure, we search for the latest thrill. Every week end Southern California goes on a thrill expedition. For 60 hours we search for everything! "Maybe what I need is a Club Med vacation, then I'll be happy." Solomon said, I've tried it all. Achieving success. If I could just get people to look up to me, then I'll be happy. We're very status conscious in the Saddleback Valley. We've got to have all the right symbols. Solomon says, I was the king of an empire. I had slaves. But that didn't bring happiness.

v. 17 "*All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*"

The popular idea of happiness is having the right circumstances. But God's way to happiness is having the right attitude.

Matthew 5 we have the opening lines of Jesus' famous Sermon the Mount, 8 positive statements about happiness called the beatitudes. Of all the subjects Jesus could have chosen to speak on when he started the Sermon on the Mount He chose the subject How to Be Happy. Why? Because He knew that was what everybody was searching for but very few people find it.

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For the next eight weeks we're going to look at these Eight Beatitudes of How to be Happy, not just principles for personal happiness, but also prescription for emotional health.

Each of these begins with the word "blessed". The word "blessed" is an Old English word. It simply means "happy". He says *"Happy are you if you're poor in spirit for yours is the kingdom of heaven... Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted ... Happy are the meek for they will inherit the earth ... Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled ... Happy are the merciful for they will be shown mercy. Happy are the pure in heart for they will see God. Happy are the peacemakers for they will be called the sons of God. Happy are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

When you read those things, does that sound like contradictions? Happy if you're sad... happy if you're poor ... happy if you're put down and persecuted! That does not sound like happiness to me. Jesus was saying that you can learn to be happy in spite of your circumstances. If you have to have all of your problems solved before you become happy, will you ever be happy? No. If you have to have everything perfect in your life before you're happy, will you be happy? No.

Jesus said, I want to teach you that happiness depends not on the right circumstances but it depends on the right attitudes. My happiness is not determined by what's happening around me, but rather by what's happening in me. For the next eight weeks we're going to look at what that means.

Jesus is saying, it's not how much we have, it's what we are that makes us happy. Happiness does not depend on the external, the atmosphere outside; it depends on the attitude inside. It is not determined by external circumstances; it's determined by my internal attitude. These are the attitudes.

Happiness is a choice. You choose the right attitudes. Basically right now, whether you're happy or sad, or somewhere in between, you're about as happy as you choose to be. Life is tough. There are a lot of things that don't go right and don't go your way in life. Happiness depends on choosing the right attitudes.

Briefly, let's look at the very first step, the very first attitude. The first step to happiness is to be humble. Matthew 5:3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* What does He mean by the poor in spirit? He's not talking about low self esteem. He's not talking about putting yourself down all the time. Jesus did not die for junk; He died for people. You have value, you have worth, you have significance. That doesn't mean you're perfect, you're not. You have sinned, I've sinned, we all have. He's not saying you run around putting yourself down all the time: "I'm lousy! I'm no good! I'm evil, wicked, bad and nasty!"

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? It simply means to depend on God. He's talking about humility, admitting that I don't have it all together, realizing that I haven't arrived, realizing that I haven't learned it all, that I'm not the sum total of the universe, that I'm not perfect.

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The opposite of poor in spirit is arrogance or egotism. Jesus said if you're full of arrogance and egotism you're never going to be happy. The Good News Translation of this verse: "*Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor.*" They know they don't have it all together, they know that they need God. Living Bible says, "*Happy are the humble.*" The point that Jesus is starting off with today is simply, humble and happy go together. Humility and happiness go together. They're twins, soul mates. If you want to have lasting happiness then you need to learn to be humble.

How can humility increase my happiness?

1. Humility reduces stress.

When I'm humble I don't have to have all the answers, I realize that the world does not depend on me, I can resign as general manager of the universe. When I'm humble I realize that I don't have to solve all the problems in the world. When I'm humble I don't have to fake it. I don't have to pretend that I'm perfect because God doesn't demand that I be perfect in order to be happy. I don't have to play God and assume responsibility that's not mine.

When I'm humble I can live with the tension between the real and the ideal -- the way I want to live my life, the way I want my career to go, the ideal for my family, my marriage, my kids and then reality, the way it really is. There's always a tension in life between the ideal and the real. Humility accepts the fact that you can be happy because you're depending upon God even though things aren't ideal. You may not have the best job and your marriage may not be perfect.

It reduces stress when I'm humble.

I'm convinced that we take ourselves too seriously. (Someone asked me, "Now that you've got your doctor's degree, what do we call you?" I answered, "How about Gumby?") I think we take ourselves too seriously and we don't take God seriously enough. I think that is the crux of almost every one of our problems. We're out there trying to impress people with who we are and because we know who we really are and who we want to be there's stress. When I become a humble person, when I walk in dependence upon the Lord, it reduces the stress in my life. As the stress goes down the happiness goes up.

2. Humility improves my relationships.

How many of you love to be around people with big heads? Prideful people are a pain in the ... blessed assurance! and a few other parts of the anatomy! Selfish, self centered people are an irritation. Nobody likes to be around them. They wreck relationships. Self centered people are never happy. Never happy! Because they are unhappy they make everybody else unhappy. They spread all their gloom and doom simply by their egotism.

On the other hand, how many of you like to be around humble people? those that don't think they're so hot? They aren't always trying to impress you. When you tell a story they don't always have to have a better one. When you are humble you get along better with other people. Humility doesn't mean you think less of yourself, you just think more about others. When you

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become interested in others you become interesting to others. So you have better relationships when you're a humble person. You don't have to be right all the time. And it's easier for you to say those two hard words, "I'm sorry" or the three hardest words, "I was wrong" or the other three hardest words, "I need help".

When I'm poor in spirit which means I don't have to fake it and pretend I'm perfect it reduces my stress and improves my relationships because I am humble enough to ask forgiveness.

I read this week of St Francis of Assisi, the monk, who had a method of maintaining humility. In his memoirs he said any time someone praised him, in order to stay humble he had a fellow monk set down and tell him all his faults.

He had to ask a fellow monk, because he never married. Most of us don't need to go get a monk! We have our heavenly sand paper at home. We laugh at this but, ladies, it is not your job to keep your husband humble. Men, it is not your job to keep your wives humble. That's God's job. Ruth Graham about Billy Graham: My job is to love Billy, God's job is to keep him humble. God can do a better job than you. In your marriage you need to be a supporter and encourager. Let God do the humiliating. He can do it easy enough.

It improves my relationships. I find that when I'm full of pride I bruise very easily. I'm very sensitive to other people's comments. When I'm pumped up, trying to impress people, and someone says something that really shouldn't bother me, it hurts. It's like sticking a pin in a balloon.

On the other hand, I've discovered, when I'm walking humbly before the Lord and just being who I am, being honest and depending upon God, I'm almost immune to insults. Almost nothing can hurt me. I'm walking before the Lord with the attitude they may be right, they may be wrong, but I'm just trying to please the Lord. If you find someone who is very sensitive to criticism it's because they haven't learned this first principle of happiness: Be humble in spirit before the Lord.

3. It releases God's power.

Humility releases God's power in your life. James 4:6 *"God gives strength to the humble, but He sets himself against the proud."* Would you like to have God's strength in your life? The Bible says that the secret of spiritual power is to walk humbly before the Lord, to realize you have to depend on Him.

Yesterday was my birthday. My wife was fixing me breakfast. My kids had cards and presents for me. I began reading the cards and I just burst into tears, uncontrollable. There were two things going through my mind at that time. One, I was overwhelmed by the graciousness of God in my life and the goodness and all the things I've not deserve. He has allowed me to be born in America, to live in a beautiful area such as here, to be with a great group of people who love me and our church and the family. I'm humbled by that. the goodness of God in my life overwhelmed me. The other thing was the deep sense of responsibility I feel pastoring this church

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and knowing from week to week people are coming in here looking for a word from God and saying "What does God have to say about my life?" I felt a deep, deep sense of inadequacy and fear. "God, you've got the wrong guy! I cannot do this on my own. I've got to totally depend on You to lead this church." I had a little prayer meeting with God, "I want to remind myself that this is Your church. It belongs to You. Although You used me to birth this church, I give You the right to move me out of the picture at any point. If You think there's somebody else who could do a better job, take it." Every week I think, "Lord, are You sure there isn't somebody else who could do this?" I remind myself of that.

I have a ritual I do every Sunday morning as I'm driving to church. First thing I do, I sing "Jesus Loves Me" because if I don't feel loved by God how can I show love to other people. Then I offer my resignation, "God, I'm going to do this today. But if You don't want me to do this next week, You work it out. I know this is Your will today, but I'm just living one day at a time. I will not presume upon tomorrow because that would be arrogance." Then I recommit my life to the Lord and ask Him to empower me and help me. I humble myself voluntarily before the Lord as I'm driving here. "Lord, as Your son I want to feel love. And as Your servant I need to feel Your power. If this is what You've called me to do, You will empower me to do even when I don't think I've got the power." I humble myself before the Lord and express total dependence upon Him. I cannot do this on a week to week basis. Nobody can consistently come up with fresh, creative ideas week after week, year after year. Nobody can. But God can. And, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

When I take that attitude before the Lord, that there are many times I walk up here, and the power of God falls on my life. It's not because of who I am but it's because of Who God is. I think what this principle here is stating is, the secret of strength is admitting weakness. The secret of power is admitting helplessness. The secret of happiness is humility. The secret of victory is total surrender to God. The secret of independence is dependence upon God.

Matthew 5:3 (Phillips) *"Happy are those who know their need for God, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs!"* That means that all that God has to offer is available to the person who walks humbly before the Lord. All that God has to offer is that person's when we live in dependence before the Lord.

The fact is that everyone of you need Jesus Christ in your life. You need God's power to make it next week. If you think you don't, you've got something coming. His power is available. And God is waiting to pour out His power on you. But you've got to ask. And you've got to admit that you need His help. If you walk out of here saying, "I don't need God in my life this next week to make it" then Good Luck! You'll have to solve all of your problems on your own power, your own ability, your own strength and then wonder why you're tired all of the time. When you walk before the Lord and say, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, Apart from Him I can do nothing, when you have that attitude -- then that power will give you supernatural power to work on those problems you can't changed and you've tried, those areas of your life you can't get control of and you've tried, those relationships that are falling apart and you can't do anything about it. That's what it means to be poor in spirit.

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John 13:17 (GN) "Now that you know the truth, how happy you will be if you put it into practice!" Ask yourself a question, where do I need to practice humility this next week? Where do I need to depend on God more this next week?

The greatest thing about the inauguration this last week, to me, was when our new president, after taking the oath of office and he stood up to give his inaugural address, he walked to the podium and the first thing he said was, "For my first official act as president I'd like to offer a prayer." And he prayed. That spoke volumes to me. All true leaders find their strength on their knees.

You need God's power in your life. But it only comes when you humble yourself and say, "God! Help!" The person who says "Help!" is the humble person and the person who is the humble person, God says, "There's nothing I won't do for that person! The kingdom of heaven will be theirs."

Prayer:

Would you pray this prayer in your heart? God, I'm not making it in [and then mention the area]. Maybe, God, I'm not making it as a parent. Or, I'm not making it as a partner. Or, I'm not making it as a professional. And I need Your help in my life. I must decrease and You must increase. I admit my need for Your power in every area of my life. Not just some areas. I need Your power and Your guidance in every area of my life. Today, I humble myself before You. The Bible says, "*Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord. ... God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble ... Before honor is humility.*" Those that humble ourself, God lifts us up and gives us power to do what He's called us to do.

Is there an area of your life you're trying to get control of and it's out of control. Say, God, I admit this is not working! I need Your help in every area of my life, including this one.

Father, I thank You for Your word. I look forward to this series on happiness with anticipation. This very first foundational principle of realizing we need You in every area of our lives. I thank You for the many times You wouldn't let me give up on this church. Yet, I'm even more grateful for all the many times You've never given up on me, that You've continued to work in my life. I pray that I would never get over the day that You saved me and never stopped being amazed that You've gifted and called me. I pray that each of us would sense Your presence in our lives today. In Jesus' name. Amen.