

Living Between The Steps Part 1

Matthew 5:1-11

As believers we all want to live a life of blessing and we also want to be a blessing to others. But as we journey through this life we come to find that sometimes that is easier said than done. We make resolutions, we get involved in activities, we study more and pray harder. In short, we do, we do, and we keep on doing. And after a while we get discouraged with all of our doing, and wonder, is this all there is to this “blessed life”? Our spiritual lives get dry. Spending time in the WORD, and with the LORD becomes something that we have to do, instead of something we look forward to. Discouragement sets in, and we begin to wonder if our prayers reach much higher than the ceiling. This desert place that we have found ourselves in, is not where we want to be. The fault has to be with us... right? So again we make resolutions and we convince ourselves to try harder. We see others that seem to have it right. We wonder what are they doing that we're not.

We are putting all the checks in the blocks, we are taking all the necessary steps, we are planning our spiritual walk to death. Determined to succeed, we have rolled up our sleeves and got busy just as our blue collar roots have told us to do. After all, God

helps those who help themselves doesn't He? And maybe that is the point, we are doing way too much.

A university professor tells of being invited to speak at a military base one December and there meeting an unforgettable soldier named Ralph. Ralph had been sent to meet him at the airport, and after they had introduced themselves, they headed toward the baggage claim.

As they walked down the concourse, Ralph kept disappearing. Once to help an older woman whose suitcase had fallen open. Once, to lift two toddlers up to where they could see Santa Claus. And again to give directions to someone who was lost. Each time he came back with a big smile on his face.

"Where did you learn to do that?" the professor asked.

"Do what?" Ralph said.

"Where did you learn to live like that?"

"Oh," Ralph said, "during the war, I guess." Then he told the professor about his tour of duty in Viet Nam, about how it was his job to clear mine fields, and how he watched his friends blow up before his eyes, one after another.

"I've learned to live between the steps," he said. "I never knew whether the next one would be my last, so I learned to get everything I could out of the

The Amazon River is the largest river in the world. The mouth is 90 miles across. There is enough water to exceed the combined flow of the Yangtze, Mississippi, and Nile Rivers. So much water comes from the Amazon that they can detect its currents 200 miles out in the Atlantic Ocean. One irony of ancient navigation is that sailors in ancient times died for lack of water... caught in windless waters of the South Atlantic. They were adrift, helpless, dying of thirst. Sometimes other ships from South America who knew the area would come alongside and call out, "What is your problem?" And they would exclaim, "Can you spare us some water? Our sailors are dying of thirst!" And from the other ship would come the cry, "Just lower your buckets. You are in the mouth of the mighty Amazon River...."

Circumstances of despair may surround us at times, but God is certainly not to blame if we lack what we need. On the contrary, He is always nearby to provide for us. We need only draw on what He has already given. We need to begin to live between the steps. And we start by identifying and avoiding the wrong pursuits and abiding in the right pursuit.

moment between when I picked up my foot and when I put it down again. Every step I took was a whole new world, and I guess I've just been that way ever since."

For every step we take there is a distance between the left foot and the right. Two points on a singular plane. And smack dab in the middle of one point to the next is right where we should be living. It is where the good stuff is, between the steps, where past and present collide. In Matthew Chapter 5 we have such a place, an instruction manual, if you will, to help us on our journey into a blessed life.

Mat 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

Mat 4:24 And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.

Mat 4:25 And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.

Jesus is near Capernaum in Galilee, and large crowds of people have come from all around to see Him and hear him speak. Jesus first sermon is called

the “Sermon on the Mount because of what He does when He see the large crowds.

Mat 5:1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

Mat 5:2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

The introduction to this great sermon tells us how to start our "living between the steps." Jesus' sermon is first presented amidst a climate of great unhappiness in the nation of Israel. They are living under the burden of high, corrupt Roman taxation. The Jewish priesthood is also corrupt and void of any meaningful teaching. The nation is filled with social, racial, political, and religious prejudice and strife. Into this scene comes an uneducated, country preacher named "Jesus," and crowds flock to hear Him teach. They are mesmerized as they listen to Him because

Mat 7:29 ... he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes.

The teachers, or rabbis, normally read a passage of Scripture and then shared what famous rabbis had said about it. The rabbis sometimes had differing opinions and would contradict each other. The listeners were then left to make up their own minds. However, Jesus taught the Word of God in a clear, powerful way, not relying on any famous rabbi for His *authority*. His style was a clear, commanding, "Thus saith the Lord!" Also, while the rabbis of His

result of an ongoing relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, not of our “doing”.

Many people are exhausted and frustrated because of their endless pursuit of "blessed living." Like Solomon, they have tried everything the world has to offer and found it all *vexation of spirit*. That's why Jesus gives us that wonderful promise in Matthew 11:28?

Mat 11:28 Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Jesus knows the **wrong pursuit** of blessed living can be difficult and painful. To those who are tired and weary of the wrong pursuit of happiness, Jesus promises divine *rest* and divine delight.

How would you best describe your life: Are you on sinking sand, solid ground, or somewhere in between? Many of us slip and slide in life, rarely coming to a balanced walk with Christ. Why is this so? Why do so many believers settle for a life of instability?

God is never lacking in the resources we need. No matter our circumstances, God is able to abundantly provide. This great truth is often misplaced when we take our eyes off the Provider and place them on ourselves. Instead of turning to God to keep us straight, we veer off the path, lose our bearings, and suffer the consequences.

Peter tells us we have been given *exceeding great and precious promises* in the first part of this verse, but look at how he continues:

2Pe 1:4 ... that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

The word translated *partakers* (*koinōnos*, coin-oh-nos') means "fellowship" or "to share in." How do we become *partakers* of God's *divine nature*? It is through Jesus Christ. In Christ, we take on the very nature of God.

2Co 5:17 Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*

Notice the phrase "in Christ". This phrase is found over eighty times in the New Testament. One of my favorites is:

Eph 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* **in Christ:**

That means *in Christ* we have every *blessed* thing Jesus talks about in the Beatitudes. This is possible because *in Christ* we share in the *divine nature* of God. Therefore, "living between the steps" is the

day expounded on the heavy burdens of the Law, Jesus taught authoritatively about love and blessedness.

Getting the right start to a life of living between the steps requires **two** things. The first is...

I. Avoid the wrong pursuit

Most people pursue a blessed life in all the wrong places. Some pursue it through careers and some in relationships. However, most search for a blessed life in fortune, fame, or finances. They have the "when and then" attitude of pursuit: "**When** I get that car, **then** I'll be happy;" "**When** I get that job, **then** I'll be happy;" or, "**When** I make lots of money, **then** I'll be happy." Yet, what does Jesus tell us in Luke 12:15?

Luk 12:15 And he said unto them, *Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

Solomon records his wrong pursuit of a blessed life. In Ecclesiastes chapter two, Solomon describes his efforts to find happiness in the same ways most people do today.

First, he tried to find it in **pleasure**.

- He tried to cheer himself with *wine*.

Ecc 2:3 I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.

- He also hired men and women singers, and he had many concubines, or a harem of women. He had everything that could delight a man's heart.

Ecc 2:8I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts.

- He continues to tell us in verse 10 that he didn't hold anything back.

Ecc 2:10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.

He was like people today who pursue a blessed life through pleasure by living an "amusement park" kind of lifestyle. They try to find blessedness through music, concerts, sex, drugs, trips, and all kinds of entertainment. They pursue happiness by

- He is called *the blessed God*.

1Ti 1:11 According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

- Paul refers to Jesus as *the blessed and only Potentate*.

1Ti 6:14 That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

1Ti 6:15 Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

Being *blessed* is an exclusive part of God's divine nature. Therefore, the only way we can find the blessedness Jesus speaks of in the Beatitudes is by having a personal relationship with God through Him.

Since blessedness is part of God's nature, the only people who can experience it are those who share in His nature.

2Pe 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Mat 5:11 **Blessed** are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

This word “blessed” is often used interchangeably with "happy." However as you are going to see in just a second, we as Christians should never be happy. Joyful yes, but never happy.

The Webster dictionary defines happy as, “favored by luck or fortune. Another dictionary defines it as "favored by circumstances" or "lucky" because the root word "hap" means "chance" or "luck."

Therefore, if your "hap" is good, you are happy; if your "hap" is bad, you are unhappy. In other words, happiness is based on circumstances. However, what Jesus is talking about when He uses the word *blessed* goes way beyond the word "happy."

The Greek word translated *blessed* (*makarios*, mah-car'-e-os) was used in reference to Greek gods. They were considered to be happy within themselves because they were not affected by the circumstances and happenings in the world.

Therefore, the word *blessed* refers to an inward contentment and tranquility not affected by circumstances.

Being *blessed* is best defined as having "divine delight." The word *blessed* is used in the Bible to describe God; for example,

pampering themselves. But in verse 11 he records his findings.

Ecc 2:11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun.

When Solomon couldn't find a blessed life in pleasure, he pursued it through prosperity.

Ecc 2:4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards:

Ecc 2:5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all *kind of* fruits:

Ecc 2:6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

Ecc 2:7 I got *me* servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me:

Ecc 2:8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces:

Therefore, he tried to fill the void in his life by building houses that would put the mansions of today's rich and famous to shame. He also planted vineyards, which were very valuable in His day. He owned more livestock than anyone in Jerusalem or

anyone who ever lived in all of history. He amassed a fortune in gold and silver that was more than the wealth of kings and provinces. Solomon was so successful in amassing his fortune that he became the wealthiest man to ever live.

Ecc 2:9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me.

Someone has said, "Money can't buy happiness, but it can rent it." But the truth is, when you have a huge financial windfall, you can be happy for a while, but it won't last. Look at the track record of the lottery winners in our time. The majority of them end up broke, unhappy, and far worse off than they were before they won. This is the tremendous problem with trying to find a blessed life through **prosperity**. Solomon expresses this very problem in Eccles. 5:10.

Ecc 5:10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this *is* also vanity.

Look at the word vanity. The Hebrew word translated *vanity* (hebel, heb-el) means "empty" or "futile." Like Solomon, those who pursue a blessed life through **pleasure** and **prosperity** will discover what he writes nine times in the book of Ecclesiastes. It is all *vexation of spirit* .

Ecc 2:11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, **all was vanity and vexation of spirit**, and *there was* no profit under the sun.

So to get the right start into a life of living between the footsteps, we need to avoid the wrong pursuit and:

II. Abide in the right pursuit

The right pursuit comes from understanding the word that opens each verse in our passage this morning.

Mat 5:3 **Blessed** are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Mat 5:4 **Blessed** are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Mat 5:5 **Blessed** are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Mat 5:6 **Blessed** are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Mat 5:7 **Blessed** are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Mat 5:8 **Blessed** are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Mat 5:9 **Blessed** are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Mat 5:10 **Blessed** are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.