

**HANDLING HARASSMENT FOR YOUR FAITH**  
**Don't Worry - Be Happy!**  
**Part 8 of 8**  
**Rick Warren**

Matthew 5:10-12 "Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!" (vs 10 GN)

**1. The Reality of Harassment**

". . . when men insult you . . ." (vs 11a)

**2. The Reason for Harassment**

". . . because you are my followers" (vs. 11b)

"No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."  
Jn. 15:20

"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." 2 Tim 3:12

**3. My Response to Harassment**

\* **Recognize** \_\_\_\_\_

"We are not fighting against human beings, but against wicked spiritual forces. . ." Eph 6:12  
(GN)

Rev. 12:10

\* **Refuse** \_\_\_\_\_

"If someone does evil to you, don't pay him back with evil. . . Never take revenge. . . let  
God's wrath do it." Rom. 12:17 + 19 (GN)

I Peter 2:23

\* **Respond** \_\_\_\_\_

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Rom 12:21

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Matt. 5:44

\* **Rejoice** \_\_\_\_\_

"Be glad and happy . . .!" (vs 12a)

### **Reasons to Rejoice**

\* **It means** \_\_\_\_\_

..... "If you are insulted because of Christ, you are blessed, . . . for God's Spirit rests on you."  
1 Pet. 4:14

\* **It means** \_\_\_\_\_

..... "The apostles (were) full of joy that God considered them worthy to suffer disgrace for Jesus' name." Acts 5:41

\* **It is** \_\_\_\_\_

..... "These troubles . . . won't last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God's richest blessing upon us forever and ever!" 2 Cor. 4:17 (LB)

\* **Remember** \_\_\_\_\_

"Since we are God's children . . . if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share in his glory." Rom. 8:17 (GN)

\***.... Remain** \_\_\_\_\_

"So those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good." 1 Pet 4:19

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One of the major causes of unhappiness is trying to be like everybody else and trying to have everybody like you. There is a myth that says "In order to be happy I must be approved by everybody" but that doesn't work, does it? You just can't please everybody.

Jesus was a realist and was very honest about the consequences of following him. He said, If you follow Me there are many people who aren't going to approve of your decision, they're not going to like it. If you live by these beatitudes we've been looking at for eight weeks you can expect some people to be upset. So in His closing statement of Matthew 5:10 "*Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!*" The statement was so shocking, He repeats it twice. Again, in the next verse, "*Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*"

Jesus gives more space to this one beatitude than any of the other ones. And He personalizes it: this is the only beatitude that says "you". Now all the other beatitudes deal with the character of the Christian, this one He just sums it up and deals with the character of the world and how it treats the Christian who has the first seven characteristics in his or her life. He's saying happy and healthy are those who can handle rejection. He's saying happy and healthy are those whose beliefs are so strong that they can withstand any attack.

I want us to look at My Response to Harassment. Before we do, I want you to first notice the reality of it. It's going to happen. Notice He doesn't say if you're persecuted, if you're insulted, but "when you're persecuted". Circle that word. Be prepared. Don't be caught off guard. As the world gets more and more secular it's getting more and more hostile to Christianity. He doesn't say if you're harassed, He says "when you're harassed." That's the reality.

What are the reasons for harassment. The second part of verse 11, "*...because you are My followers.*" He's not talking about racial harassment, sexual harassment, being put down for being obnoxious. Sometimes people set themselves up as martyrs. They are irritating or they're stubborn or they're nose-y and no wonder people put them down. They are just obnoxious. Also, He's not talking here about the self-righteous Christian who is offensive in witnessing and blows everybody away -- "Turn or burn, you're going to die and fry. I'm so great and you're so bad and God's called me to tell you all your sins." And then the guy comes back and says, "I'm being persecuted". He's not being persecuted, he's being a jerk! And he's being a fanatic!

The fact is, the right reason for harassment is, "*No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also.*" (John 15:20). Jesus said that and He's saying the right reason for harassment is being like Jesus. Evil people don't like Jesus. They don't like to attack Jesus directly, so they attack His followers. The media is merciless on Christians -- putting them down and attacking them. The world crucified Jesus. And the world would still do it today. People become uncomfortable around goodness. They didn't like Jesus. They didn't like Him because the more light that's in your life the more it reveals the darkness in other people's lives.

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Law of life: The more positive you are, the more the negative people are going to hate you. 2 Timothy 3:12 *"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* It doesn't say "he might be" it says "he will be". If you want persecution and you're a student, go to any high school campus and say, "I'm a Christian and I'm committed to being a virgin until I get married" and see what they say about that and see if they don't laugh at you. Or be a businessman and say, "I'm not going to participate in that activity because I'm trying to please the Lord" and see what they say about that.

The world cannot stand anybody who is different. And Jesus didn't fit the mold. He wouldn't do what the Pharisees wanted Him to do. He wouldn't compromise. He wouldn't mold and conform. They had to either follow Him or kill Him. So they killed Him.

You say, "I don't need this message. Nobody ever hassles me about living for Christ." That tells you that you're no different than anybody else. He says all who live godly will be persecuted, harassed. If you're not being harassed it means there is no difference in your life.

**My Response to Harassment.** How do you handle harassment when you're going to be persecuted for your faith?

#### 1. Recognize the source.

Ephesians 6:12 *"We are not fighting against human beings, but against wicked spiritual forces..."* God is the enemy of the devil. If you're a parent, I can hurt you, but the better way to hurt you is to hurt your kids. If I hurt your kids that really hurts you. The devil cannot get at God, so he does the next better thing -- he hurts His kids. The Bible says in Revelations 12:10 *"Satan is the accuser of the brethren."* The person at work who's harassing you is not the real problem; recognize the source.

#### 2. Refuse to retaliate.

Romans 12:17 & 19 (Good News) *"If someone does evil to you, don't pay him back with evil... Never take revenge... let God's wrath do it."* Remember who the enemy is. The person attacking you is really just a pawn. They don't understand that they are being used by the devil. Jesus, in v. 11, lists three different kinds of verbal harassment. He says there are insults -- when people try to dishonor you or discredit you or say derogatory things about you. There is persecution -- mistreatment. Then He says, they will tell lies -- deceit and deception. The world loves to find fault with Christians. If a pastor stole some money or ran off with some other man's wife would it be in the news in the morning? If the bartender down the street did it, would it be in the news? The world loves to find fault with believers. If they can't find any fault -- if you walk blamelessly, with integrity -- they'll just make something up. They will insult you. They will mistreat you. And they'll make up lies about you. They are going to attack Christians.

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In the Bible Jesus was accused of being a drunk. They said He's a glutton and a wine bibber. That means He was a party animal! But Jesus never reviled back. He refused to retaliate.

### 3. Respond positively

Romans 12:21, "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*" Is that your normal reaction when you're put down? But you never get ahead by trying to get even. If you're always trying to get even you never get ahead.

When I was a child I teased my sister mercilessly. I learned a secret that once she started reacting to me, I was in control. That's true with any situation. Once you start reacting, who's in control? The person who is taking the initiative. So how do you respond positively?

Matthew 5:44 "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*" Is that easy? No. Unusual? Yes. Is that what God says to do? Yes. He says, "Don't react; respond positively." When people put you down, you build them up. When people hassle you, you just be nice to them. You do not retaliate. The moment you start retaliating, they are in control. One of the greatest principles of life that you need to learn is, You have control of your reaction. You cannot control the things that happen to you, you cannot control the things that people say about you. You cannot control the events, the persecutions, the hassles you'll get. But you can control how you choose to react. You can control how you choose to respond.

Respond positively. Love them. Pray for them. Pray for their good. Pray for God's will in their lives.

### 4. Rejoice over it.

v. 12 "*Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad.*" He's not saying rejoice in the pain. He says, When people put you down for your faith -- not because you're obnoxious or being pushy, but because you're being like Jesus, which means you'll be different -- He says don't complain, celebrate.

#### Why should you rejoice?

**1) It means that God's Spirit can be seen in my life.** If it couldn't be seen in your life nobody would be harassing you. It's an indication that people can see Jesus in your life.

I Peter 4:14 "*If you are insulted because of Christ, you are blessed, ... for God's Spirit rests on you.*" When people put you down because you're a Christian it means they see Jesus in you, God's Spirit in you. If I'm not being persecuted, I ought to ask, "Can anybody tell? What's wrong with me? Can anybody tell that I'm a believer?" The world did not love Jesus. He was perfect. Nobody can stand perfect people. It shows how imperfect all the rest of us are. Have you ever walked into a room and turned on the light and you jump back from it? Jesus was the light of the

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world. They recoiled. John says, *"Men loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil."*

It means God's Spirit can be seen in my life. If you're insulted because of Christ, you're blessed, because God's Spirit rests on you. Today, we have too many Lady Clairol Christians, "Only God knows for sure." Like secret agent Christians. Undercover believers. You don't know if they are really believers or not. They may say it and show up at church. They may have churchianity but do they have Christianity? They may have a religion but do they have a relationship? It's like the people who go around saying, "My witness is my life." Be serious! What an egotistical statement! "I'm so much like Jesus I can walk into a room and people will automatically fall down and repent!" Even Jesus had to tell them. You may walk around and be real nice and people will just think you're a boy scout! A nice moral person. You've got to tell them. We need audio-visual Christians who walk the walk and talk the talk. You've got to tell them and you've got to show them.

What if they outlawed Christianity, would there be enough evidence to convict you? If you were put on trial for being a Christian, could they prove it? Or would it just be circumstantial evidence?

**2) It means God can trust me.** The Bible teaches that when you are being persecuted, harassed, it means that God can trust you with it. Acts 5:41 *"The apostles were full of joy that God considered them worthy to suffer disgrace for Jesus' name."* Circle "considered them worthy".

We Christians in America know so little about persecution. We have it so easy. Yet around the world, thousands of Christians are martyred everyday. I was in a conference where I spoke in Amsterdam. They brought in 10,000 evangelists from around the world. We think of evangelist as the guy with the pompadour hairdo on TV. Evangelists in foreign countries often means he doesn't even have any shoes and he walks around from village to village spreading the good news. He may have five or six different churches that he is trying to nurture. Two-thirds of these 10,000 people who were there were from third world countries. In reports that we got back later, a number of them were killed when they returned to their country, just because they had attended the conference.

We don't live in that kind of world. But are we blessed? The Bible says that they were considered worth to suffer disgrace. If you've read anything about the church in Russia you'll know that the Christians there pray for the Christians in America. They say that the persecution has made them stronger believers. Christianity is like a nail, the harder you drive it the deeper it goes into the wood. There's tremendous growth in Korea right now. The largest churches are in Korea. The Korean church was built on the blood of martyrs. When the Communists invaded one of the stories I heard was that the prominent pastor and his family were taken. The Communists dug a big hole in the ground, put the husband, his wife and three kids in the hole. They then brought the whole city around. They said, "Now pastor, renounce your faith or we're going to bury your wife and kids alive." His kids started crying, grabbing his legs, "Daddy, don't let us die!" He was getting ready to renounce his faith and his wife put her hand over his mouth and wouldn't let him speak and told the kids to be quiet, "We get to die for the glory of God."

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Is that so bad? Are you going to die? Yes. Wouldn't it be better to die for a cause than to die for nothing? If you're going to die anyway, why not make it worthwhile? That is a privilege to die for Jesus Christ. Whenever you are allowed harassment and persecution it means God thinks you can handle it. And if there is no harassment in your life maybe God doesn't think you can handle it. That you're not a strong enough Christian.

**3) It is only temporary.** 2 Cor. 4:17 (Living Bible) *"These troubles won't last very long. Yet this short time of distress will result in God's richest blessing upon us forever and ever!"* Paul says, we don't look at the things that are seen, we look at the things that are unseen. The things that are seen are temporary. They're not going to last. The things that are unseen are permanent. Paul had an eternal perspective and he said, "I'm going to spend 70, 80 years at the max here on earth. But I'm going to spend thousands, millions of years in eternity reaping the rewards of what I did with my life for 60, 70 years. What's more important?" He says, Look at it from an eternal perspective.

When you get an eternal perspective all of a sudden all the cars, stereos, BMW's don't matter two bits. It's all going to burn up at the judgement. What is going to last is how I used my life now for the 70, 80 years and then I get to reap the rewards for millions of years. You will spend far more time on that side of eternity than you will on this side of eternity. Make your life count.

So what? So you get persecuted. So you get put down. Somebody laughs behind your back and calls you a Holy Joe, or a fanatic, or a Jesus freak? God's up there, checking it off, making records. It's only temporary. Like the guy who was asked his favorite verse in the Bible. He answered, "It came to pass."

So he says rejoice. Don't rejoice over the hurt! The goal of the Christian life is not persecution but to be like Jesus. If you're like Jesus it is inevitable that somebody is not going to like it.

### **5. Remember my reward.**

v. 12 *"Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward [not average, great] is your reward in heaven."* There are special honors reserved for those who experience persecution. Jesus says you are in good company: *"For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."* "You mean I might be considered in the same class as Isaiah and Jeremiah?" History tells us that every one of the 11 remaining disciples were martyred except John who died on the isle of Patmos. Everyone were killed, crucified, or tortured. Peter was crucified. He was crucified upside down.

There are going to be degrees of reward in heaven. We're not all going to be the same. There are levels of reward in heaven. The Bible says that there will be great reward for people who handle harassment with the right attitude. We read the verse that says, *"Store up treasures in heaven"*. One of the ways you store up treasures in heaven is by responding like Jesus would when people put you down. It's your attitude. And some of us are going to be pretty poor when we get up there.

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Romans 8:17 (Good News) *"Since we are God's children, if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share in His glory."* We're going to share in His glory? When I think of this verse I think of these big marques in Hollywood telling who's appearing. I can see these stars all over heaven that says "Now appearing for eternity Jesus Christ! Co-starring, Rick Warren ... " It says it! If we share in His suffering we will share in His glory. You have no idea what that involves. But it's better than you can imagine. Is it worth the little put downs at school when you consider what's going to happen for eternity? We're going to share in His glory!

Matthew 19:29 *"Whatever you give up for the Lord's sake here in the earth, He will restore a hundred fold in eternity."* That's 10,000% interest!

Why do we rejoice? Focus on the future rewards. Recognize the source. Harrassment is from the devil, not that person who is hassling you; it's a spiritual battle. You refuse to retaliate. Respond positively. Love them, pray for them. And rejoice over it because God's Spirit can be seen in your life. And He trusts you with persecution. It's only temporary anyway. The reward is going to far outweigh the inconvenience.

#### **6. Remain faithful.**

You persevere in doing what is right. I Peter 4:19 *"So those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."*

Underline "suffer according to God's will". That's not a theme you hear too often on television. What you hear on television is God wants you always to be happy, healthy, be a millionaire and if you're sick or suffering it's because you're sinning or you're out of God's will. The Bible says that sometimes suffering is God's will. That's the exact opposite of what the health and wealth gospel teaches.

Then it says that those who are suffering *"...should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."* Remain faithful, persevere in doing what's right. People can laugh at you until hell freezes over but it can't stop you unless you let it. A laugh never destroyed anybody. A put down never destroyed anybody. A rejection never destroyed anybody. Unless you let it.

The Apostle Paul was absolutely unstoppable. Nothing could stop the guy. In Acts he says, "I'm going to go back to Jerusalem." They said, "Don't you know there is a group in Jerusalem that have committed themselves to killing you. They've taken a vow before God that they're going to kill you if you come there." He said, "Big deal! A guy's got to die sometime. I'm going to Jerusalem."

What does it take to stop you? One little word of criticism? One little threat of criticism? Somebody in your office might think you're a weirdo because you read your Bible during the coffee break?

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I had dinner with a lay pastor in our church. He was telling me how, as a new Christian, he had a tremendous job making tons of money and was very successful. The company asked him to make an unethical decision. He wouldn't do it. So he had to leave the company. He was a brand new Christian. He left the company and he said, "I didn't know if God would take care of me or not. I supposed He eventually would." He went from two maids and a limo to having to moving in with a friend. Total slide. One extreme to the other. He was unemployed for nearly two years, because his specialty was so unique and his qualifications were so high nobody would hire him. This was a two year test! Because he refused to compromise on his conviction. He was a brand new Christian at the time. But he said, "I would not give in to pressure!" I admire that. But it doesn't matter whether I admire it or not. He's going to get the reward in heaven. Those two years of employment are nothing compared to sharing Christ's glory in heaven.

**1. What is your faith costing you?** In much of the world it's costing them their lives. We have it so easy here in America. We have air conditioned Christians. We know little of suffering. We don't have to sacrifice. We think our problems are big. But most of the world would love to have the problems of Saddleback Valley. Their problems are just matters of survival.

**2. At what cost would you stay faithful to Christ?** What could cause me to deny my faith? Most of us are not worried about persecution. It's convenience. If it's not convenient I don't want to do it. I heard a pastor on a tape one time say, "I want to thank you for braving the rain last Sunday." I got to thinking -- the sheer stupidity of that statement -- they braved the rain. That means they actually had to walk out of their warm house, under an umbrella, maybe 15 or 20 feet to get into their car with the heater turned on, of course, then drive to the church, get out of their car and maybe they walked 40 or 50 feet under their umbrella... That is sacrifice! It's just so weak! If it's not convenient forget it!

**3. How many people know you're a Christian?** How many people at work know you're a believer? Not that you go to church. How many of them know what you believe? Big difference. There are a lot of church goers. The number one reason that people don't witness is the fear of rejection. "What will they think if I tell them God loves them? What will they think if I say `Jesus Christ died for me and you?' What will they think if I invite them to Easter service?" Who cares what they think? If I see somebody in a burning house and it's falling down and they're inside, I loose all my fear of -- it's none of my business. I just run in there and get them. It becomes my business if they're dying. And there are people all around us, folks, who are dying and going to hell. 176,000 people will die and go to hell in the next 24 hours and we don't care. Every time I could snap my fingers 3 people die. That's why we have Saddleback church. People need the Lord. And we shouldn't care what other people think because we realize it's not really them, it's the devil behind it all. Those people need Christ. We don't want to be different. We want Christianity and culture too.

If you do all of these things you're going to be harassed and hassled. Never let anybody laugh you out of living for Christ! Jesus is very honest. He never watered down commitment. He says "There is a price to be paid for following Me." Popularity here on earth is never guaranteed by the gospels. But reward in heaven is guaranteed.

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Like the story of the old missionary who had spent his life in Africa. He had lost his wife and family to malaria. He had spent 60 years slaving away, nobody knew about it. He was coming home a broken man, his health was broken, he was dying. He didn't have friends in America. He happened to come home on the same plane that Eisenhower came home on from World War II. When the airplane landed in New York, they opened the door, rolled out the red carpet and there were bands and confetti and signs everywhere that said, "Welcome home, Ike!" Everybody was thrilled and shouting. The missionary came off the plane and saw all these people welcoming Eisenhower. He started getting a little discouraged. He said the devil said to him, "This is what you gave up. You lived for the Lord all your life and this is what you get. Nobody knows or cares. You're lonely. You're dying. You're old and sick." He said he started feeling sorry for himself and God just tapped him on the shoulder, "Son, you're not home yet."

You won't be in heaven five minutes before you say, "Why didn't I give more! Why didn't I serve more! Why didn't I love more! Why didn't I witness more! Why didn't I make my life count! Why did I waste it on things that didn't matter for ten years, much less for eternity."

How are you using your life? Are you using it to build your kingdom or God's kingdom?

I invite you to join the winning team. Woodrow Wilson: "I'd rather temporarily loose with a cause that will ultimately succeed, than temporarily succeed with a cause that will ultimately loose." It's very easy to be popular today. You just have to please everybody. Do whatever you can. But popularity doesn't last. When I was in high school I was the most popular kid on my campus. I was class president every year, student body president, in sports, had a rock band. Two years after I graduated I went back, walked onto that campus and nobody knew me. Talk about an ego blow! One minute the hero the next minute the zero. Stars we don't recognize today were on the cover of *People* magazine 6 months ago. It's not worth it. Get an eternal vision. See what really counts.

How do you get those rewards:

1. You commit your life to Christ. If you haven't done so you need to do that. It's not a religion. Commit your life to Christ.
2. You need to be baptized. That is the first statement to the world: "I'm not ashamed to say I am a Christian." A little boy asked me one time, "Pastor when can I get advertised?" That's what baptism is -- an advertisement for Jesus. I want the world to know what is on the inside of me. It's the wedding ring of the Christian life. I made a commitment to my wife: I had no idea what I was doing. I said "I do" -- two words that changed my life and I'm working out the implications for the rest of my life. She gave me an external symbol to remind me of an internal commitment. The ring doesn't make me married, it shows that I am married. Baptism doesn't make you a Christian, it shows that you are a Christian. I can't imagine being married and being ashamed of this ring. I can't imagine a person saying they're a Christian and not wanting to be baptized to say, "I want the world to know that I am a Christian." Jesus said "If you're ashamed of Me here on earth I'll be ashamed of you in heaven."

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3. You need to join a church and get involved. If not Saddleback, fine. But find a body and say "That's my church." Don't set on the sidelines anymore. Whether you have 5 years or 50 years left, make your life count.

Prayer:

What is your faith costing you? Have you got an air conditioned faith that is a matter of convenience? "If it's convenient I'll live for the Lord." At what cost would you stay faithful to Christ? I doubt that anybody will ever threaten you with your life here in America. They might but I doubt it. But there will be people who will threaten you with ridicule, or rejection, or snide remarks, snubs, or you won't get invited to certain activities, or people will talk behind your back, or they may say things about you or even maybe a glance. I've met a lot of Christians who are afraid of a glance of disapproval. How many people know you're a Christian? Are you a Clairol Christian? Only God knows for sure? Jesus said there is a price to be paid for following him but the rewards far exceed the price.

As we close out this series I'm going to ask you to sell out to Jesus Christ. In your life would you say, "God, I want to quit playing Mickey Mouse with You. You're going to be number one. Because this is the most important thing in my life and You are the most important person in my life. I want my life to count for the kingdom of God whether You give me five years or fifty years." If you've never committed your life to Christ do so now. Say, "I don't understand it all but I want You in my life and I want You to be the manager and call the shots." Some of you need to say, "I've never been baptized and made a public statement." You need to do it. You need to say "I'm going to be baptized at the next baptism and publicly say I'm not ashamed I'm a Christian." Some of you need to say, "I'm going to join a church. I'm going to get involved and not set on the sidelines and be a spectator but a participator. I'm not going to be a consumer, I'm going to be a contributor."

Jesus says, "*Happy is that person.*" Happiness comes, not from pleasures or popularity or possessions or power. Happiness comes from fulfilling the purpose for which you are made. You were made to know God and to love Him and to serve Him and fellowship with His church.

Father, make us strong to not be ashamed to live for You, tomorrow at work or at school. For we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.