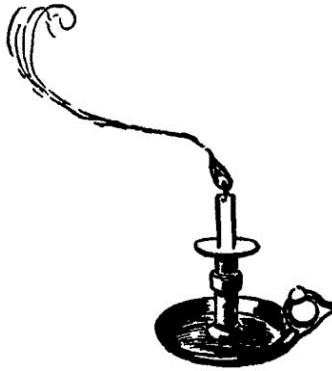


THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Timothy 2:19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

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For A Conservative Anabaptist Perspective

From The Editor's Desk

Eternal Life

Mark 10:28-30 ^(ESV) Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." ²⁹ Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, ³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

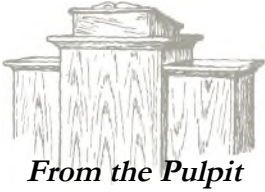
There are many today who only live for the moment with no thought, and possibly no comprehension, of the eternal life that awaits and should we as believers speak to them about this inescapable fact various reactions are noted.

Some say "well that's what you believe" Some may say "I don't believe all that nonsense" Some may shudder and say "Don't be morbid, I am enjoying my life here and there is nothing else." Sadly we have come across these comments and many others but what do we, as those who profess to be disciples of Jesus Christ believe?

It seems to me that eternal life in the world to come and this is referring to the eternal world or heaven is something that we need to do something for, some way of life that will earn that reward and that will take endurance. And it is this matter of endurance that we would like to briefly touch on this morning. The scripture has much to say either directly or indirectly about endurance being needed for the Christian life to be victorious and to do that we need to believe what Jesus said.

Some definitions of the word *believe* used in the Scripture also indicate that it entails not just a mental assent to truth but also a trust and continuance in that believe which we call endurance and Scripture has many passages that encourage and exhort to be constant and persevere in walk with Jesus, we have the example of countless martyrs who died persevering in their faith rather than give up.

Because Christ lives in us as believers, we can remain courageous and hopeful to the end. We are not saved by being steadfast and firm in our faith, but our courage and hope do reveal that our faith is real. Without this enduring faithfulness we could easily be blown away by the winds of temptation, false teaching, or persecution so let us persevere to the end and "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;" Hebrews 3:14. J.v.L



From the Pulpit

Eight Steps To True Happiness

Brother Darrell Martin

May the blessings of God continue to grace our assembly here today.

For the message this morning you may open your Bibles to Matthew 5, a familiar portion of scripture, the first part of this chapter is what we call the Beatitudes. We have eight brief statements beginning with the word "blessed" there are actually nine if you separate verses 10 and 11 but we put those together because they are the same thought and we call it eight Beatitudes. Our Lord gave these at the beginning of the sermon on the Mount as an introduction to his sermon and in the sermon on the Mount Jesus clearly explains to his disciples to the multitude that was there He is clearly explaining to them what it means to be a disciple, what it means to follow Christ, what it means to be part of the kingdom of Christ and these eight introductory statements that He gives give us a clear picture of what it means to be a true Christian, a true child of God, we could call them the keys to the kingdom, the thought is that we must possess them to be a child of God.

This morning I would like to take an overview approach and look at each one briefly. The value of an overview is to see the relationship of each one to the whole and especially what I would like us to see is the progression that is here in these eight statements these eight Beatitudes, they are like climbing the rungs of a ladder or like going up steps and each one seems to take us higher and I would like to keep that in mind as we look at those, so I am using the title "Eight Steps To True Happiness".

The thought of true happiness is drawn from this word blessed which simply means truly happy, very happy, a state of bliss or happiness. Even the original word carries with it the idea that we are to be envied that we are so happy so content so blissful that others looking on have a bit of envy and would like to experience that as well. Well certainly that is descriptive of the Christian life. It is true joy and satisfaction found in God and it is di-

rectly connected to these qualities of *blessed are they* and then it gives a quality and so the happiness is found in these qualities. We say that true Christian joy is not dependent on outward circumstances, that doesn't affect it, conditions in life that we face even other people, we notice from Scripture how Mordechai's behaviour destroyed Haman's joy, well it was because it was not true joy. Other people cannot affect our true joy. So this true happiness is found here, another thought yet is that it is not what natural man would think would bring happiness, we call them paradoxes, and in fact it is the exact opposite of what man would think to find happiness. Haman thought that happiness would certainly be having position and authority but it made him a very unhappy man.

This is where true happiness is found. And so these eight statements, eight qualities, eight steps whatever you want to call them, since they are exactly opposite of what we would think is the way to happiness then what it means is that if we are going to be truly happy we must give up our ideas of happiness and we must completely submit to God's way. This is God's outline, it is God's way of true happiness and we must give up our way and take God's way and taking God's way is what we have described here for us in these eight qualities and it is the way to true happiness and to truly being a child of God.

Matthew 5:1-12 ^(KJV) And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: ² And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, ³ *Blessed are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ *Blessed are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. ⁵ *Blessed are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ *Blessed are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. ⁷ *Blessed are* the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. ⁸ *Blessed are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God. *Blessed are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. ¹⁰ *Blessed are* they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ *Blessed are* ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹² Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

I would like to divide them into two groups of four. The first four we think of as steps in coming to God and then the last four as steps in growing to be god-like to be more godly. So first of all steps in coming to God.

The first step is to be poor in spirit from verse three, Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Be poor in spirit, it is having a conscious need of God, having a conscious need of God is the exact opposite of being proud and self-sufficient as we were thinking about our Sunday school lesson. Poor in spirit is recognizing our own helplessness, our own inability to do good in our own strength. Romans 7 describes that, Paul describing a person before he becomes a Christian struggling with wanting to do what is right and finding that he doesn't have the ability to do it:

Romans 7:18 “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not”.

So it is coming to that place of awareness of our helplessness and our own inability to do good in our own strength and it needs to go further than that. First of all it is recognizing our own helplessness but then beyond that it is recognizing our need of salvation and deliverance, recognizing that we need help, we can't do it ourselves we need God's help, and like the prodigal son the account there says that he came to the end of himself, and he was ready to say I need help, he came to the end of himself, that is being poor in spirit, recognizing that we have a need. The person that is not poor in spirit has all the answers, he is proud, he is self-sufficient but the person that is poor in spirit recognizes that I need help.

Now going a bit further it is not only recognizing that we need help but that we need God's help and we reach out to Him, that is what David said in Psalm 70 he describes very vividly his need of God's help:

Psalm 70:5 “But I am poor and needy: make haste unto me, O God: thou art my help and my deliverer; O Lord, make no tarrying”.

Come quickly and help me because I am needy and I need your help, Thou art my help and my deliverance. So it is recognizing that we need God's deliverance, we need His cleansing power, we need His power to do right because it is not in ourselves and that is certainly the first step into entering

the kingdom - recognizing our need of God, God's deliverance and He says those who are poor in spirit theirs is the kingdom of heaven. So it is, we could say, the door that enters us into the kingdom and we enter through that door of being poor in spirit.

Not only is it the first step in entering the kingdom but we must continue to remain poor in spirit and as we go on in our Christian life we must continue to have a conscious need of God because we never outgrow our need of God's help, we daily need His grace, we need His power, we need His strength and so we continue to be poor in spirit in order for God to use us. We sang the song this morning: "I need thee every hour, I need thee, O I need thee, every hour I need thee!" And that needs to be our prayer everyday that we have that conscious need of God's help. That is being poor in spirit and from it we can find blessedness and true happiness.

Step number two from verse four is: Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Be sorry for sin, it is being genuinely contrite and penitent. Mourn is the thought of deep grief and sorrow, sorrow of heart and it is the next step up the ladder, we sensed our need of God and now it is recognizing and acknowledging that we have transgressed the holy law of God, we are guilty before God, we have sinned and so we must sorrow in genuine contrition because of our personal sin and our personal guilt before God. Not only recognize that in sorrow but cry out to God for His mercy and part of that is what is in focus in verse four; Blessed are they that mourn, sorry for sin. The Psalmist said in: [Psalm 38:18](#): "For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin".

That is confessing our sin. That is confessing that we have transgressed and crying out to God for mercy and pardon all like the publican in [Luke 18:13](#) it says: "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner".

That is blessed are they that mourn, calling out to God for mercy and for pardon because of our sin. Well the verse's promise is: For they shall be comforted, they shall be comforted. If we are truly sorry for our sin Jesus will comfort us with His forgiveness and that is the reason why Jesus came. I like the familiar verses in Isaiah 61 again that outlines what Jesus

came to do, these are the verses that Jesus read there in the synagogue in Nazareth, I believe it is, but he outlines in Isaiah 61 what he came to do
[Isaiah 61:2-3](#) “..... to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.

He came to turn their sorrow and their mourning into joy, blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted. The blessedness the happiness is not so much in mourning that is necessary but it is in the comfort, the comfort of forgiveness and he exchanges the ashes full beauty and the garments the spirit of heaviness he gives in its place garments of praise. That is the fulfilment of the promise they shall be comforted. [1 John 1:9](#) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...

Oh the joy of sin forgiven! I'm sure we can all remember that release of the burden of guilt, the joy of sin forgiven, the happiness of joy is not so much as we said in the sorrow of mourning as it is in the comfort of forgiveness. And again like being poor in spirit we will never outgrow that need for God's forgiveness. We needed that when we entered the kingdom but we continue we must continue to have a broken and a contrite heart. We must continue to have a hatred and a sorrow for sin, a hatred for sin that keeps us from sin but if we do stumble and fall into sin we must have that hatred and abhorrence that God has for sin and sorrow anew for sin. [Romans 12:9](#) Abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good”.

Abhor, hate it, put it far away, detest it and that is all part of the sorrow for sin. We need to continue to have that attitude as we grow in a Christian life that we can find the state of true happiness and true blessedness.

Step number three verse five, Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

This is simply having the spirit controlled nature. The word meek is a little misleading in our English language because in English, if you look it up in the English dictionary, it means weak or mild or deficient in courage and spirit. But that is not the way the Bible uses the word meek and that is not what the original Greek word here means, rather the original word translated from Greek is the thought of possessing power and strength under con-

control, the person has great power and strength but it is controlled and I think the best illustration of that is a strong wild animal that has been tamed and he is under control, that is what meekness is. And meekness is self-control, it means complete control of the passion part of our nature, we are untamed by nature, wild and strong but being meek is having the spirit controlled nature and meekness is expressed, self-control is expressed in patience, long-suffering, gentleness, those are attributes that are not found in carnal man, it is only because of the Holy Spirit controlled nature that we can be patient, we can be long-suffering and gentle.

But at the same time meekness never compromises principles of truth, it is not soft and being ready to back off and compromise, not at all, meekness is strength but it is complete control of the passion part of our nature, and it is impossible in our own strength. We cannot control ourselves by our own power we saw that in Romans seven and so meekness means not only having self-control but being spirit controlled, having the spirit control our nature, it means God's spirit dwelling within and so this is the third step. After we acknowledge our need of God, after we have confessed our sin then God's spirit comes to dwell within and He gives us a new heart, a new mind, a new nature and God's spirit within provides the power to keep under control the carnal expressions, the passions, our old carnal nature and keep it under control. And that is certainly where true happiness is found.

Jesus said in [Matthew 11:29](#): "...and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls". Rest, that is the state of bliss, the blessedness, the happiness we are talking about but it comes in being meek and lowly in heart. Meekness is one of the fruits of the spirit. In [Galatians 5](#) it is given there is one of the expressions of God's spirit dwelling within and meekness is very valuable in God's sight this is brought out in [1 Peter 3:4](#) it talks there about the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God a great price, great value. Having the spirit controlled nature. Now it says blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Now how does meekness relate to inheriting the earth? Now we may not understand that entirely but one thought that I'll share is that [Romans 8:14](#) tells us: For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

And so being spirit controlled, giving expression of a spirit controlled nature is a proof of sonship in God's family, that we are sons and daughters in God's family and it is the sons or the children who are entitled to the inheritance in a natural sense and also the scriptures teaches that it is the sons of God that receive the inheritance and so blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth because they are the sons of God. Those who are meek are truly the sons of God.

The fifth step: Be hungry and thirsty for truth, verse six: Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. That is simply having a spiritual appetite for God's Word, a spiritual appetite for God's Word and it naturally follows the sequence of progression, when we have received spirit of God, let back up, as we confess our sins, we have acknowledged our need, we have confessed our sins we receive God's spirit within now we have been born again and received the new nature and with that comes a desire to grow in the things of God and like a child needs to eat and wants to do that so that he can grow. If a child does not have an appetite we get concerned as parents because a child needs to eat and to feed himself because that is the only way he will grow and so it is with the children of God we must have a desire an appetite for the Word of God so we can grow thereby. God's Word feeds our soul it provides strength and nourishment for the in a man and we need that to grow.

[John 4:14](#) Jesus talks about the word of the water of life, God's Word is the water of life. Jesus says the water that I shall give man he shall never thirst, and so whilst it is symbolic of Jesus it is also symbolic of Jesus words the Word of God, it is the water of life. In [John 6:35](#) it is the bread of life and we need the water and the bread to continue to nourish our spiritual life. We need the attitude of [Psalm 19:10](#) More to be desired are they then gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

You know we desire the words of God even more than gold, it is more valuable than gold and sweeter than the honeycomb or [Jeremiah 15:16](#) he says there: "... and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts".

Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart, this speaks about the appetite and a desire to feed on the Word of God. Well with

God's nature within us our interests and our desires are on the things of God and what happens then is that the worldly and the earthly pleasures lose their appeal and our appetite is on the things of God not on the things of the world. "Fade, fade each earthly joy Jesus is mine". That needs to be out testimony; it is part of being hungry and thirsty for truth and God's Word.

This last part of this verse is very interesting it says Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. They shall be filled. Jesus promised that whomsoever would drink of the water of life and eateth the bread of life he said they shall never hunger and they shall never thirst, it completely satisfies. (John 6:35) Now if the bread and water of life completely satisfies or as this verse says we are filled, how then do we continue to hunger and thirst after righteousness?

In the physical realm we eat because we are hungry, we are hungry and we sit at the table, we have an appetite and the dishes are passed around and soon we are filled we had plenty we are full and now the food no longer appeals to us we, can pass them around and pass them around and nobody takes any because we are full we are just not hungry, the food does not appeal any more we are full. In the spiritual sense it is a different kind of hunger and I will try and explain it this way this is how I have thought of it as I studied this verse:

We feast on the Word of God and we receive blessed refreshment and satisfaction from the Word of God and so we are filled we are satisfied because the Word of God is satisfying it brings that satisfaction but it is so satisfying that unlike natural food when we are full we don't want more, the Word of God is so satisfying it is so satisfying that we want yet more and with the blessedness of being filled comes a renewed hunger and thirst for more righteousness, I think that's the way God's Word works and that is how we can continue to hunger for righteousness, hunger and thirst and at the same time be filled because, yes it satisfies, because it is so satisfying we want more and we continue to reach out for more. And so the promise is that we will be filled and yet we never get to the point where we don't need any more because we are full but with that fulfilment and that satisfaction becomes a desire for more.

And so we not only have an appetite for the Word of God when we become a Christian, and that is very important, but all through life we need to continue to grow and continue to become strong and more and more filled with the Word of God. You know we said that the Word of life strengthens us strengthens our spiritual life, as a person grows older and his physical strength declines our spiritual strength should be increasing and we should be getting stronger and stronger we never outgrow our need for being filled with the fullness of God and the Scriptures should ever be rich and meaningful to us. It is a blessing when you visit older people older Christians and you ask them what you can read and they have favourite portions of Scripture that they want you to read and that is because they have been finding their strength in the Word of God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

Let us now move to the last set. These are steps in growing to be godlike, first four in particularly are in coming to God, coming to the kingdom although we saw the need to continue to exercise those but these last four I see in a different category and these are growing to be like God, godlike.

Number five: Be merciful.

[Matthew 5:7](#) Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

It is the thought of being compassionate and gentle to others. Merciful is an attribute of God. Mercy is altogether heavenly, again you don't find that in the carnal natural realm, we defend ourselves rather than thinking of compassion and gentleness to others, but it is an attribute of God, God is merciful and Jesus said in [Luke 6:36](#): "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful".

It is an attribute of God and we are called to be merciful like God. The child of God delights to show mercy because we have been recipients of God's mercy. Let's turn to those familiar verses in Psalm 103 that remind us of God's mercy and how He has been so merciful to us and therefore we delight to show mercy to others: [Psalm 103:8-11](#) The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

So God is merciful and as we ponder verses like this of how God has been merciful to us and been slow to anger and He has not dealt with us according to our sins but His mercy has been great so that it inspires in us, it behoves us to show mercy to others. Not only has God been merciful to us but others have been, others have been so patient and so forbearing with us, our parents, our brothers and sisters, those we work with, they have been patient and forbearing with us and so we delight in showing mercy and kindness to others and we find true happiness. He is saying blessed are the merciful, that is where true happiness is, true blessedness is found in being compassionate and gentle and gracious and forbearing with all others, and shall I add for the children, even with our brothers and sisters at home we need to be compassionate and forbearing and patient as we live together as families and as we work together because He says blessed are the merciful.

Now again the last part is very inspiring. He says: Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy, they shall obtain mercy. We said that we delight in being merciful because we have already received mercy but this verse promises even more mercy in return, blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy. As we continue to show mercy and express gentleness and compassion to others we have the promise of more mercy in return. And again we are daily in need of God's mercy, it is not just that we needed God's mercy back then but we are in daily need of God's mercy and the promise is that they shall obtain mercy; they shall continue to receive the mercy of God.

Step number six, Be pure, verse 8: Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. It means being free from anything that would defile. And again that is another step to being godlike, God is pure, it is an attribute of God. [1 Peter 1:16](#): "Be ye holy; for I am holy".

And it calls for diligent effort to be pure in the midst of an impure world. Pure in heart is the emphasis here, to me that means being pure from the inside out all being pure through and through not just outwardly appearing pure but being pure in thought and heart, and we said that calls for diligent effort.

[2 Corinthians 7:1](#): "...dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God".

It is an ongoing work of progressive sanctification, we continue to be cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and perfecting is the sort of action going on we continue to grow in perfection and Holiness.

[1 Peter 2:11](#): "...abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul".

We cut off those things that would bring that would defile us they war against the soul.

[Philippians 4:8](#): ".....whatsoever things are pure....think on these things".

We all know that impurity begins in the thought life and whether pure or impure the things that we see and hear and read fill our minds and fill our thoughts and so whatsoever things are pure think on these things. And it takes a diligent effort to be pure in heart. The promise is those that are pure in heart they shall see God, they shall see God. God is holy and only the pure and only the holy will be welcome into His presence. That's what Psalm 24 makes clear to us verses three and four raises the question: "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?" The answer comes back: "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully". He shall receive the blessing of the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. ([Psalm 24:3-5](#)). He that has clean hands and a pure heart they are the ones that shall stand in the presence of God.

Also in the closing chapter of [Revelation 21:27](#) when he is describing to us the holy city the New Jerusalem it says: "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth". Only the pure in heart shall see God.

Now I'm giving that in a future sense that standing in the presence of God and being welcomed into His presence but it is true that already in this life sin in one's life obscures God and it puts a distance between us and God, but the pure in heart that they shall see God. When we have purity in heart that is accompanied by a real consciousness of God and a delightful comforting sense of His presence and we can see God by the eye of faith when things are clear between us and God, so there is also a sense that we already experience that, blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

Step number seven, Be peaceful, verse nine: Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

It simply means to be quick to resolve strife, quick to resolve strife and again it is an attribute of God. The New Testament refers to the God of peace one of the benedictions that we use occasionally, the God of peace, God is it is an attribute of God. Also Jesus is called the Prince of Peace ([Isaiah 9:6](#)) and He brought peace. There are many scriptures we could look at but I think of Ephesians 2 He brought peace. At His coming the angels heralded peace on earth, goodwill to men ([Luke 2:14](#)). So Jesus came as the Prince of peace to bring peace, His kingdom is one of peace and to be part of His kingdom to be a follower of Christ we must be a peacemaker that is very clear, quick to resolve strife, blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God. A peacemaker is one who works hard to make peace and then to keep peace, make peace bring about peace and then keep or maintain peace, quick to resolve differences, quick to settle strife, quick to say I'm sorry, that is all part of being a peacemaker and it takes effort to be like God in this way to grow in this quality and this attribute but it is where true blessedness and happiness is found.

[Romans 12:18](#): "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men".

It is a scriptural call and I guess that scripture makes room for some that are simply difficult to get along with but it says: As much as lieth in you. Or as much in your ability, it means that we do our best to live peaceably with all men, that is excluding none. This is possible only as we have the peace of God ruling in our hearts, again it does not happen on its own we cannot do it in our own strength but we need the peace of God ruling in our own hearts and that is what [Philippians 4:7](#) says: "The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and mine through Christ Jesus". It is the thought of God's peace taking control and ruling or even guarding, *Garrison* I think is the original meaning there it is a military term of surrounding, God's peace completely surrounds us and keeps our hearts and minds under control and it is when we have the peace of God ruling within that we can reach out to our others.

Having peaceful relationships is a proof of being one of Jesus followers, that is what this verse is saying they shall be called the children of God when we are known as peacemakers then that is an expression or it is a proof that we are one of God's followers and that is why Jesus said in [John 13:35](#) "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love

one to another". That is how others know that we are the children of God when we are peacemakers.

Finally step number eight: Be willing to suffer for Christ, verses 10 to 12: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you.

It is being ready to bear reproach and false accusation and this top rung of the ladder is perhaps the most difficult. It is most certainly a paradox indeed to be persecuted and falsely accused and reproached it is certainly the most unpleasant but He says: Blessed are ye, truly happy are ye. And verse 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad. How can that be? We can say is that even possible under persecution? We don't know about persecution, maybe a little mockery or reproach but we don't know what these verses are talking about but we try to put ourselves in that experience and we say is that possible that we could rejoice and be exceeding glad?

Well the Apostles did it in [Acts 5: 41](#) when they came out of the Council it says that they rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's name. And so they did it, they suffered reproach but they rejoiced. And there are many accounts, many stories of Christians who died singing and praying and so yes it is possible.

Well we could say how was it possible, how is it possible? I thought of first Peter four, the chapter that speaks about suffering as Christians: [1 Peter 4:13-14](#) says: 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; *Why, how?* 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.

So how is it possible that we can rejoice that we would face persecution and reproach in the name of Jesus Christ? Well again it is not in our own strength but He says you can do it because it is possible because the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you. And certainly that is one of the answers as to how it is possible because God's spirit resteth upon us, the spirit of God the spirit of glory. It made me think of Stephen when he was there in the council room and they were falsely accusing him and persecuting him, it says that his face shown like the face of an angel. ([Acts 6:15](#)) Cer-

tainly he had the spirit of glory and of God resting upon him. Well also I see two things here in Matthew five that make it possible, one is the promise of the reward of heaven, he gives this twice.

[Matthew 5:10](#): "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". And then in verse 12 [Matthew 5:12](#): "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven".

So the promise of reward helps to make it possible, I think that is what helped many of the Christians as they faced suffering and knew that their physical life was coming to an end, their thoughts were on heaven and the reward in heaven and that is what helped to make it possible.

Great is your reward in heaven! It is more than sufficient compensation for the suffering and the difficulty in life and that is how we can, and any suffering Christian, can rejoice and be exceeding glad.

It is a paradox men don't understand it, the persecutors, the executioners they didn't understand it, how these people could sing but it is because that is where true happiness is found.

Another thought here of how it is possible is the knowledge that others have been faithful. He says at the end of the verse 12: So persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

You know there are others who trod the same road, others were faithful, the prophets and the martyrs, we have record of them in scripture and [Hebrews 11](#) gives a whole list and the end of those who died for their faith.

And so should this be our lot we could be faithful, which could find true happiness because we know that others have been faithful and God's spirit rests upon us. God certainly wants us to find true happiness and fullness of joy that's what He wants us to find, He wants us to experience it in this life and in the next and so He has given us these keys, He has told us and given us these eight steps, these eight keys so that we can find true happiness in Christ.

May God help us to continue to grow in these qualities and in His likeness so that we can be truly like Him.



Recipes For A Fruitful Life

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit
And so prove to be my disciples.

John 15:8 ^(ESV)

The dictionary defines the word recipe as a set of instructions for making something or a procedure for doing or attaining something. In the context of our title, the needed ingredients or procedures to be a fruitful Christian are the teachings contained in the Bible, God's Holy Word. There are no shortcuts or substitutes in the recipe for spiritual success. In 2 Chronicles 7:14 we read, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." This recipe, given to God's people in Solomon's time, still speaks to us today.

May we endeavour to grow and bear fruit in our Christian lives.

Mark 4:2-9 ^(KJV)

And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, ³ Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: ⁴ And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. ⁵ And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: ⁶ But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. ⁸ And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred. ⁹ And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Mark 4:14-20 ^(KJV)

The sower soweth the word. ¹⁵ And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. ¹⁶ And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; ¹⁷ And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. ¹⁸ And

these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,¹⁹ And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.²⁰ And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive *it*, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

When Jesus spoke to the multitudes He often illustrated His teaching with a natural story called a parable. The parable presented the teaching in a more understandable and vivid way to the listeners. It also concealed the truth from those who did not possess the key to its spiritual meaning. It witnessed that the natural world that God had created was in harmony with spiritual truth. The parable did not contain direct proof of the doctrine that it revealed, but supported it.

The whole body of Christ's teachings is the standard by which all parables are to be interpreted. Not every aspect of each parable has special significance, but the main spiritual lesson should be revealed to the true seeker.

No doubt, the multitude listening to Jesus had often observed farmers in their fields scattering seed. They were acquainted with soil, rocks, weeds and the need to loosen the earth so the seeds might flourish. Jesus used their knowledge of nature to teach a deep spiritual truth. As the sower scattered seed, some landed on the edges of the field where the ground had not been prepared. The earth was so hard that the implement used to cover the seed did not do its job. These seeds were exposed to foraging birds. They were quickly snatched up and eaten before the seed could germinate. Other seed was sown on the part of the field where the soil was thin and rocky. As the farmer was preparing to sow, he should have spent more time working with this area of his field. The rocks should have been dug out and some mulch added. Then the plants would not have withered and died. Another part of the field had a weed problem. The soil was tilled and ready for the seed, but unnoticed by the farmer were weed seeds ready to grow. When the plants were growing, the undesirable weeds should have been removed to give the desired plants the needed moisture and sunlight. This neglect resulted in weak, spindly plants that yielded no increase.

Thankfully, some seed fell on fertile, well-prepared ground. There was a bountiful harvest which rewarded the farmer for his efforts.

Even Jesus' twelve disciples did not understand the spiritual significance of this parable. When they were alone, the disciples asked Jesus to explain the meaning of it. He explained to them the various conditions of men's hearts and how His teaching would be received.

Some of the listeners would be cold and hardened and would reject the truth. Others would embrace it with enthusiasm but would give up when trials came. Some would let their material pursuits and the challenges of daily life smother the light they had received. And there were those who would be diligent and whose spiritual lives would grow and bear fruit. Although many would hear the Word, only some of them would grow into healthy, fruit-bearing followers.

John 12:24. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit"

The first thing the recipe for a fruitful life requires is the death of the old man and a new birth experience. This experience transforms our "field." God breaks up and mellows our stubbornness and unwillingness. He picks out the rocks. Weeds are rooted out. Our field is prepared to yield good fruit. God asks, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" (Isaiah 5:4). After conversion, there is need for growth and sanctification. The Word teaches that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12). As we live our Christian lives, we must constantly be on guard against undesirable attitudes that want to creep in. The apostle Paul speaks about indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, and revenge against unrighteousness being active in the believer (2 Corinthians 7:11). Successfully bearing fruit for Christ will require a diligent battle against evil.

Let us look at the different heart conditions that hinder fruit bearing.

The hard heart.

When we were converted, God took away the stony heart and gave us a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19). Our humble, teachable spirit was open to the

Holy Spirit's leading. If we are not diligent, our hearts can become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). In this condition we find it hard to accept direction from others. Our lives may become only a form without the power of the Holy Spirit. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8). This hard, self-right spirit becomes very exacting and goes by the letter of the law when dealing with others. The Christian graces of mercy and forgiveness are lacking. The leading of the Holy Spirit is not evident. Fellowship with the brethren may be strained. To try to soften such a heart, God will first use a "gentle rain." If this tender call is not heeded, He may need to use the "plough" to break up the hard soil. "Break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you" (Hosea 10:12).

The shallow heart.

Sometimes we are tempted to be fair weather Christians. As long as things are coming our way, we are courageous and want to serve God. Satan thought Job served God because of the blessings he received from Him. When everything was taken away from him, Job's faith and trust in God remained solid. We can be sure that our "depth of earth" will be tested. We may be tempted to live our Christian lives by feelings and emotions. Such a life is unstable and brings many disappointments. "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Ephesians 4:14).

The heart choked with weeds.

This condition seems especially relevant for our time. "And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41). Even our legitimate responsibilities have a way of attaching themselves to us and crowding out spiritual concerns. For some, as Martha, it could be the daily duties of life that want to burden us. The pressures of making a living will try to overwhelm many. There is a drive to fill our time with hobbies, recreation, and leisure activities. Social activities add to our busyness. Wealth and the desire for it try to snare us all. "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdi-

tion” (1 Timothy 6:9). Even church responsibilities have a way of occupying our thoughts and time to the point that our personal devotions become less meaningful. All these things can grow like weeds and choke our spiritual lives. Are we more caught up in the proverbial “rat race” than we realize? We need our eyes anointed with eye salve (Revelation 3:18) to see the thorns growing in our lives. We must be open to the proving of our brethren if we would effectively root out the weeds that hinder us from bearing fruit.

The soft teachable heart.

This is the condition that we must strive to maintain. Here the planted seed of the Word will grow unhindered. With the maturing of the plant, precious fruit will be evident in our lives. This will bless others and glorify God’s name. “The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing” (Psalm 92:12-14). “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

An illustration from life

A man was pruning his grape arbour. Being inexperienced, he tried to prune his own vines just as he had observed others do theirs. Much growth was trimmed off. A little later, another man came and pruned the arbour again, removing more growth. There seemed to be very little left. As the season progressed, it was evident that the vines that had been severely pruned produced much more fruit. “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2). Why would we resist when God desires to prune our lives?

Be fruitful instead and be pleasing to God and man.



Jesus Is Coming Again!

Revelation 1:7 is clear it says: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen."

See Companion Text: Mark 13:24-37

There are many mysteries surrounding the return of our Lord. It is not, however, the mysteries we need to be concerned about but the things which God has chosen to reveal to us. These are meant to encourage us to be ready. Some things are certain. Every day brings us closer to the Lord's return. Many who felt that the Lord's return was close have been gone many years. We are certain that the end is closer now than in their day.

Prophecies saying that in the last days knowledge shall be increased leave little doubt that the end is imminent. The return of the Lord should bring joy. We will be able to leave our earthly body with its inherent sin and craving for self-gratification. We will be free to love and serve without the downward pull of earthly desires and temptations that have so often hindered us.

At the conclusion of all earthly things, time shall have ended and eternity will reign as it did before the foundation of the world. Jesus impresses us with the certainty of this happening by using the word shall eleven times in Matthew 13: He warns us to be alert and watching. He uses watch four times. It is not His intent to appear without warning His children. He wants us to be awake and busy in His kingdom. As we read the prophecies, we want to discern which are to be understood literally and which are figurative. It may never become completely clear to us, but each verse should create in us a desire to watch. As we observe events around us, we may wonder if current happenings are direct fulfillment of prophecy. World events should be looked at as a whole instead of as separate incidents. To-day we have the advantage of being able to look back in history. Past events are a part of the whole picture. We hear of wars, floods, and pestilences that today are called epidemics. We hear of earthquakes causing tremendous destruction. The earth is waxing old as a garment as predicted in Hebrews 1:11. The wickedness of man is abounding. Never before has sin been so readily available to so many people.

Matthew 24:38 teaches us that the end times will be as in Noah's day. Surely, even in his day, the world was not more evil than it is now. As we look at the whole picture, we must conclude that the world is ripe for judgment and the Lord could come at any time. For our own good and also for the benefit of His kingdom God has not made known the day of His return. If we knew the day of Christ's return too many of us would be tempted to put off the day of consecration until just before the end. We would be useless servants indeed. The Lord has left His children with the responsibility to take care of His house, and there are duties for each of us. To watch means to care for what He has given us to do. We must not be lazy and slack like an irresponsible employee. We do not know the exact time of the Master's return, but we know with certainty that He is returning. There is no time for procrastination. Let us take heed, watching and praying fervently so we will not be found sleeping.

It is no coincidence that in the same sermon the Lord taught us not to be overcharged with the cares of this life and also warned us to be ready and watching (Luke 12:31-40). We are to seek first the kingdom of God and trust in His promise to supply our needs. The import of Jesus' message was that spiritual sleepiness can be a result of being too concerned about material things. Anything that subtracts from our love to God will lull us to sleep. Today, the gentle waves of easy credit and ample insurance lapping on the shores of affluence may cause sleepiness. We can easily lose our dependence on God and trust in man's provision to see us through the tough times.

Another temptation we face is to unthinkingly put far away the day of Christ's return. After many warnings of the coming of the Lord we may become like the hard-hearted servant who said the Lord was delaying His coming. In this condition our love for the brethren begins to wane. Though we feel we are too civilized to smite each other (Luke 12:45), we may struggle with feelings of bitterness and hostility toward our fellow servants.

It is interesting to note that two prophecies are coming to pass simultaneously. The first is the increase of knowledge; the second is an increase of iniquity. At the tower of Babel, God confused the languages because there

was a danger that the unchecked imaginations of the people would lead them into still further mischief. Could it be that today's technology, with its capability to share knowledge through universal media, has brought the human race in a full circle, back to where God put a stop to their inventions? After the Lord's return we must face judgment, and we are warned repeatedly to be ready. To put the day far off will not eliminate the facts of the matter. To put off consecration until a more convenient time often has the same results as saying "I refuse." Some may know of others who lived for the flesh and came back to God before death. Praise God for His mercy to those fortunate ones, but woe to those who turn aside the Holy Spirit's entreaty, hoping that living a genuine Christian life will somehow be easier later on. Sad will be their awakening when the trumpet blows—how sad it will be to hold an empty lamp as the foolish virgins did (Matthew 25:1-13).

In mercy and loving kindness our Lord has given us sufficient time, knowledge, and grace to prepare ourselves for His return. His Word points us to Jesus' sacrifice as the answer to our carnal natures. For those who receive Him and His commandments, Jesus' coming is not a dreadful time, but a joyful event.

The Apostle John looked to the time of Jesus' return, and said, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" Revelation 22:20.

We must not let our earthly pursuits lull us to sleep or distract us. Let us lift up our heads, for our redemption is near.

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