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Who Sets the Bar for You

1 Peter 3:8

**Prayer:** *Father, once again I just, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for your gifts, again I thank you for the gift of Janan and all that she has meant to us over these many, many years. And Lord, we just again thank you for the gift of your church, the gift of your Son, the gift of your word, the gift of your Holy Spirit. And Father, this morning again we call on that gift. We pray for your Holy Spirit, we pray that you would guide us as we open up one gift, your word, and rely on another gift, your Holy Spirit, to make it of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.*

Well, our text this morning actually begins with the word "finally." Peter is summing up a lot of what we've discussed this past summer. We spent the entire summer on it and yet I feel like we've barely scratched the surface. And just to sum up thus far, Peter opens up this letter by addressing it to God's chosen elect scattered throughout Asia Minor and he's prepping them for the hard times and the persecution that is right around the corner. He's constantly balancing the privilege they have of being God's own

with the responsibility representing Jesus Christ. In the first ten verses Peter tells us how to see God with our hearts. In the next two we learn to appreciate the unspeakable gift of the word of God and the next three verses tell us how to become slaves to righteousness. In verse 17 we're told to live in reverential fear of God's holiness and his judgment. Chapter 2 tells us that we're living stones being fitted into a living temple offering living sacrifices to God. We learn that God does indeed have a perfect plan for our lives and at the center of that plan is the cross. In chapter 3 we see the cross being played out in marriage, it's God's great poem, his artwork, his statement. Our marriages are God's artwork. And we learn that marriage is a deeply mysterious statement made to the universe about the relationship of the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. And most importantly we learned that we can never stop our marriages from declaring either the glory of or the disgrace to God's great plan.

So it's fitting that our text today would begin with the word "finally." In 1 Peter 3:8 Peter is summing up in practical terms what the first three chapters were aiming at and he sums it up with five very simple commands. This is 1 Peter 3:8. He says:

*Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.* The NIV puts it this way, it says: *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love*

*one another, be compassionate and humble.* And this morning I want to look at these five different commands and ask of ourselves the question: How am I doing? And there's really only one honest answer to that question and the real honest answer to that question is really that depends. You see, it depends on how high you set the bar for each of those five simple commands, I mean, you set it too high and you become legalistic just like the Pharisees. You set it too low and you become carnal. I mean we've got the same dilemma that Goldilocks had, one is too hard, one is too soft and we desperately want to know what "just right" is all about.

Wouldn't it be nice, we think, if somebody just laid it all out in black and white: This is what is expected of you, period. Do A, B, C and D, do it exactly like this. We all know it doesn't work that way. But God has not left us guessing. So let's walk through these five commands and see where the bar really belongs.

Now the first one says: *"Have unity of mind or spirit."* Another translation says: *"Live in harmony with one another."* That's not so bad, that's not so hard, I mean lots of groups are like-minded, lots of groups are harmonious. I mean you can look at groups like the Elks or the rotary or a bowling team or a firehouse, many of them succeed in unity and harmony because they all have a common purpose whether it's bowling, whether it's service, whether it's fire fighting, but that's not what Peter is saying here. In fact

he's not just saying have Jesus at your common purpose, instead he's saying have as your common bond the very mind of Jesus. He's saying think like Jesus thinks. And if there was anyone who understood what that really meant it was Peter. Because failure to think like Jesus thought was one of his greatest failings.

Remember when Jesus told the disciples plainly that he was going to be crucified? Remember Peter's response? His carnal mind wouldn't have it. This is *Matthew 16*, it says: *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you." Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."*

See, Peter quickly learned how easy it is to substitute earthly thinking for the things of God. So the first thing that *1 Peter 3:8* is commanding is not harmonious thinking. Rather it's all minds operating on the exact same wavelength that Jesus' mind operated on. And our first problem is that we do not have in our minds the things of God, instead we have primarily the things of man. How do you know that? Well God tells us in *Philippians 2*

exactly what a God-centered mind is like and this is what he says in *Philippians 2:1*. He says: *Therefore, if any of you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.*

See, harmony means having the same love. It means being one in Spirit and purpose with our Lord Jesus Christ. Now does that describe you? Does that describe me? See, if I describe harmony as niceness or the ability to get along with others, then it's doable. Then I'm quite comfortable and that's really the problem. See, unity of spirit and harmony could be understood on the level of a Pepsi commercial or on the level of a sacred task demanding that we have the very mind of Christ. Peter's giving us five simple commands, but those commands, they're all open-minded -- they're all open-ended. And so all of those commands have wildly different ways of being understood. And we oftentimes reserve the right to plant our flag in the place that grants us the status quo. We define what okay is and that really is the problem. Not too hard, not too soft, not too legalistic, not too carnal, we just want the perfect evangelical balance.

Look at the second command, the second command says "be sympathetic." Am I sympathetic? Well, I should think so, I mean, isn't everybody sympathetic? I mean, again, that depends. Romans 12 gives us an excellent working definition of what "sympathy" is. It is extremely simple. This is *Romans 12:15*, it says: *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.* Who's not willing to do that? I mean I'm very sympathetic towards people I like. I mean I readily identify with them because friendship has already provided an emotional bridge to them. And you know, I've personally experienced brothers and sisters coming into my emotions and in this place folks have literally wept with me as well as laughed and let me tell you, this church is outstanding in that respect. But again, we ask ourselves, okay, where's the standard? How do we judge? How do we know how we're doing? Well, Paul says the church is to be literally like a human body, I mean, we're supposed to be so completely connected to one another that nothing can happen to the smallest and weakest among us without it affecting all of us. I mean I may drop a rock on my little toe and it may be the smallest and the most lowly part of me, but you and I both know from that moment on nothing matters in my body but that little toe. Is that true for this body? Is that true for me? I mean, do we ever really enter into the emotions of our brothers and sisters not because they are our friends but for Christ's sake alone? So I guess we could ask the question this way. Have you

ever vested emotion into someone you don't know or someone you did know but didn't like simply because God commands it? I mean how do I know whether I've obeyed the command to be sympathetic or simply am paying lip service to it? You got fired from your job? Too bad. You got a wonderful promotion? Wow, nice. Is that what being sympathetic means? Is that entering into the emotional state of someone else? You know, the old cliché says "walk a mile in somebody else's shoes" but really how many of us are able to walk fully invested in somebody else's pain or joy? Let me tell you what makes a genuine difference here. What makes a difference is prayer. In fact prayer makes all the difference in the world, particularly when you are identifying with somebody that you don't have an emotional bridge to.

Now when Pastor Andrew was taken out of prison in Turkey and put under house arrest, there was great rejoicing amongst many, many people and I know I was one of those people and I was rejoicing because I've already been vested in this person through prayer. Recently we've had some spectacular answers to prayer in this local body and the ones who know, the ones who rejoice in those answers are the ones who are invested. They're the ones who have invested in prayer for that exact outcome. And these folks are able to rejoice when others rejoice and the reason why is because a very specific prayer has made them sympathetic. So I would ask how

sympathetic am I towards the weakest and smallest parts of this body?

Now the third command again looks deceptively simple, it's love the brethren. Love his brothers. It's about brotherly love and, again, who doesn't have brotherly love? Well, again, that depends on what that term really means. Do we truly love as brothers? I mean, what's the standard? What is too little, what is too much? Years ago when Chechnya was a break-away republic in Russia there was a terrible civil war was taking place and when the Chechen rebels were attempting to retreat from Grozny, they found themselves hemmed in on all sides by Russian landmines. In order to make the retreat, some of the rebels shouted out "meet you in paradise!" and then dove on to the landmines. They literally created a footpath of human flesh. That's brotherly love. I mean these folks weren't even Christians and yet they fulfilled Christ's definition of love in *John 15* where he says: "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*" What does the Holy Spirit have in mind when he commands us in *1 Peter 3:8* to love as brothers? I mean, can I assume it means to be willing to figuratively and literally die for one another or is that too extreme? I mean, I know God expects brotherly love from us 'cause he said so in *1 John 4:20*. He says: *If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not*

*love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.* Again we're faced with this question: How much brotherly love is enough? I mean how do we know what normal is when we reserve the right to declare where normal lies and normal is the product of our peers?

The fourth command is a good example of the problem we face. The fourth command of 1 Peter 3:8 is "a tender heart." NIV says: "Be compassionate." Well, compassion is really nothing more than sympathy with legs, sympathy with arms. It's putting sympathy into action. But who gets to define it? You know when my kids were little, they used to listen to a tape that was a dramatic replaying of the match between David and Goliath and it had Goliath speaking when he sees young David coming out to meet him, and this is what he says, quoting 1 Samuel 17, he says: "*Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks?*" *And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field."* Now I know this is strictly hypothetical but I just want to pose a question. I want to ask was Goliath being compassionate here? What if the Philistines were looking forward to seeing Goliath torture David? And what if Goliath was just so filled with pity that he was actually saying, "Don't worry, kid, I'm going to kill

you quickly." I mean isn't that compassion, relatively speaking? I mean maybe the Philistines would have complained that Goliath had gone soft. I mean, in the eyes of his peers, Goliath would have been seen as a compassionate man. See, my point is you cannot judge any of these qualities by the peer group that you're in.

There's a story about Mother Teresa. It is said she was approached by a wealthy businessman and she asked him for money for her people. The man said, "I have something for you," and so she extended her hand and he spit on it. She said, "If that's for me, I thank you. Now what do you have for my people?" See, Mother Teresa lived out her life in the world's largest garbage dump ministering to the lowest of the low in India. She had compassion. But so did Goliath in our story. And so once again we're faced with a question: How much compassion is enough? And where do we set the bar? Do we set it at our peers or do we set it at scripture? When we hear God commanding us to like-mindedness, to sympathy, to brotherly love and compassion, they all seem so simple. They seem so manageable. But the more we understand them, the higher the bar goes and the more impossible each one seems. You want compassion, just go follow Mother Teresa to India.

Now the last command from 1 Peter 3 is particularly appropriate considering the other four. It's "have a humble mind." Do you

have a humble mind? Well, you know what? That depends. Let me tell you a story about a man named King Yee. Pastor Kimber Kauffman is a pastor of a large church in Indianapolis and it had recently been remodeled and the pastor was in his new office, brand spanking new, it had a shower and bathroom attached, it was 7:30 on a Saturday morning, Pastor Kauffman was leaving, then he remembered he had left a book in his office. And so he was going back to retrieve the book and as he retrieved it, he heard someone. And so he looked into the bathroom and he saw this tiny Asian man on his hands and knees scrubbing the floor by the toilet with a toothbrush. "Hi, I'm Kim Kauffman," he said. The man responded, "Hello, I'm King Yee," and with that he left. He said one week later he was watching the 6:00 o'clock news on CNN and there was a story there about Larry Bird who's the coach of the Indiana Pacers. And he had been flying with his team to Colorado to play the Denver Nuggets when Mr. Bird got off the plane in Denver complaining about heart issues. They said immediately Indianapolis management chartered a jet to fly the leading cardiologists of the Midwest out to attend to Mr. Bird and the pastor said my jaw dropped as they introduced Dr. King Yee as the head of the cardiac team. He said one week ago this guy was on his hands and his knees with a toothbrush cleaning the grout lines behind my toilet. He never once anticipated meeting me and when he did, he said absolutely nothing about who he was. That's what a humble mind is all about.

Now I read that and I hear that I know this much, if I was King Yee, I would be looking for -- not for humility but for a humble-looking way to let that pastor know that I was a big shot too. I mean I'd be subtle, I'd be clever, but I'd figure out a way to be proudly humble. I'm just awestruck by people who are that self-possessed. But what if King Yee is not the exemplar of humility but simply a mere practitioner of it. I mean what if God expects all of us to be no different than King Yee when it comes to humility? And so the bar goes even higher. And the question we ask this morning is: How do we get over the bar? I mean, do we stand on our peers' shoulders, grab ahold of the bar, set it at a comfortable level and then just step painlessly over it? Or do we ask God for the grace to overcome its impossible height?

Joshua asked the Israelites in Joshua 24 if they would serve the Lord. This is how they responded. This is *Joshua 24:16*, it says: *Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we will also serve the LORD, for he is our God."* You have to understand

that the Israelites were speaking to Joshua who's been at Moses' side for the entire time they've spent wandering around in the desert. He's heard them complaining that God wanted to kill them in the desert before God opened up the Red Sea. He's heard them complaining that the manna that God sent them didn't pack the culinary punch that the cucumbers and the leeks did when they were in Egypt. He was there when they rebelled at Massah and threatened to kill Moses, so he knows all about these people. And so he responds to their statement by saying this in verse 19: *But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good." And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD." Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses."* You see, Joshua asked people for the impossible. Serve the Lord and the people said, hey, no sweat, I'm happy to do it. It was as empty a statement as could possibly be made. You see only Joshua knew what they were agreeing to. And understand, his answer is the key to getting over the bar. Joshua said, *"You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God."* You see the same is true for you and me and understanding that is the secret to finding God's power to

do anything. At the beginning of this message I read a simple statement from *1 Peter 3:8*. He said: *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.* Now that consists of five simple commands. If you have no problem whatsoever with those commands as I read them, either you don't understand them or else like the Israelites you're simply kidding yourself. I mean the question isn't whether or not we set the bar too high or too low, see the answer is the bar is actually set at Jesus Christ and none of us will ever get there. And yet for some reason we think we're just as capable as the Israelites.

You know, I always marvel at the love that people profess for Jesus's famous Sermon on the Mount. You know oftentimes people who know very little of the Bible or know very little of Jesus say how much they love the Sermon on the Mount. Well if you read carefully what Jesus is saying there, you see that it's far more challenging than people imagine. And the reason why is Jesus is demonstrating what Joshua was trying to say. Time and time again Jesus takes the teachings of the Pharisees and he proceeds to put them in context as to what the demands of a holy God really are. And so Jesus takes the very doable commands that the Pharisees had fashioned from the ten commandments and he renders them well-nigh impossible. Over and over again he tells the people what the Pharisees had taught by telling them, he said, *"You've heard it said"* and then he

states the obviously doable things that the Pharisees have concocted, but Jesus never stops there. He takes the same statement "*but you have heard it said*" and he adds this ominous phrase "*but I say.*" Over and over again during the Sermon on the Mount you will hear Jesus say, "*You have heard it said but I say.*" And what Jesus is saying is that any attempt whatsoever to think you can actually be good enough for God will be met by a standard that is so high and so huge you will never ever be able to achieve it, because the standard is the holiness and perfection of God himself.

Listen to how Jesus applies God's standards to something as simple as the command not to murder. The Pharisees told people that they can't murder someone. I don't think that's a hard commandment to obey, I mean, not many of us have any intention of murdering anybody. I don't think the hearers of the Pharisees thought it was that hard a thing to do, but listen to how Jesus phrases it. He says, "*For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the*

*hell of fire.*" Do you hear what Jesus is saying here? He's saying you think you're okay because you don't murder anybody? He says I'm telling you the command not to kill includes being angry, it includes being insulting, it includes calling someone a fool and if by chance you think you can meet that standard, you're going to find the commandment not to kill goes deeper and wider than you ever imagined, so much so that you will never be able to keep even this command.

Well the same is true for the Pharisees' teaching on adultery. And again, listen to how Jesus phrases this command. He says, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" Again Jesus is saying you think you're okay because you haven't committed the actual act? But I say to you adultery goes far deeper than simply committing a physical act, and if you've ever had even a fleeting lustful thought, you've already failed this commandment.

The Pharisees told folks they were forbidden to lie. Jesus takes that command then he expands that infinitely. He says, "*Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'* But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is

*the throne of God, or by earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.*

*Once again the Pharisees taught we can respond in like kind if someone hurts us. Again Jesus expands on that. He says, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."*

*The same is true for the Pharisees' command about who we are to love and who it is we're allowed to hate. Again Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the*

*tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?"* I mean do you see what Jesus is doing here? Do you see why it seems so bizarre when people say oh, I love the Sermon on the Mount. I mean Jesus is addressing himself to those who think that by their own efforts they can somehow be good enough for God. And what he is doing is he's pointing out that the commandment will always be far, far greater than anyone's capacity to achieve it because the commandment is a reflection of the very nature of God and God is absolute transcendent perfection. There is no commandment anywhere, anyhow, anyway or any time that any of us could ever do with absolute perfection. So every time you think you can, you are literally challenging God. And Jesus summed it all up perfectly when he ends the Sermon on the Mount with yet another impossible task. Listen to what he says in verse 48. He says, *"You therefore must be" -- what? -- "perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* Well, Peter in our text this morning is reflecting the very same kind of impossibility of achievement on our own. You see, King Yee is light years ahead of me when it comes to humility, but he's still infinitely far from the humility of the Lord Jesus Christ. Pastor Kauffman said he looked at King Yee's hands and he instantly thought of the hands of Christ fashioning the universe and then washing the disciples' feet. That's the standard that Jesus meets. And no matter whether it's

humility or compassion or brotherly love or sympathy or like-mindedness, the key to all of them is understanding the absolute impossibility of ever working my way to that goodness or godliness on my own power. You can have the love of the Chechen rebels, you can have the compassion of Mother Teresa, the humility of a King Yee and it will always, always fall short of the glory of God. The logical question is well then why bother? I mean, why set an impossible standard when you know you can never reach it?

You see, one thing many people don't realize is that the law, that is the ten commandments, is an impossible standard. It was not given to us as something that we could accomplish and therefore justify ourselves before God. The law was given to us for the express purpose of making us throw up our hands in profound despair that we finally realize the absolute impossibility of what God is calling us to do so that we would then turn to Christ and accept by faith that he alone fulfilled the law perfectly. I mean *Galatians 3:24* says: *Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.* God is telling us that the law is our taskmaster, he's teaching us that God's nature is absolute perfection and that we have fallen far short of that perfection as we always will. When God says: *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,* he is adding an impossible

qualifier describing what sin is. I mean think about what that statement is saying. God is telling us that anything short of his glory is sin. Anything that you and I have ever done that doesn't match the flawless perfection of the glory of God is sinful. Wait a minute. I've never in my entire life ever done anything in any way ever equal to the glory of God. And if that's really true, then that means I am so steeped in sin, so far beyond my wildest imagination that God should have nothing whatsoever to do with me. And if you're thinking like that, my answer is you're getting warm, warmer. See, when God said in *Isaiah 64*: *But we are all like an unclean thing. And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags,* he's not speaking about the wicked things that we do. He's speaking about our good deeds. He's speaking about our very best. God says our righteousness is so far below God's standard that it's like filthy rags. And I've said this to you many, many times before, *Isaiah* is addressing a kosher crowd, a people to whom things, issues of blood have a huge significance. And the actual technical term for "filthy rags" is "used menstrual rags" and it's designed to make them appalled at hearing it. And what God is doing is he's reaching to the highest heights, your righteousness, and he's going to the lowest low, he says "filthy rags." Why do you think Tim Keller makes that statement about God's love by saying this, he says: "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very

same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope." See there's only two ways to look at this. One way is to understand that I'm a worm, I'm garbage, I'm fit for nothing but the dung heap or to simply say what an incredible God we have, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, and I choose to go with the latter.

One of the most important and difficult parts of explaining the gospel is trying to get people to understand that their best efforts are just not good enough because they all fall short of the glory of God. I tell folks all the time we're in this impossible situation, we're under a curse and the curse is that God must demand absolute perfection of those who would have fellowship with him because he himself is that perfection. The good news is that God has found a way to supply absolute perfection to those same people knowing that they could not. He did it by becoming a man, by living among us perfectly, and then he offered up his life of perfection for our life of sin so that we could claim his perfection by faith, faith in his perfectly lived life, death and resurrection. Jesus' perfection extended to every part of his life including this list that Peter describes in our text this morning. He says: *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.* Jesus was perfectly like-minded, perfectly sympathetic, perfectly loving, perfectly

compassionate and humble. And what Peter is telling us this morning is a reflection of how we are practically to put this into play. We will never achieve the level of goodness or perfection that God must demand of us. But God has a solution to this. And God's solution is summed up in his words to Paul in *2 Corinthians 12:9*. He says: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."* See God's brilliance, his brilliance and wisdom is such that God made our very weakness the source of our strength. *Romans 8:26* says: *Likewise the Spirit also helps in -- what? in our weaknesses.*

See God is offering us a choice here. As I said before, we can stand on our peers' shoulders, lower the bar to a comfortable height like the Pharisees tried or we can let the reality of the height of the bar break us and then bring that brokenness to him for strength. You see in God's economy the power to accomplish the impossible comes not from ability but from brokenness. *Psalm 51: The sacrifices of God are the broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* I have to confess, my first reading of *1 Peter 3:8* was just like that of the Israelites. Let's see, like-mindedness, okay. Sympathy? I can do that. Brotherly love? No problem. Compassion? Well, I already know I've got brotherly love so it's probably no sweat to have compassion. Finally, humility. Hey, what's not to be humble about? You know,

the more I understood the height, the width, the breadth, and the depth of these commands, the more I understand that I don't even begin to scratch the surface. And my righteousness is as filthy rags. But that's okay because I'm still loved enough that God himself would die for me. I mean it's not my desire to be negative but it is my desire to be realistic, to point out how small we are and how huge in every way God is, how high the bar is and how low our natural ability is 'cause that's where our real power lies. See, God wants us broken and asking him where's my like-mindedness, where's my love for the brethren, where is my sympathy, where is my compassion, Lord, where is my humility? I mean if we look for our answers among our peers, we're going to quickly find out, hey, I'm okay, because everybody's okay. But in reality we're all a mess.

The Gallup Poll recently compared 65 life-style issues between evangelicals in the church and the world and on 63 of 65 issues they were virtually identical. So you see we're all okay, we're all amazingly okay. The bar is comfortably set at ankle level, and all you have to do now is step over it. Or you can see yourself as God sees you and bring that brokenness to him asking him for the power to be what Peter is calling us to be. It sounds so simple but it's the source of God's power in your life.

Jesus Christ promised us in *John 16:23*: "*Whatever you ask of the*

*Father in my name, he will give it to you.*" Now the key qualifier for that statement is the phrase "in my name." Jesus says whatever you ask the Father according to my nature, according to my heart, according to my desires, he will give it to you. When you truly pray that way for the ability to do these five things that Peter says here, you are guaranteed a yes. This is an absolute guarantee of answered prayer, and it comes from brokenness. You see the power of brokenness is that it allows you to see well enough to ask for the very things that God wants to give us, things like like-mindedness and sympathy and brotherly love and compassion and humility. You see, the world and oftentimes the church wants to assure that everything is fine and the status quo is perfectly good enough, the bar is set at a comfortable height where nothing could be further from the truth. You see it's not a question of whether the bar is set too low or too high because the bar will always be set at an infinite height because it's the height of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's not hard, that's impossible. Understand, God wants to do great and mighty things through you. But also understand it all starts with an attitude of brokenness. Again God says: *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* Understand, our very weakness is our strength. And no one knows that better than the one who wrote the very letter that we're studying. I mean he was a crude, uneducated fisherman who was also a blowhard, a coward and a liar. But he

brought all of his weakness to the foot of the cross and there he found his very weakness was the source of his strength. He's the one who is now inviting us to become what by God's grace he has already become. And he charges us: *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Let's pray.*

*Father, we want these things. I want to be like-minded and sympathetic and loving and compassionate and humble. But I know where the bar is set, Lord, it's not set by my peers, it's certainly not set by my culture. It's set by you, Lord, by the life you lived and the absolute perfection that you are and we know this is an absolute impossible standard. We cannot make it. We cannot achieve it. It breaks us as the law is intended to break us. And so, Lord, we bring that brokenness before you. We are empty vessels, we are broken vessels, we are weak vessels, and we pray in that spirit of brokenness that you would give us the strength we need to be like-minded, sympathetic, loving, compassionate and humble, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*