

THE BEATITUDES

WOMEN'S COUNCIL BOOK 2023

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Introduction

The Mosaic law was a strict law designed for a stiff necked and undisciplined people. The law taught that merely following the laws of Moses would lead them to righteousness. Those who followed the letter of the law believed they were living uprightly and flaunted it overtly. The concepts of the Beatitudes were to teach us who we should be in our hearts. Jesus taught an inward vs. outward way of shaping our lives, so that our outer expression came from our inner thoughts, thus striving for moral perfection. Christ and His teachings were meant to do away with the old Mosaic Law and allow people to grow inwardly spiritual, as opposed to the outward showiness of the Sadducees and Pharisees. No longer was the concept “an eye for an eye” an acceptable form of behavior.

The Sermon on the Mount, Christ’s first large public teaching, is probably one of the most significant teachings of Jesus. Though it contains more than the Beatitudes, even the unchurched will have at least heard of the Beatitudes. The fact that Christ taught this lesson on a mountain has significance in that it teaches to rise to a higher level. The word Beatitudes means to be blessed, prosperous or abundant.

The Sermon on the Mount opened the understanding of a higher spiritual growth to live properly for the development of His Kingdom. The heart of Christ’s message was to change our inner selves to bring integrity to our souls. He desired that His people *would be blessed, prosperous, and abundant*. His guidance was meant to help us find peace within ourselves, an internal freedom, and have compassion and good will toward others. Through the development of our inner selves, we would become an outward light to others of His goodness and love. In the Book of Mormon, we also see Jesus teaching the same principles when He showed Himself to the House of Jacob here in the Americas. These attributes characterized the love of our Christ.

It is our prayer that this study will provide thoughtful meaning in your spiritual growth and endeavors.

By Linda Dunn

(Women’s Council Member)

Worship #1

Blessed Are They Who Shall Believe On Me

Scripture: “*Blessed are they who shall believe on me; and again, more blessed are they who shall believe on your words when ye shall testify that ye have seen me and that I am*” (Matthew 5:3).

Hymn: #374 “With a Steadfast Faith”

This is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, where we find the Beatitudes, recorded in the fifth chapter of the book of Matthew. Interestingly, this scripture is not found in the beginning of the Beatitudes in the King James Version (KJV). Although a similar scripture is found in John 20:29 when Jesus is speaking to Thomas, it is not associated with the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes.

I read this scripture, Matthew 5:3, repeatedly and thought and prayed about what I wanted to share for a worship lesson with you. As I mulled over this verse, I began to interchange the words believe on, with faith in, and then it all became pretty clear to me, FAITH. We must have faith; without faith we have nothing. “***Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen***” (Hebrews 11:1). We must place our faith in Christ Jesus alone.

Our belief on Him can also be called our faith in Him, and then we understand that this is now a personal issue of our heart. We must believe on Him, but how much greater is our faith when we believe because of someone else’s testimony of Christ who has shared that testimony with us. I think that is the way our faith begins. We believe because someone that we love has taught us, and shared with us, of the greatness of our God and the stories of Jesus and His gospel. I was visiting with a dear sister at church recently, and she told me about her young granddaughter who has a strong belief in and faith in Christ, and who wants very much to be baptized and to attend church regularly. This belief is largely because of the teaching and example of her sweet grandma and grandpa who have taught her and prayed for her and her siblings. This is frequently the beginning of our faith walk. Someone loves us. Someone prays for

us. Someone teaches us, we see that light of Christ in them, and our faith begins to grow.

Recently I have been watching *The Chosen*. If you aren't familiar with it, it is a series about the life of Christ, and it is unlike any other depiction that I have seen. It is wonderful and draws you in and explores what many of the characters that populate the New Testament may have been like. It looks at what the relationships within the disciple group might have looked like, their relationship with Jesus and with others, as well as telling the wonderful stories from the New Testament, frequently with a tie-in from the Old Testament.

As I have prayed for how to begin and where to go with this devotional, I was led back to a recent episode of *The Chosen* taken from the eighth chapter of Luke that deals with the woman with the issue of blood and the daughter of Jairus. I know these stories, and I know that you know these stories. However, the way they came to life watching them opened my eyes, and it was as if I was hearing and seeing them for the first time. The depiction was of the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years with no end, no help, being seen as unclean, being shunned by those around her, even those who loved her, being totally alone. She heard about this teacher who could heal, she had faith in Him. She believed that all she needed to do was to merely touch the hem of His garment, and she would be healed. And, she was healed immediately! ***“Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made you whole; go in peace”*** (Luke 8:49). She was healed by her total faith in Jesus Christ! She lived and practiced her faith. Talk about moving mountains!

When Jairus approaches Jesus, he has never met Him, he knows what he has heard recently of a miracle worker, and he knows the prophecy of a coming Savior. The Scriptures tell us that Jairus falls to his knees when he meets Jesus. In the episode of *The Chosen*, Jairus says, “I know you!” as he looks up into Jesus’ eyes. Because surely, he does know Him. The lessons he has been taught since childhood, the prophecies he has read, his faith in the coming Messiah all merge together and unite in this “man” Jesus, and Jairus is overcome. He believes. He has faith. And his daughter is healed, brought back from death, by Jesus because of the faith that Jairus possessed. Praise the Lord! May we all have a faith like this.

Prayer Thought:

Oh, Dear Father, Creator of the Universe, King of the Heavens and Earth, we bow our knees to you Lord. We are so grateful for your love and faithfulness to us. We praise you for the many blessings that you shower upon us. We thank you for the gift of your precious Son and your gospel. We thank you for our ability to hear and see your love and your gospel carried out in another person's life, and our ability to choose to believe and grow our faith in you. We pray that as we also live our lives, we would share our testimony, and that people would see you in the things that we say and do, and that might lead another person to believe and choose you. Amen.

By Kelli Woods

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Lesson #1

Blessed Are They Who Shall Believe On Me

Scripture: *“Blessed are they who shall believe on me; and again, more blessed are they who shall believe on your words, when ye shall testify that ye have seen me and that I am”* (Matthew 5:3).

“And again, more blessed are they who shall believe in your words, because that ye shall testify that ye have seen me, and that ye know that I am” (3 Nephi 5:48).

Thelona Stevens, in *Bible Studies*, says that this sermon was given to His followers, those that really desired to learn of Him. There were some disciples but doubtless many curiosity seekers and some critics.

This verse is not in the King James Version, and because of that we can consider it is important. It was removed by the apostate church and was placed back in the Scriptures by Joseph Smith, Jr., at the direction of God. It is in the Book of Mormon.

- What does this mean for us today?
- Is it important?
- Whose words will we follow?
- What are our actions?

We are at a critical time. There are many voices circling round us. Those voices, such as government leaders and media, will tell us they are speaking the truth, and we need to listen and believe. Or do we ask the Father above for his guidance, and do we listen?

In 2020, just 47% of Americans reported belonging to a church, synagogue, or mosque. That is down from 50% in 2018 and 70% in 1990. In 2020, during the COVID shutdown, people were not allowed to gather at church. Many did not return. Yet there are many of those unbelievers that are searching for community. They mention *community*. What do they mean by *community*?

Community, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is “a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests....”

It appears that community is wired into the hard drive of people, a search to belong to a group. There are those who are searching. Will we speak “our words” or the words of Christ? The words of Christ are not known by much of the U.S. population.

What is coming will require us to be strong spiritually, mentally, and physically.

What is Mass Formation Psychosis? This is when a large part of society focuses its attention to a leader(s). Followers can be hypnotized and be led anywhere, regardless of data proving otherwise. Anyone who questions the narrative is attacked and disregarded. We saw this in the 30s and climaxing in the 40s when Hitler rose to power.

Is it happening now? Are people listening to the “leaders” with complete devotion? By “leaders” I am referring to those daily voices that are shared by the media, such as the politicians, health organizations, etcetera. Are we listening to the “leaders,” or are we listening to The Leader? Can we speak the words of Christ to those who do not want to listen? No, but there will be those who are searching for truth.

Christ cannot come to a sinful people. If we accept that, then we will have to become free of sin. Then our words will be Christ’s words, and we can speak to those that are questioning what is in the world today. I hear it said that when Christ comes, he will

“straighten us up.” Is that true? Can we just sit idly by and wait, or is action required?

By Dawn Hoover

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Worship #2

Yea, Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit, Who Come Unto Me; For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven.

Scripture: *Psalm 73:21-26 and Matthew 5:5*

Hymn: #267 “There Is a Balm in Gilead”

Susannah gathered her remaining belongings in her hands and left her home for the last time. A single tear ran down her cheek as she turned to say goodbye to her children.

Years passed and Susannah’s heart still ached at the loss of her children on that fateful day. While others were preparing for the marriage feast for her daughter’s wedding, she tried to help any way that she could. After the wedding she went back to her brother’s home where she had been living and helping around the house.

Time passed and Susannah received a message that her daughter was expecting a baby! She was going to be a grandmother. She counted down the days and was ready to leave when the time came for the baby to arrive.

Finally, the message came. The baby was stillborn. She was devastated and heartbroken and felt she needed to walk. She wandered aimlessly, lost in her broken spirit. She walked until she came to the lakeside where a crowd gathered. Someone was speaking. It was a Rabbi.

He began to speak, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Susannah walked away in disbelief. “How can this be?” she said to herself. There is no blessing in a broken heart, but the Rabbi spoke with such authority. She kept hearing his voice and pondering on what he said. Then she thought of Job and Naomi who had experienced worse distress.

In the words of Asaph, “My heart and my flesh may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

Excerpts from *Real Bible Experience*

By Linda Watkins

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Lesson #2

Yea, Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit, Who Come Unto Me; For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

The first sermon that Matthew records, given by Jesus as He began His earthly ministry, began with what we call the Beatitudes. Jesus took his disciples further up in the mountain away from the crowd, to teach them the qualities that His servants and ministers must have. The very first quality He presented was being poor in spirit, in fact, it is the foundation of all the other graces. In order to do the work of the Master, a new attitude would be needed: humility before God and man. We must have a humble spirit in order to teach and give ministry to others. In order to represent our Savior, we must put on His cloak of humility. In doing so we are immediately blessed and happy, with a promise that the kingdom of heaven will be ours.

I chose this particular Beatitude because I was in the depths of humility, even suffering, if you will, the pangs of hell at one time in my life. Having come to a terrible recognition of my self-centeredness and sins, I cried to the Lord day and night, mourning over the life I had led and the sorrow it had caused my friends and loved ones. After many months, the Lord answered my prayers by giving me a beautiful and life changing dream. After that, I knew I was loved and forgiven by Him, and that He would stay with me and help me to become a handmaiden He could use in His service, one who would continuously strive to read, study, and obey His commandments. One who could learn and develop a Godly love for her fellow beings. I have also taken note of the many ways our family has been blessed, and I know He watches over them and is answering my pleadings in His own mysterious ways.

This is my interpretation of the poor in spirit: Someone who has come to the end of managing her own life and is ready to turn the job over to the Lord. As Matthew Henry puts it in his commentary on the Bible, “To come off from all confidence in our own righteousness and strength, that we may depend only upon the merit of Christ and the spirit and grace of Christ. That broken and contrite spirit with which the publican cried for mercy to a poor sinner, is this poverty of spirit. We must call ourselves poor, because (we are) always in want of God's grace, always begging at God's door, always hanging on his house.”

Jesus explained more of this poverty of spirit when He told his disciples, “***Give to him that asked of thee; and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away.***” And later He said, “***Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal.***” And in the same sermon, Jesus instructed, “***Wherefore, seek not the things of this world, but seek ye first to build up the kingdom of God and to establish his righteousness, and all these things [that your Father knows you have need of] shall be added unto you***” (Matthew 5:44; 6:19-20; 6:38).

As a child I began to read the Bible. I did not like what my Savior said about being easily entreated and sharing our worldly goods when someone asked. My younger sisters always wanted to borrow my clothes but did not take care of them like I did, and so returned them to me in bad shape. I wanted to mind Jesus, so I just let them keep the outfits they wanted to borrow. Needless to say, I didn't have many clothes left, but I believed this was what Jesus wanted. I also gave away most of my jewelry and tried not to walk and mince as the daughters of Zion, mentioned in Isaiah. He said they would have burning instead of beauty, and instead of a well-set hairdo, baldness (Isaiah 3:16-27). I certainly did not wish to lose my hair! I believe this attitude and way of life may have discouraged unneeded attention to myself growing up. I was never popular, but God sent me a few sweet humble friends. When I found the man God had chosen for me, he loved me just the way I was plain and poor. If I had only kept this humble attitude through my young

adulthood, I might have remained innocent and trusting through life's trials and cares.

The Lord did not tell us if we would be rich or poor in this world's goods. He told us to be happy with the blessings He would give us. Therefore, we are not to be proud of any wealth of situation, nor to complain if we do not have many worldly goods. But, we are to walk humbly before Him, calling on Him for our needs, and thanking Him when we have enough. ***“And now, I would that ye should be humble, and be submissive, and gentle, easy to be entreated, full of patience and long-suffering, being temperate in all things, being diligent in keeping the commandments of God at all times, asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal, always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive”*** (Alma 5:39-40).

A few years before retirement age, I had a terrifying dream in which I was slipping back into my old sinful habits and was about to be pulled into the murky water. I awoke panicking and fell to my knees. I begged the Lord to not let me break my covenant with Him and asked Him what He wanted me to do. He gave me a list of five things I must do: 1. Put God first, before family, self, house, and things. 2. Reject my wayward heart and be filled with His righteousness. 3. Give up pride of self, place, and belongings. All are God's gifts. 4. Go to the conference services today (I had not taken the day off from work as I should have). 5. Give up my job. Seek first the Kingdom of God. He knows our needs and will supply them. I struggled with the Spirit on that last one, but after a few months did give up my job. We have testimonies of how the Lord helped us survive until I was old enough for Social Security and Medicare; and the exciting jobs he had waiting for me to do, for His work.

Perhaps your grandparents or great-grandparents were survivors of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Or, you may have known people who lived through those times. It was a mystery to me how someone who apparently had enough and to spare, would use everything in the fridge, and never throw anything out. But when you find out what they had suffered through, it makes more sense. They would never again take anything for granted and would value all that the Lord provides through his bounty. There were many

during that time who lost their fortunes, businesses, bank accounts, etcetera, and not being able to make the adjustment from wealth to sudden poverty, tragically ended their own lives.

One of the greatest examples of a man poor in spirit, always contented with what the Lord gave him, was Job. A wealthy man, blessed in family and worldly goods, Job lost all. Suddenly his family, his wealth, and his good health were gone. Yet he continued to bless the Lord, ***“Then Job arose and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground and worshiped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord”*** (Job 1:20, 21). Through all his sufferings Job came to know the Lord even better and had a valiant testimony: ***“For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body; yet in my flesh shall I see God”*** (Job 19:25, 26). Job's friends accused him of having some hidden sins that had brought this “punishment” upon him, so Job examined his life before them and the Lord, finding only a life of humble service and obedience. Then in chapters 38-41 the Lord answers Job through the whirlwind with an amazing account of His miraculous creation, asking Job if he is qualified to give counsel to the Creator and Overseer of all of this. After Job's long-suffering, the Lord restored to him all he ever had, and more, allowing Job to live a long, joyful, and prosperous life.

When Christ restored His church in our days, He gave counsel through His prophet concerning our use of monetary blessings and how we can share what we have with others in need. ***“And, behold, thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support, that which thou hast to impart unto them, with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken”*** (D&C 42:8b). ***“Harmony and charity must prevail among all of those now called under the name of my Remnant Church. Further obedience to the Celestial Law and the Law of Consecration is a necessary requirement for the preparation of the bride”*** (D&C 151:5a).

WHO COME UNTO ME

As Jesus Christ walks among the churches today, He would say to us: *“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me”* (Revelations 3:17-20).

Jesus is always beckoning us to come unto him. *“Come unto me ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”* (Matthew 11:29). *“But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul”* (Deuteronomy 4:29).

We are blessed when we recognize our need for God, our utter dependence on Him, and come unto Him, reach out for Him, seek Him with our whole being. "If with all your hearts ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me. Thus saith our God." (No. 4 from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*). Finding our God is the greatest prize of life. The love of God is the greatest treasure. Lehi and Nephi both were given dreams in which they partook of the tree of life, and Nephi was told it represented *"the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things"* (1 Nephi 3:64).

Jesus, the very thought of thee with sweetness fills my breast,

But sweeter far thy face to see, and in thy presence rest.

No voice can sing, no heart can frame, nor can the memory find

A sweeter sound than thy blest name, O Savior of mankind!

O Hope of every contrite heart, O Joy of all the meek,

To those that fall, how kind thou art! How good to those who seek!

But what to those who find? Ah, this nor tongue nor pen can show;

The love of Jesus, what it is, none but who love him know. Amen

(Hymn 455, “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee” by Bernard of Clairvaux, translated by Edward Caswell.)

FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Now what about the promise that our Savior made to those who are poor in spirit? The poor in spirit are blessed and happy, for they are heirs of the kingdom of God. What can this mean? First of all, he who is contented is happy. Not superficially giddy, but deep down inside contented and happy. Happy to be alive, to be a child of the Almighty God! To be found in His graces, to be growing into the person God created.

“For I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness; I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God....And may the Lord bless you and keep your garments spotless, that ye may at last be brought to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets who have been ever since the world began, having your garments spotless, even as their garments are spotless in the kingdom of heaven, to go no more out” (Alma 5:33, 42).

Questions for discussion:

1. What is most important in your life?
2. What kind of treasures are you seeking?
3. Do you believe that God will provide your needs when you put His kingdom first?
4. How would you describe a follower or disciple of Jesus Christ?
5. What is the first Christian grace that Jesus taught his disciples?
6. Why?

By Diana Galbraith

~

Worship #3

And Again, Blessed Are They That Mourn; For They Shall Be Comforted.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Hymn: #57 “Abide with Me”

When my father passed away it seemed very sudden. Mom called the family and said that he had been taken to the emergency room with shortness of breath. Hours later we were informed that he had contracted COVID-19, and he would be transferred to a rehab center for treatment. The hospital was full at that time. This was on December 4, 2020.

You hear about “COVID Fog,” but you can’t understand it until you witness someone who is experiencing it. My father did. He thought my mother had abandoned him because she was unable to visit. They were not allowing visitors for patients with COVID. He would get very agitated, and the nurses would call Mom and have her talk to him. She was able to calm him down each time, but it would take thirty to forty-five minutes. This was very hard on both of my parents.

Dad seemed to be able to breathe better, but the “fog” kept getting worse. On Monday morning, December 7, 2020, my mother called us at 3:00 a.m. asking us to pray for Dad because he was really having a bad night. She was barely able to talk through her tears. She said she had told Dad when they had talked before he had gone to bed that she would be able to visit him that afternoon. He had responded that there would be no need. She called again twice more during that early morning. The nurses had called with an update and said Dad ate breakfast and seemed to be doing better, this was about 9:00 a.m. That afternoon, I received two more calls. The nurses had called with another update, Dad had refused lunch. And then only an hour later, Mom called again saying, the nurses had called and said that Dad had passed away at 3:00 p.m.

When I let my supervisor know what had happened, she told me to take off immediately, I was on bereavement time. Within four hours, I was able to go to Mom’s and help her deal with the details that needed to be taken care of after Dad’s passing. Not being able to say goodbye to my Dad was hard on me, but it was much harder on my Mom. She didn’t cry while I was helping her that week. She confessed that she had cried out her grief while Dad was in the nursing home. Every time the nurses had her talk to him on the phone, she cried afterwards.

Later that week, Mom told me it was a blessing that the Lord had taken Dad then. His Parkinson’s disease had started affecting

his ability to speak. As a minister and teacher, having the ability to communicate taken away from him would have been devastating.

It still hits me occasionally when I think of a joke he would have liked or about a religious question that I would have asked him. My father was one of those special people who had a wonderful way of explaining things. I know I will see him again in Zion, but I miss him dearly. Knowing he loved the Lord and sought to serve Him, gives me comfort that my father is now working on the other side of the veil.

By Ester Goodrich

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Lesson #3

And Again, Blessed Are They That Mourn; For They Shall Be Comforted

Scripture: *Matthew 5:6 and 3 Nephi 5:51*

As referenced above, in the New Testament and in the Book of Mormon, Jesus Christ says, “***And, again, blessed are all they that mourn, for they shall be comforted***” (Matthew 5:6). I have experienced this firsthand, as I am sure that many of you reading this have also. Isaiah 61:1-2 states: “***The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort those who mourn.***”

As we are admonished in the Scriptures, Jesus Christ was the example of how we should live our lives. Therefore, as He comforted those that mourn, we are admonished to help those in mourning. There are many types of mourning. Some are mourning for a loved one who has passed, some are mourning for an ability that they have lost, some are mourning for the loss of the steadfastness of a brother or sister, or even a house lost in a fire and so many other things.

However, I believe that Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount was specifically talking about those that are mourning the loss of a loved one; those who have lost a parent, a spouse, friend and even a child. We as a people are encouraged to share in the mourning to help those continue to grow their faith and their work for the Lord and for others.

When my husband passed away three weeks after our second house fire, I was in shock. The Lord sent the Holy Comforter which gave me strength to continue. It was a Friday, and I was heading back to the hotel where we were staying after my second appointment that day. I was crying so hard that I could not see to drive so I pulled off the road and began to plead with God for strength and guidance in what else I could do to help Ron with his pain. I heard an audible voice say, "There is nothing else you can do." Then the Holy Comforter flowed over me and through me like a waterfall. I was at peace, and I was reminded that Ron had asked for administration the night after the fire. I was reassured that it was in God's hands.

That Spirit stayed with me that night as I got Ron ready for bed and as I got up to take him to the bathroom after he woke me around 2:00 a.m. I got him into the bathroom, and he asked me to give him a minute. I couldn't have been out of the room for more than two minutes, but when I stepped back in, he was still sitting in the wheelchair, but he was unresponsive. The ambulance came and the paramedics tried to revive him, but they could not.

That Saturday, the comforting Spirit helped me to make the hardest phone call I had ever made to call his mother to tell her what had happened. The next day was communion Sunday. The Holy Spirit gave me the strength to go to church. During that service one of the priesthood up front leaned over and talked to the presider. He then went to the podium and gave this message: "I am compelled by our Heavenly Father to do something which I have never done before and that is to bring to you a word from our Lord. I would invite you to gaze upon His picture before us rather than upon me. But He would have you to know that He is pleased with each of you for the choice that you have made to come to Him, to come to His table. He would have you to know that He is mindful of your situation, each one, even the hairs of your head. He would have you

to know that His promises are true, that you have heard His word from His servant this morning, and He would invite you to take heed to that word and that council and take it with you and to walk in the light as He is in the light. For those of you that are wounded and are hurting, He would have you to know that He holds you close. He hears every prayer before you speak and answers while you are yet speaking. He would have you to know that there is nothing you can do that could ever make Him stop loving you and that as you have come to His table and allowed Him to wash you clean, you are clean indeed. Go from His house free in the knowledge that you have indeed been redeemed and He will go with you and before you. Amen.”

We must learn from the example of Jesus Christ and strive to become like Him, to learn about Him and His gospel so that we will know how to comfort those who mourn. By studying and learning from the example given by Him, we can gain the knowledge of how He would react in every situation. Getting to know our Savior on a personal level can help use to understand what He would have us do and how He would have us “comfort those who mourn.”

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

By Sara Reynolds

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Worship #4

Blessed Are The Meek; For They Shall Inherit The Earth.

Scripture: “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*” (Matthew 5:7).

“*For the meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace*” (Psalm 37:11)

Campfire Song: “Spirit of the Living God”

Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me. (repeat)

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.

Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me.

In these scriptures and the song, we are reminded that meekness is all about yielding to the divine will of our Savior and God the Father. When I ponder on the meaning of meekness, I am reminded of the trials of trying to rebuild our house after fires.

Yes, my husband and I experienced two house fires within the space of two years. The first was an electrical fire on July 4, 2010. After the fire, we relied on our own understanding and rebuilt, getting a personal loan, and using contractors referred to us by colleagues. However, during the rebuilding process my husband, Ron, experienced some physical challenges that led him to ask for administration. He was not a member of the church, but I explained the ordinance and the potential benefits. He experienced instant relief of his pain during his administration. This led him to start studying the Restoration gospel to try to learn how it was so much different from other churches.

We moved back into the house on Labor Day weekend of 2011. It was less than six months later that we experienced the second fire. February 11, 2012, I received a call from the fire department that our house was on fire and my husband was in an ambulance. I had only left the house 30 or 45 minutes earlier to get groceries. I rushed home to find the fire department clearing the smoldering house of all flammable or explosive items. Ron refused to go to the hospital. We requested that the fire department contact the Salvation Army for assistance and were provided a hotel room for a few days (we had not been attending any church regularly for years). After arriving at the hotel room, Ron asked for administration because he had been caught in the fire and had smoke inhalation, and that was compounding his other health issues.

He received administration that evening. The next three weeks were a blur of work, taking care of Ron, and visiting his family (they had not spoken in seven years).

Just a month before the fire, I had started working with a hotel owner, which was the first of many blessings to follow as Ron and I turned to God for direction in the rebuilding of the house. Ron's health continued to decline, and he passed away exactly three weeks after the fire (refer to the "Blessed are those who mourn" lesson for this testimony).

As the clean-up effort progressed, it was my fellow church members who taught me what meekness was all about. Before this trial, I would never have requested assistance in the clean-up effort from the saints. When the congregation that I was now attending learned that I needed help in the clean-up effort, they graciously scheduled a workday, and several of the saints came out, cleaned up, and helped fix the roof so the weather would not make things worse.

I was led to talk to my neighbor about renting his basement apartment. This was a special blessing as I was able to go over to the house daily and pray on bended knee for guidance in the restoration effort. It took many months for me to sufficiently surrender my will to my Savior's. When I did, I was blessed to be led to the contractors and investors that would result in the total restoration of our house.

Just a couple of examples: I was referred to an electrician in the church that needed some tax work, and he graciously wired the entire house in exchange for my tax services. I was referred to a tile mason that needed some tax work, and he graciously tiled the tub and backsplash for the bathroom vanity and the kitchen. They bought all the materials and performed most of the work with some help from my son Michael (that is another testimony that has been shared in *Moments with the Master*).

It is such a blessing to be able to wake up in a house that God built. That is the only way that I can describe it because of testimony after testimony of how each contractor was identified and performed the work with such skill. The house has been blessed and consecrated.

I praise God for the trials that humble us and strengthen our faith.

By Sara Reynolds

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Lesson #4

Blessed Are The Meek; For They Shall Inherit The Earth.

In the Sermon on the Mount, in both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon, Jesus Christ says, “*And blessed are the meek,*

for they shall inherit the earth.” But who are the meek? Why will they inherit the earth?

Webster’s 1828 dictionary defines meek by the following:

1. Mild of temper: soft; gentle; not easily provoked or irritated; yielding; given to forbearance under injuries. “*Moses was very meek, above all men*” (Numbers 12:3).
2. Appropriately, humble in an evangelical sense; submissive to the divine will; not proud, self-sufficient or refractory; not peevish and apt to complain of divine dispensations. Christ says in Matthew 11:30, “*Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest to your souls.*” And in Matthew 5:7, “*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*”

Meek, or some form of the word, is used 66 times in the Scriptures. Charity is used 70 times in our Scriptures. Meekness can help us develop charity within us, for charity and meekness are a lot alike.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 we read what charity is: “*Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*” If you read this carefully, you will see that what charity is describes the meaning of meekness also. From this we can understand that you can be meek without having charity, but you cannot have charity without being meek.

From the *Wycliff Bible Dictionary*, meekness is an inward attitude of submission to God and His word, From James 1:21, “*Receive with meekness the word.*”. When we receive the word with meekness, we receive it with the Spirit of God.

Meekness does not mean weakness; rather it means controlled and bridled strength. Meekness is submission without struggle or a holy gentleness. This is an example of the giving up of self or personal will, to the divine will. Thus, the meek are extolled in the Beatitudes. See Matthew 5:5 (King James Version) or Matthew 5:7 (Inspired Version).

In Matthew Henry's commentary on the Bible, we read that Christ began the Sermon on the Mount with blessings for hereunto we are called that we should inherit the blessings. These blessings (blessed are) are designed to remove the discouragements of the weak and poor who receive the gospel. It is designed to invite souls to Jesus Christ. It makes a way for His law (the gospel to enter) into their hearts and so we might know what to expect from Him.

The meek shall inherit the earth. The meek are like Christ, and because they are, they are endowed with the life of Christ (eternal life). "Inherit the earth" means that they have happiness here, which we can also receive. The meek can experience that "peace that passeth understanding" while still living on this earth. They will be able to receive a greater portion of the Holy Spirit. The meek are those that are eligible to receive celestial glory. The earth will pass away and a new one will be created for those who have attained the celestial inheritance, and they will dwell with God the Father and Jesus Christ throughout eternity.

"Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" is also found in Psalm 37:8. In fact, this whole Psalm dwells on meekness: ***"Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him; fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; fret not thyself in any wise to do evil."*** Throughout the rest of the Psalm the Lord tells us what the blessings of this nature can be. ***"The Lord knoweth the days of the upright; and their inheritance shall be forever. They shall not be ashamed in the evil time; and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed. Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell forevermore. For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved forever; but the seed***

of the wicked shall be cut off. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.”

Throughout the Scriptures there are many examples of those who were meek. David was a man after God’s own heart. He was not perfect, but he desired to serve the Lord. Moses walked and talked with God but was very meek. Neither of these men were considered weak either physically or mentally. Job learned to be meek through the trials that the Lord allowed him to endure. Nephi, the son of Lehi, Helaman, Alma, Ammon, and the brother of Jared, all from the Book of Mormon, are examples of men who were meek. We also have examples of women who were meek: Queen Esther, Ruth, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, among others.

How can we become meek? First, we must study the Scriptures diligently, so that the word of God is written upon our hearts. Second, we must humbly and patiently ask in prayer and meditation that the Lord will grant us understanding and wisdom. Third, we must be willing to give up our own will to be able to do the will of the Father. Fourth, we must be always willing to do the work that the Lord has called us to. But that is just the beginning. Each of us brings our individual talents to the work. Each of us has gifts that the Lord can use to spread His light to the world. To become meek, we must submit ourselves totally to the will of God, and commit our whole lives, our resources, our time, our talents, and everything we are to the service of our God. This is a lifelong commitment that will take time and continual effort. Do we want to be able to live eternally with God and Jesus Christ? The time to start is now.

Questions:

1. What are the different definitions of meek or meekness?
2. How are charity and meekness alike? How are they different?
3. Give different examples of those who were meek in the Scriptures.
4. What is the opposite of meekness?
5. Psalm 37 mentions ways to exercise meekness. What are they?
6. What is the first step to understanding meekness?

By Ester Goodrich

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Worship #5

And Blessed Are They That Do Hunger And Thirst After Righteousness For They Shall Be Filled With The Holy Ghost

Scripture: *“And blessed are all they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost”*

(2 Nephi 11:83).

Hymn: #416 “Gentle Shepherd”

This scripture in the book of Matthew touches my heart, as I have experienced the hunger and thirst one dark time in my life. This is a testimony of a woman who has been baptized twice, but only confirmed a member of Jesus’ church once.

At age 12, I joined the Christian Church, as that was the church my parents were affiliated with. When God reached down and touched my heart and ministered to my hungry soul, my life changed, and the happiness I had prayed for and longed for came to me when I was confirmed a member of the RLDS Church in Independence, Missouri. I was confirmed a member of God’s church here on earth.

Jesus Christ, the gentle shepherd, has been leading me to the knowledge and peace that only He has for my life. I believe ever since the day I was born, events in my childhood, adolescence, and adulthood gave me evidence that the Holy One of Israel, God Almighty, loved me then, and still loves me today.

That blessing of eternal love is extended to all His children and is His promise if we believe and keep His commandments. During the times in my life when I try to do it my way, it does not work so well. As God’s children, we daily need to ask for guidance and direction, repent from our sins and ask for direction from God in our daily activities and decision making. He hears our prayers, and the hunger and thirst for righteousness will result in happiness.

Our lives are full of all different kinds of decisions we make on a daily basis. God gives us agency to choose Him and His ways or choose a path that leads us away from Him and into unhappiness and grief. We are to teach our children to make right choices to find peace and happiness, and we can see it in their bright eyes and

countenances when they choose Jesus. Our right choices make God happy, and He wants us to be happy every day. Choose God today. There is no other that can help us find our way!

By BJ Thompson

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Lesson #5

And Blessed Are They That Do Hunger And Thirst After Righteousness For They Shall Be Filled With The Holy Ghost

Scripture: *“And blessed are all they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost”* (Matthew 5:8 and 3 Nephi 5:53).

Have any of you hungered for food? All of us at one time or another have made the statement, “I’m hungry.” Has anyone of you wondered why God made us so that we need to eat two to three times a day? I have done both, but years ago while pondering on why we need to eat more than once a day, the thought came to my mind; it’s a similitude to feeding upon the Word, needing nourishment, physically and spiritually. Where would we be if we only were required to eat meat (food) once a month. If eating physically is a similitude to feeding upon the Word, then where would our spirituality be? Lacking? I would say so.

We can get ourselves something to eat if we’re hungry, but in order to feed on the Word we must also get ourselves *to* eat. If we hunger for righteousness, then we must feed upon the Word. Do you rise up in the morning and read your Scriptures? That’s wonderful, and so you’ve gotten a taste of God’s food to start your day. Is that the end of it for the day? You don’t need any more of God’s food for the day? Or for the rest of your day are you about God’s work? Are you singing hymns, helping someone out, feeding a hungry child, involved in a Bible study class, attending church services, visiting with your fellow saints? This all constitutes being hungry for righteousness. And throughout your day are you receiving God’s blessings? Have you stumbled upon a dilemma and don’t know a way out? Did you call upon God to lead you? If so,

He did, didn't He? For those who are hungry for righteousness, He will fill them with the Holy Spirit.

Have you found a friend, neighbor or co-worker who seems to be struggling? That is a person who is hungry for righteousness, but doesn't know how to get fed. Suggest to them that they manage to feed themselves a couple times a day on God's Word. To receive the hope and blessings that God has to offer, they must feed on His Word several times a day, and He will then pour out His Holy Spirit upon them and they will receive blessings they never imagined. Your answer to them is not counseling, but rather sharing how they can turn to God for their answers. Our counseling suggestions may not be what God would want for them. Leave the counseling to God and give them comfort and hope. God will take care of the rest.

In understanding this Beatitude, we have to realize that the key word is *hunger*. To hunger is to have a *passion*; an *earnest*; a *desire*; a *need* that your soul be filled. As documented in Matthew Henry's Commentary pp 1220–1221, v IV, "...We must truly and really desire them and importunate; 'Give me these, or else I die They are appetites that return frequently, and call for fresh satisfactions. The quickened soul calls for constant meals of righteousness, grace to do the work of every day in its day....'" It is only God who can fill a soul.

It's not a casual thought. It's not getting up, opening your Scriptures, spending 10 to 30 minutes in them and then walking away with the thought, "Well, that is done. Now, on with my day." Hungering is a *need* to know more, to learn more, to absorb what is written and to fulfill your life, to achieve righteousness. By fasting, studying, and praying, you are filling your soul with righteousness and, when doing that, you are filled with the Holy Spirit. The feeling is nothing like our everyday "run errands" type of feeling. You feel surrounded by God and His Holy Spirit, and it lifts your soul to a new dimension.

So many people in this world, in your environment, do not know how to achieve this inner peace and so many blessings are withheld from them. It is your responsibility to share this experience with them and not keep it to yourself. Here is an odd example: Do you want to be, on the day Christ returns, standing on a high boulder with your arms outstretched singing His praises while a number of

your friends and relatives are standing at the bottom of that boulder asking, “Why did you keep this knowledge all to yourself? Why didn’t you share with us? We have been left empty and you had this all along?”

Acts 10: 34-35

2 Nephi 8: 48

Questions:

1. When someone is “crying on your shoulder” about a dilemma in their life, what can you do to help them find their answers? If they tell you that praying doesn’t work, do you have an experience you can share with them as to how God helped you out of a trying time? Give an example of your testimony.
2. How do you go about your week feeding on God’s Word?
3. How can you find the hunger for righteousness? Have you had it and lost it, or have you never had it?

By Cheryl Blanton

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Worship #6

And Blessed Are The Merciful For They Shall Obtain Mercy

Scripture: “*And blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy*” (Matthew 5:9)

Hymn: #502 “Lord, Thy Mercy Now Entreating”

When I was newly married, a whole 18 years of age, I was told by my new father-in-law that if I was old enough to marry his son, then I was old enough to make a large Thanksgiving dinner at their home for all of us ... alone! This took me by surprise, but after discussing my feelings with my wise and loving mother, I realized the reasoning behind this. Terry’s father was under considerable stress because Terry’s mother had been ill for many years, therefore Russell had often had to do the planning and cooking on the holidays. He wanted a reprieve!

Though I was a bit overwhelmed, I was also excited about trying to do as I had been asked. Terry's sister was my age but had been the fill-in cook for one too many occasions, and backed off, except to help with some of the dishes after the meal.

I went right to work to plan the meal, get the food needed, and on Thanksgiving Day, I arrived early enough to butter and place the turkey in the oven and work on making Terry's mother's recipe for stuffing. While reading the recipe, I realized that one of the ingredients called for were giblets and neck meat. The turkey had not come with the neck and the giblets. While everyone else visited and judged me, or napped and watched parades, I peeled potatoes, made gravy, opened cranberry sauce, made Waldorf salad, and cooked the broccoli. There were homemade rolls, I had made the day before, along with two pumpkin pies and whipped cream.

I thought that I had done quite well, but after the prayer over the meal, while everyone prepared their plates, Terry's dad said, "Cindy, when are you going to learn that you only need to peel and cook one potato per person?" He then criticized the need for Waldorf salad, saying that they only needed simple dishes around their house.

I tried to consider Russell's stress level and overlooked the comment as best I could. My reasoning had been that at our house we always made extra because we enjoyed the leftovers, and I thought Terry's parents might enjoy them for a hot turkey sandwich later. Then Terry's mom piped up. She didn't like that I hadn't put giblets and enough butter in the stuffing and that I had made the pumpkin custard pies with light pumpkin custard and a thin crust instead of the standard version, which she was used to enjoying.

I was sorry it was not to their liking, but I took heart in knowing that I had received wonderful comments about the pie from my family in the past because it had less crust and a lighter, less sugary filling.

Once again, I tried to consider her illness and her needs at that time, yet I felt discouraged after working so hard. I had always been taught to consider the needs of others and to try to understand their actions and comments, attempting to be merciful, and forgiving attacks on my abilities. Yet I was struggling with doing this. I had not anticipated being treated this way at all. I was raised with a lot of positive reinforcement.

In retrospect, I should have been more assertive and spoken up to defend myself after working so hard to please them. But now I realize that no matter how hard anyone tries to be accepting and to forgive others, until we are accepting and merciful to ourselves first, we will never understand how to be merciful towards others. The facts were, until Terry's dad accepted himself as a good husband, caretaker, worker, and servant of God, and until his mom accepted herself as a loved child of God, though she was incapacitated by her illness, or until I accepted myself as a good daughter-in-law, who was really trying her best, none of us could find mercy in our hearts nor true forgiveness and acceptance of the others... until... *we had mercy for ourselves first!!* This is how it is with God's love and mercy... *He loved us first*, so that we can learn to love ourselves, and others and *most importantly ... Him.*

Over the years, I must confess, deserving or not, I have received other abuses. But through God's grace, I have learned to love myself and to try to see where others are coming from. I have considered that some may have wanted to help me at times, in a way that I was not accustomed to... with kind of a tough love... something I had never really thought that I needed. But maybe I did! I try not to hold onto these negative memories except to learn from them, and I do not want to draw a nasty picture of Terry's family because they were delightful in so many ways. I just wanted to use this true analogy to help some who may still need to learn the true meaning of mercy, love, and acceptance to come to a better understanding of their natures.

We all have different circumstances where mercy is needed in our lives. We all need to be forgiven of shortcomings. For example, these might be trying to get along better with a new in-law, a need to forgive a co-worker for a mistake, a better understanding of a fellow saint, or a need for God to be merciful to us in our many trials and mistakes, etcetera.

I have learned to make better stuffing and to use less potatoes, *but I still love my pie* and will continue to make it the way I was shown. *The best thing I have learned is to make peace... peace with myself, peace with others, the peace that comes with having mercy for all.* Praise God who is all merciful! For truly, when we choose to use and accept mercy, we are blessed.

Prayer Thought:

Lord, please help us all to be merciful, even as Thou, O Lord, art merciful. Give us love, understanding and forgiveness in all circumstances. Show us how to love more fully ... free of judgement and full of Thy love and mercy.

By Cindy Patience

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Lesson #6

And Blessed Are The Merciful For They Shall Obtain Mercy

Scripture: “*And blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy*” (Matthew 9:14).

One day I sent a very large check to a bank to pay for some very expensive hearing aids. Later I received a bill for these hearing aids. I discovered that I had sent the check to the wrong bank. Someone had cashed the check, and I still owed for the hearing aids. This was very painful for me, as I felt I could not pay for them again. However, I sent another check to the correct bank and prayed mightily about the problem. Many weeks went by, and I then believed that I had paid twice for the hearing aids. I just left the problem in God’s hands, and He showed great mercy toward me. I opened the mail one day to find a check for the same amount I had originally paid. No one took credit for this, but Almighty God demonstrated great mercy, and prayers of thankfulness went to heaven.

What is this God like? “*The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great mercy.*” (Psalm 145:8).

Jesus taught us in Matthew 9:14, “*I will have mercy and not sacrifice, for I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.*” He demonstrated this in the story of the Good Samaritan. He taught that the Jewish man and the Levite passed by the injured man. But the Samaritan, who was supposed to be an enemy, had great mercy and cared for the injured man.

We have many things in life for which we need to be very thankful. One such activity is the act of mercy, for the mercy demonstrated by Christ is not in small quantity. His mercy lasts forever. ***“Praise ye the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever”*** (Psalm 106:1).

Are we willing to show mercy all the time, or is it sporadic behavior? God told Abraham He would extend mercy if there were ten righteous people in Sodom, but they were not to be found so God sent angels to take Lot, his wife, and two daughters by the hand and lead them away before He burned the city, such a merciful act. Genesis 18:16.

Noah and his wife, and three sons and their wives, were the only people saved through the mercy of God when He saw the necessity of covering the earth with a great flood. Noah found grace, or mercy, in the eyes of the Lord, for Noah was a just man.

Joseph of Egypt was sold into slavery by his brothers, but the Lord showed him mercy in action. He put him into a position of great responsibility. Likewise, Joseph showed mercy to his brothers who sold him. Mercy is shown here as forgiving iniquity and transgression. Genesis 45:5.

How do we obtain this mercy from God since we are all sinners? ***“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”*** (Romans 3:23).

We have been told many times that we will receive mercy when we repent of our sins. ***“And now, surely whoso repenteth shall find mercy. And he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved”*** (Alma 16:13).

Mercy needs to be part of our everyday lives. God sees all the acts of our living as He comprehends all things. ***“He is a merciful Being even unto salvation to those who will repent and believe on his name”*** (Alma 14:124).

In our desire to be merciful as Christ is, we can take onto our souls acts of charity, clemency, forbearance, lenience, grace, kindness, and love. Always show your enemies mercy because it makes you a better person. ***“And blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy”*** (3 Nephi 5:54).

When we are alone, away from others, we can turn to prayer, petitioning mercy from the Lord. One prayer could be such as,

“Thou art merciful O God, for thou hast heard my prayer, even when I was in the wilderness” (Alma 16:178).

However, we must always be sure that we turn our hearts to God so that He hears us. Turning our thoughts to man will avail us nothing. We are told, ***“Thou art merciful unto thy children when they cry unto thee to be heard of thee and not of men; and thou wilt hear them”*** (Alma 16:181).

God will hear our prayer when we truly repent of our sins as long as we live. Alma preached repentance when he said, ***“And now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved”*** (Alma 16:135).

Sin entered the world with the disobedience of Adam and Eve, so God issued a proclamation that all men must go through death, but God initiated the plan of mercy by sending His Only Begotten Son to give His life upon the cross and bring about the resurrection. Oh! The mercy of God to do that for us, who are sinners. Alma told King Noah, ***“And now the plan of mercy could not be brought about, except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also”*** Alma 19:97).

Jesus showed great acts of mercy while He was on the earth, even during His crucifixion He showed mercy to the thief on the cross, and He made provision for His mother when He turned her over to John. Even while He was in agony, He could think of others. John 20:25-27.

We, therefore, must become a repentant, merciful people. Jesus teaches that whatever weakness you have, whatever sin you struggle with, all God asks of you is that you come before Him and ask for His mercy. All He requires of you is a repentant heart.

It is never too late to posture your heart to receive the depths of mercy and love your Father longs to give you. The price of His mercy is a humble heart because humility is the key that unlocks the depths of your soul to receive the free gift of mercy and grace. Obtain mercy at the throne of grace. Hebrews 4:16.

1. Mercy is forgiving iniquity and transgression.

2. Mercy endureth forever.
3. Mercy is kindness.
4. Mercy is an act of God.
5. Mercy requires repentance.
6. Mercy requires that we believe on His name.
7. Mercy requires prayers to God and not depending on man.
8. Mercy requires that we endure to the end.
9. Mercy brings healing.

Questions

1. How long will God's mercy last?
2. What does mercy forgive?
3. What will we show if we are merciful?
4. What is the most important act to obtain mercy?
5. What do we need to believe to obtain mercy?
6. How long do we need to be merciful?
7. What do we need to do to obtain mercy?
8. What does mercy do for our souls?
9. For whom do we need to show mercy?

By Erlyne Gress

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Worship #7

Blessed Are The Pure In Heart; For They Shall See God

Scripture: *“And blessed are all the pure in heart; for they shall see God”* (Matthew 5:10).

Hymn: #478 “Blest Are the Pure in Heart”

The Zion's Hill Congregation has been watching *The Chosen* series one Sunday afternoon a month. This video series is about the life of Jesus and draws from the New Testament. It has been so eye opening to watch this depiction of Christ and His disciples and then discuss our thoughts after each episode. It has been a blessing to me to listen to the different views of those who show up and share in the discussions.

We don't usually have a big crowd, so chairs are set up in the fellowship hall with the lights turned down, and we watch the videos projected on the wall. I am not even certain which episode we were watching this particular afternoon when I excused myself because I had started coughing. When I returned, my seat had been taken and there were no chairs left, so I just stood in the back until the video finished. As I was standing, I was overcome with deep feelings of overwhelming sadness (I'm not sure why). For whatever reason, I felt very emotional and alone. I prayed for this feeling to leave me. I knew I was among my church family, so there was no reason for these feelings.

As the prayer was starting to conclude our evening together, a young woman approached me and put her arm around my waist. She was very petite, shorter than myself, and pulled me to her in a side hug as we listened to the prayer. She smiled up at me after the prayer and asked if I was okay. What a pure, sweet spirit shone from that young sister as she looked at me in kindness. Those sad feelings that had engulfed me just minutes before were gone. I quickly realized the Lord had sent this special handmaiden to bless me with her care and concern. It was a simple act, but one I needed at that specific moment. This young woman has the gift of love and compassion as I've seen her with others in offering her kindness and warmth when someone is feeling down.

When I volunteered for this writing assignment, I prayed and asked about what I should write for the worship. This experience came to my mind quickly, and I felt that it was what I should share. I wondered at first if it was too simple, but the love of God is simple. Loving others and showing them we care for them is one of the ways to become the pure in heart so that we can see God.

By Erin Gates

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Lesson #7

Blessed Are The Pure In Heart; For They Shall See God

“The first time we read the Beatitudes they appear to be a simple and beautiful statement. Mild and beautiful principles for other worldly people, but not much use for our modern world. We soon find that they contain the dynamite of the Holy Spirit. They explode like spiritual time bombs when circumstances require them to do so. They rip, tear, and revolutionize all our ideas of life” (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* by Oswald Chambers).

We aren't called to apply the Beatitudes literally, but to allow the life of God to slip into the subconscious mind, then at some point circumstances will arise in which Christ's statements emerge. Then we must decide if we will accept this spiritual revolution that will be produced if we obey them.

The motive that underlies these precepts is the love of God. If you read the Beatitudes with your mind fixed on God, you will realize the neglected side. “Their meaning in relationships to people is so obvious that it scarcely needs stating, but the aspect to God is not so apparent” (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* by Oswald Chambers).

There is a method of interpreting the teachings of Jesus. It is the spirit of Jesus in the heart of the believer applying Jesus' principles to the circumstances in which the believer is placed.

“***Be transformed by the renewing of your mind,***” says the Apostle Paul, “***that you may prove what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God***” (Romans 12:2).

To understand the Sermon on the Mount, you must have the mind of its preacher, Jesus. This knowledge is available to anyone who will receive the Holy Spirit. Luke 11:13, John 20:22, and Acts 19:2–6.

We must know Jesus first as a Savior before His teachings can have any meaning for us. Imagine coming to men and women of defective lives and hearts and telling them to be pure in heart. What is the use of giving us an idea that we cannot possibly attain. We are happier without it.

If Jesus is only a teacher, all He can do is tantalize us by setting a standard that we can't come anywhere near achieving. But

if, being born again from above, we know Him first as a Savior. We know that He did not come only to teach us. He came to “make” us what He teaches us we should be. The Sermon is a statement of life the way we will live when the Holy Spirit is having its way with us.

Purity is not a question of doing things right, but of the doer being right on the inside. Purity is not innocence; innocence is the characteristic of a child. Innocence can give the appearance of purity. But the child has limited experience in decision making. Men and women ought not to be innocent, they should be tested, tried and pure.

Jesus demands that the heart of his disciples must be utterly pure and unless He can give us His disposition, His teachings simply tease. But if Jesus can give me His own disposition of holiness, then I can begin to see how I can actually be pure. Jesus is both the sternest and gentlest of saviors.

The good news is not only that Jesus died for my sins, but He gave Himself for me that I might give myself to Him. God cannot accept goodness from me. He can only accept my badness and He will give me His solid goodness in exchange. 2 Corinthians 5:21.

The pure in heart are those whose whole life, public and personal, is transparent before God and others. Their very heart, including their thoughts and actions, are pure and unblemished by anything corrupt. You are a clean slate. You will know as a disciple that Jesus has changed your life when certain circumstances put you to the test. Rather than feeling resentment, you experience a change inside that enables you to lean on God. You are able to tell yourself, “It’s ok, God is with me to help me through this.” The proof that God has changed our disposition, or mindset, is not when we persuade ourselves that He has, but when we prove it by living it. Only the pure in heart will see God. See Him now in the glory in the life of the world to come.

When we seek Christ, we must come to Him in a spirit of repentance, humility, fasting, praying, studying, and offering up our love, then offering up our love and surrendering our will to find ourselves approved. As our humility increases, our soul is purified with greater purpose.

When we grow in faith and spirit, we become more closely in tuned with what God wants for our lives. Christ wants to pour out

His blessings on us, but we need to be prepared to receive them. There is a responsibility that comes with these blessings. He wants to bless us with endurance, health, and knowledge so we can prepare for His coming and the building of Zion.

Questions:

1. We must know Jesus as a _____ before His teaching can have any meaning for us.
2. What is the underlying precept of the Sermon on the Mount?
3. What is purity?
4. Who are the pure in heart?
5. When can we receive the Holy Spirit?

Written by Vicki Olson

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Worship #8

And Blessed Are All The Peacemakers, For They Shall Be Called The Children Of God

Scripture: *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men”* (Romans 12:18).

Hymn: #512 “Let There Be Peace on Earth”

As Christians, we receive the gift of peace with God because of God’s redemption of sinful humanity through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. We are called to share that peace with others as peacemakers, in the name of Jesus. By making peace, we show ourselves to be children of God, as reflected in Jesus’ blessing in the Beatitudes.

Many affirm this blessing with their lips, but in turbulent times, possibly have tended toward what we may think of as judicious fighting. There is a great deal of conflict in our world, and the way we respond to it as Christians is important. If a peacemaker is to be called a child of God, does it not make sense that we do everything within our power to be one? It is fair to say it takes some work, and the compound word links peace with the word for doing or practicing. Even though the word is a noun or adjective, it

requires action. Peacemakers believe in the power of forgiveness and acceptance.

As of 2022, 18 women (compared to 91 men) have won the Nobel Peace Prize. Mother Teresa is perhaps the most well-known, awarded in 1979 “for her work for bringing help to suffering humanity.” In the greatness of her life’s work, we may internally feel inadequate; unaware that it is the day-to-day behaviors and choices we make which have profound impact on our world.

I am blessed to know a beautiful woman who exemplifies these attributes in her daily life. I have known her, worked with her, and called her friend for 13 years. My admiration for her temperament is profound because I have never seen her waiver from being that kind, understanding, thought-provoking, positive thinking, forgiving individual. She does not talk about people behind their back, she keeps conversations and circumstances private without a trace of hesitation, and if anyone says something against another, she is the first to bring to their attention the positive traits or help in better understanding the person. She truly accepts people for who they are. She is an instinctive peacemaker. Being with her helps me to be a better person. I don’t think there is a better compliment.

If your heart is longing for holy peace, if your restless soul needs a reminder that there is beauty to be found amidst the mess and chaos of our tangled lives, then perhaps this prayer is also for you: O Lord, make us a tool of peace within our work and school, peace within our family, peace within our church, peace in all the earth. “With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow. To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”

By Tawna Noftzger

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Lesson #8

And Blessed Are All The Peacemakers, For They Shall Be Called The Children Of God

Scripture: “*Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all*” (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

Song: *The Beauty of Your Peace* by Tim Hughes

Music: <https://tinyurl.com/ycke5ytj>

Lyrics:

*Your voice has stilled the raging storms
The wind and waves bow down before
Your still small voice brings hope to all
Who wait on You, we'll wait for You
To lead us to the place where You'll restore our souls
And all our earthly strivings come to cease*

*Take from our souls the strain and stress
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Your peace
The beauty of Your peace*

*Bright skies will soon be overhead
We'll enter in to Heaven's rest
There'll be no death, there'll be no pain
The things of old will pass away
You'll lead us to the place where You'll restore our souls
And all our earthly strivings come to cease*

In Doctrine and Covenants 87:5b, we are encouraged to study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books and with languages, tongues, and people. Listed on our church website we see our mission: “We are striving to have a Christ-like walk in all that we do while sharing the fullness of the gospel to help build the Kingdom of God on earth, Zion.” My goal in this study is to bring together all these elements, while at the same time focusing on the blessing of the Beatitudes; specifically, regarding peacemakers.

Quoting from a book review in the beginning pages of the text we are using for this study, it says, “*Peacemaking Women* is not just for women and is not just about peacemaking. This powerfully

honest book is about the peace the gospel brings every heart that applies the truths of the gospel to past wounds and present brokenness. And this book is about how personally embracing this gospel of peace makes each of us a loving instrument of God's grace to others" (Bryan Chapell, president, Covenant Theological Seminary).

If we are to "become acquainted with all languages, tongues and people" and have a "Christ-like walk in all that we do," it makes perfect sense that we learn how to get along with people of all types and personalities. Learning how to *avoid* and *resolve* conflicts is necessary. One resource of many available to us is *Habit 5* of Stephen Covey's book, *Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood*. It is about "The Habit of Empathic Communication." Many feel it important to understand who people are and why we do the things we do.

Habit 5 reminds me of a film shown to the employees at my work in the mid-70s called *We Are Who We Are, Because of Who We Were When*. I have not been able to find it in recent years, but it was about how our characteristics and personalities are largely created by where we grew up or lived most of our lives, and the era in which we lived. Only in understanding each other (or at least accepting each other as we are) can we earn the blessing of being a peacemaker.

In *Peacemaking Women*, the writer explores three conflicts: 1) Conflicts with God, 2) Conflicts with Others, and 3) Conflicts Within. I will briefly touch on each of these conflicts. The foreword of the book states, "*Peacemaking Women* is a life changing book. It contains a wealth of wisdom and encouragement for women who want to learn how to turn any conflict into an opportunity to build deeper and closer relationships." In the text, at the end of each chapter, there are questions for reflection, which are helpful in processing what we've read and meditating on our own personal situations.

Conflicts with God (Thinking about God, Idolatry, Suffering)

Do we struggle in our relationship with God, at times fearing God and experiencing seasons where we are intensely focused on activities to please Him? Does occasional lust or pride break into

our day, and when we realize this, we wonder how God can ever forgive us, *yet again*? Do we ever think God has surely stopped loving us? These thoughts are human frailties, and I imagine most of us have sensed these feelings from time to time. “We will lack deep peace if we fail to understand that God is both completely holy and wonderfully merciful.” The authors then summarize that “Jesus satisfies both the holiness and mercy of God” through the crucifixion of Christ. Matthew 20:28.

The authors explain how “we will lack deep peace if we fail to understand that God adopts forgiven sinners as his children forever.” From 1 John 3:1, “***Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.***”

There is a beautiful reminder that God’s children, through Christ, are as a bride. He delights in us and loves us fervently! As a bride, we radiate Christ physically and spiritually. We are beautiful and precious in God’s eyes.

The authors explain that one of the most common issues dealt with in counseling sessions with women is that they “cannot be good enough to merit God’s love.” As we grow and learn through study, prayer, meditation, and worship, we are enabled to experience deep peace with God. How can we have peace with others if we know not peace with God?

Conflicts with Others (Biblically Peacemaking, Shalom-Filled Relationships, Romantic Love, Families, The Church, Female Leaders with Powerful Personalities)

This section of the book is key to our goal of becoming a peacemaker. It is not possible to cover all these important aspects in this study guide, so we will focus on “Biblically Peacemaking.”

Ephesians 4:1-3, “***As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of Spirit through the bond of peace.***” These urgings are written to the officers of the church, yet also apply to each of us as “One body, one spirit: one hope”.

“The Four G’s” summarize a “systematic framework for understanding and resolving conflicts.” They are listed here as written in the text but require a full reading to explore them in detail.

1. Glorify God – How can I please and honor God in this situation?
2. Get the log out of our eye – How can I show Jesus’ work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict?
3. Gently restore – How can I lovingly serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?
4. Go and be reconciled – How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution to the conflict?

Conflicts are intensely painful, and occasionally we might even believe they are beyond reconciliation. We have a choice to strive for unity or to live in conflict. We often, through our humanness, are also in denial. The Holy Spirit is promised to us to assist us in finding our way through these seemingly impossible situations. “The gospel message of reconciliation is our mandate to show the world Christ.”

“The Seven A’s of Confession,” as written by *Peacemaker Ministries*, are:

1. Address everyone involved.
2. Avoid *if*, *but*, and *maybe*.
3. Admit specifically.
4. Acknowledge the hurt.
5. Accept the consequences.
6. Alter your behavior.
7. Ask for forgiveness.

Not all confessions require all seven steps, but using these as guidelines can help our efforts to be more sincere, heartfelt, and helpful.

“The Four Promises of Forgiveness,” also by *Peacemaker Ministries* and expanded on during counseling, are listed here. It is important to remember that “excusing is not forgiving.” For instance, I know she is going through a hard time, so I will forgive

her. True forgiveness is “On the basis of God’s forgiving me for my sin, I forgive you.”

1. I will not dwell on or ruminate on this incident. Instead, when I become aware that thoughts about this incident pop into my mind, I will take them captive and commit them to Christ.
2. I will not use this incident against you to cause you hurt, shame, or fear. Instead, I will only bring this incident up when it is necessary for our healing and growth.
3. I will not gossip to others about this incident. Instead, I will only bring it up to others when it is necessary to ask for their assistance for God’s glory and our good.
4. I will not avoid you or neglect our relationship. Instead, I will pray, allow time, and faithfully labor toward our continued reconciliation of our relationship.

Conflicts Within (Shame, Depression, Fear)

Through my personal studies of psychology, I learned one must be content and *peaceful* with oneself in order to understand, be patient with, and be peaceful with others. In fact, we are told in our Scriptures to love thy neighbor as thyself (D&C 59:2b; D&C 105:5b; Matthew 22:38, among others).

From our main text in this chapter, it reads, “In the quietness of your most private thoughts, are you at peace? As you lie on your bed at night, are you calm, content, and joyful? Or is your heart restless? Do you sometimes feel a vague sense that all is *not* well?” The authors go on to say, “sometimes the conflicts we face within ourselves cause our greatest turmoil.”

“To live as peacemaking women, we are called to face and address our misplaced shame, dark depression, and ungodly fears. It is not enough that our ‘outsides’ appear to be at peace.” This is powerful. Take a moment and re-read these thoughts, truly encapsulating what is said. Is it possible that we *put on a face of peace and joyfulness* around others when inside we are conflicted? Think about how, if that is true in our life, that we might not be able to resolve strife with others? Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, said, “Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.”

An analogy of shame is used in the text comparing it to an awful spider in the Midwest, the brown recluse. “Once a person is bitten, the small red dot quickly disappears, and the victim has little awareness that she just received one of the most venomous spider bites known to mankind. Over time, however, a terrible infection begins beneath the surface of the skin. By the time she is aware that she has been bitten, significant damage has occurred. In fact, surgery into the undamaged flesh is usually necessary to stop the rapid spread of the spider’s venom. The treatment often leaves visible reminders of the destruction left by that tiny spider. Ungodly shame works in the human heart much like a brown recluse bite works on the surface, everything might look fine, but beneath the surface a decaying, infected wound is doing serious damage to the heart and soul.” The authors make clear that women infected with shame often withdraw from God and others “in an attempt to prevent the spread of this lethal disease or to disguise the truth that they are carriers of it.” And lastly, when we have shame in our hearts, “our internal conflicts are often the fertile soils for conflicts with God and others.”

There is not time within this study guide to dissect the difference between Godly and Ungodly Shame, but the text describes that Godly shame is a blessing and is important to our sorrow and repentance. Much more is explored in the text, including a deep dive into depression and fear, and worthy of your reading.

In closing out this lesson, it is important to realize that the Lord has provided for guidance and assistance in all areas of our lives, including conflict resolution. Some of those provisions are the calls and ordinations in the church to the office of teacher. From D&C 17:11a: “***The teacher’s duty is to watch over the church always and be with and strengthen them; and see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking.***”

Considering the incredible importance of office of teacher, do you believe there are enough teachers in our church? Have we properly allowed those we do have to work within our lives? It seems it would behoove us to invite a teacher into our homes and give them the opportunity to work how they have been called by the Lord to operate in His church.

As a reminder, from 2 Thessalonians 3:16, “*Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.*”

Questions for Personal Reflections from the text, *Peacemaking Women*

1. What is your view of the church? How would you specifically describe your church? Read Ephesians 3:10–11. What do you believe may be one or two specific intentions that God has concerning the church?
2. In your own words, write a definition of the church. Read Acts 20:28, Ephesians 1:22-23, and Timothy 3:15. What relationship does Jesus have with the church? How does this impact your definition?
3. How do you understand the church’s role in meeting your spiritual needs? What is the importance of corporate worship? List three things that, in your view, the church does well and three things that it does poorly.
4. Using at least one Scripture passage to support your response, answer the following question: “How important are relationships within the church, the body of Christ?” Why should we be *Peacemakers*?
5. Think about the relationships in your church. If you could only pick one word to describe the relationships among the women, what would it be? What are some of the relationships’ strengths in the church? What areas still need further improvement to better reflect Christ to the world and to be ready for Zion?
6. As you consider the various causes of conflict in the church (idolatry, defensiveness, conflicts over core issues, preferences, felt needs, people fail us, comparison, and competition), what conflicts do you observe most often in the church? How do these conflicts detract from the ministry and testimony of the church? How do you contribute to these conflicts, and what can you do to promote peace and reconciliation in the church?

Study materials: *Peacemaking Women (Biblical Hope for Resolving Conflict)* by Tara Klena Barthel and Judy Dabler [Baker Books] ISBN 978-1-4412-0032 7; *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R Covey, PDF available at

<https://tinyurl.com/2p9xyz5p>; Inspired Version of the Bible; and Doctrine & Covenants.

by Tawna Noftzger

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Worship #9

Blessed Are They Who Are Persecuted For My Name's Sake; For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven

Scripture: *“Blessed are all they that are persecuted for my name’s sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. For ye shall have great joy, and be exceeding glad; for great shall be your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”* (Matthew 5:12-14).

Hymn: #445 “Father, Hear the Prayer We Offer”

Have you ever wondered how you would respond if you were threatened with persecution because of your belief in Christ? As a child I grew up hearing my mother and aunt talk about the persecution of Joseph Smith, Jr., and the early saints. Most of us know the stories of Joseph being tarred and feathered, beaten, and wrongfully imprisoned. We’ve heard about the early saints being driven by mobs out of Jackson County, Missouri, in 1833 and eventually from the state of Missouri in 1839. Then there was the Haun’s Mill massacre in which men and boys were slaughtered, and women were raped. The governor even put out an “Extermination Order” on the saints. As a child, I thought about this and hoped I would have the courage to stand up for my beliefs in the face of trials. I very much desired to be like the early saints, then and now.

Since that time, I have learned that bravery is a choice. It does not mean we are not afraid, but instead, we choose to do the right thing in spite of the danger. Although here in the United States, we have not had to contend with physical persecution for many years now, we can see signs that Christians are being persecuted in other ways. What was once right is now wrong, and what was wrong is

right. Christians are often spoken ill of and reviled. They are made to look bad in the media. The time may come, and probably will, when we must also suffer physically. Jesus is always with us, so we need not fear. As noted in John 15:20, He has suffered for our sakes and the servant is not better than the master. Jesus desires us to deny ourselves and to take up our cross and follow him.

I gain strength through the testimonies of others who have suffered persecution. I think this is one reason God tells us to read, study, and obey. Besides the prophets in the Bible, there were many in the Book of Mormon we can take heart from: Nephi, Alma, and Abinadi for example. In the Book of Alma, Chapter 1, Gideon was reviled against by Nehor, but he withstood Nehor with the words of God until Nehor slew Gideon with his sword. It encourages me to read that these people had the courage to withstand those who argued against God. It lets me know I can do this, too.

Indeed, there are many in the modern world who are persecuted for Christ's sake in other places. This does not stop them; they continue to believe and carry on in faith. Father George and his congregation, for example, suffered death and injuries when their Coptic church was bombed in Egypt. Shortly afterwards, Father George gave a simple televised message to the terrorists: 1. Thank you. 2. We love you. 3. We are praying for you. *

I also read about Billy from Somalia. He came from an important tribal family. After reading the Bible out of curiosity, he converted to Christianity from Islam. His family threatened him, but it did not deter him. He was able to start a small underground church. Sadly, the church was eventually discovered. Unfortunately, Twelve people were murdered and only two remain: Billy and one other.*

In North Korea, Kim Eun Jin was born into Christianity. Her grandmother was converted before World War II, and the family was held together through grandma's Bible. Her father often told them, "Even if I face death, I will follow Jesus." Her father told her every day that he loved her and to be careful. One day her father and uncle were arrested and never seen again. The assumption was that they had been killed. Somehow Kim, her mother, grandmother, and siblings were able to escape. Kim continues to give talks about their experiences. They will always follow Jesus. *

And lastly, I want to share about Peter and Michael from Sudan who were imprisoned for preaching the gospel. They were forced to live in horrible conditions. However, they continued to preach to those in the prison. Many were converted. Surprisingly, when they had their day in court, they were released. What a happy outcome for them!*

Our joy is not of this world, but in the Kingdom of Heaven. I made the decision to follow Jesus and take His name upon me when I was baptized. Therefore, when the time is come that I stand face to face with persecution, the choice is already made for me. I am willing. I see persecution as an expression of my love and gratitude for the gift of salvation I received through Christ. I will do it with prayers of love and forgiveness on my lips.

**The Arc Newsletter: Stories to Inspire Faith-Filled Living* by Johnnie Moore (January 2023).

By Sherri Morrison

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Lesson #9

Blessed Are They That Are Persecuted For My Name's Sake; For Theirs Is The Kingdom Of Heaven

From the very beginning of time, man has withstood the persecution of others, especially when it came to their beliefs, spirituality, and religion. It all started with Satan bullying Adam and Eve to eat of the tree. Adam saw his own son, Abel, after he was killed by his other son, Cain, because of jealousy that brought on persecution. Noah and his family were persecuted for believing in God and following His commandments to build an ark.

Most of the Old Testament prophets were persecuted in one way or another. Lehi had to leave Jerusalem because of the persecution related to his prophesies. The Book of Mormon prophet, Abinadi, was burned at the stake for his belief. The early followers of Christ were severely persecuted, and even put to death, for not renouncing their beliefs, and numerous martyrs to true religion, during the middle-ages, were killed, or otherwise punished, for

standing for true faith. Then, of course, came the saints of the early Restoration movement in America who suffered much. Satan will not leave the faithful alone.

In beginning to understand the concept of persecution, as it has repeated its ugly deeds over many centuries, I turned to the Biblical dictionary, which describes persecution as such:

PERSECUTION, n. The act or practice of persecuting; the infliction of pain, punishment, or death upon others unjustly, particularly for adhering to a religious creed or mode of worship, either by way of penalty or for compelling them to renounce their principles.

Most of us have heard these stories of the brave souls who endured these persecutions, and reiterating them will not help us explore the ways we can learn to overcome such persecutions, and more than this, thrive under the constant battering so that we can serve others.

While pondering on why those persecuted for Christ's name's sake will inherit the Kingdom of heaven, it occurred to me that no one deserves being with Christ in His Kingdom as much as those who stood strong to proclaim His gospel. I believe that the reason they will be with Christ is because they came to love their persecutors and gained full understanding of the love that Christ has for all people. Therefore, they were prepared to learn and serve more effectively there.

Christ is quoted as proclaiming this truth in Matthew 5:46: ***“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless those who curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.”***

But is persecution always brought on by malicious people who just want to harm others? I don't think that this is *always* true. *Persecution often stems from fear, misunderstanding, and a failure to communicate and learn to trust.* For example, when the saints were persecuted here in Independence and Far West in the late 1830s, some of that had to do with misunderstandings and a failure of our own people to try to share kindness and love. They failed to show forth to others that they were not a threat. In fact, from what I understand, some of our saints “caused” some of the

misunderstandings at that time by being persecutors of the unbelieving themselves. They did this by becoming boastful about the way the saints worked together and accomplished things much faster and more efficiently than those who worked on their own. This caused jealousy and made the other settlers to feel as if the saints were looking down on them. This consequently caused bitterness and strife.

It is important when we think about persecution that we do not always make ourselves the victims but carefully review our own actions in relation to people outside of our belief system. Could it possibly be that we have acted proud and have been haughty about our beliefs and the blessings that have come to us? Do we forget that these blessings usually came, *not through our own works*, but from a forgiving and loving God? Of course, when others persecute saints just to persecute and to be hateful towards them and their beliefs, they should have to repent in order to receive forgiveness.

So, what things do you believe that Christ would have us learn in order to overcome such persecutions and to teach us how to endure them if they still come? Let us think on some of the ways that we can better handle and endure such things:

1-We Must Submit to the Persecution

Enduring does not mean that we should submit to the false beliefs of others in our own quiet thinking, but it does mean submitting to the outward persecution. If we submit to persecution, we can be used by the Lord. Peter talked about that in 1 Peter 4:12–14: *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part, He is glorified."* God desires to be glorified when you are persecuted. Peter adds in verse 19, *"Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator."* When you are persecuted, let God control the situation. Submit to persecution so that God may be glorified.

2-Submit to the Holy Spirit

Spirit-filled persons say this: "Holy Spirit, we submit to you. We want to be useful in the opportunities we have." They yield their lives to the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter knew that he would not experience victory in the situations of persecution in which he found himself unless he yielded to the Spirit of God.

3-Be Bold

When we are given the opportunity to show others the truths of God because of persecution, we should certainly choose to be bold; not dictatorial or abusive, but anxiously *ready* to proclaim the joyous truth. By doing so, we can shine forth with the love and truth of Christ and hopefully, if loving enough, avoid further persecution. If this fails to be true in some circumstances, we are to be prepared to quietly submit and endure the persecution. By doing so, we can teach others how to submit to God and to His love.

The New Testament shows us in Acts 4:8-13: "*[Peter] said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made well; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone, which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither, is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*"

In conclusion, when you are persecuted, be submissive. Yield yourself to the control of the Holy Spirit and boldly use the opportunities that you have to testify of the fullness of His gospel. We most likely will not meet with the persecutions of the past, or fear for our lives as Christians in other countries are now faced with. But there is a growing undercurrent of unbelief, even in America, and we must be prepared to face it and to stand boldly under the direction of His Holy Spirit.

Remember, if we ourselves become the unsuspecting cause of persecution by being proud and haughty and not submitting to God and His purposes, we too are in danger of judgement. May we pray to be humble and to always love and seek out the lost and the broken, even though persecutions might arise. In God, we trust!

Questions:

1. To you, what does persecution mean? Why do you suppose that Christ tells us that the persecuted, for His name's sake, will inherit His Kingdom in heaven?
2. Do you know anyone who has been abused or persecuted for their belief in the restored gospel? Have you ever been persecuted for such? Share about it if you have. What did you do or not do?
3. What is the best way to react to those who seem to be persecuting you? Are they always trying to hurt you on purpose? How can you keep the abuse from becoming heated and hurtful, perhaps to all involved?
4. Should we even respect the beliefs of others? (Not accepting their beliefs as our own, but respecting the right for that person or persons to have those beliefs.) How might this soften hearts and be useful later?
5. What did Peter tell us to do for our enemies? Why do you think we are taught the principles of forgiveness, prayerfulness, and understanding?
6. How should we react and behave when we fully realize that we are being persecuted?
7. Does submission to our persecutors mean that we have turned from God and our faith?

By Cindy Patience

