



Sermon Discussion Guide

THE HOPE CHOICE

Life's Healing Choices: The Beatitudes – Part 2

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Matthew 5:4 (NIV)

In this week's discussion about Life's Healing Choices, we look at the “Hope Choice”: my choosing to believe that God really exists, that I matter to him, and that he has the power to change me. This is about what God can do to heal our souls and make a difference in our lives. Being human, we usually try to avoid our pains, overcome our problems, and improve our lives with our own power before we ask for God's power and help. The paths we choose to find comfort and hope on our own might include alcohol, drugs, gambling, shopping, or entertainment. These are all different kinds of escape, but any escape they provide from our problems is only momentary. God wants to provide a completely different kind of escape, like being permanently set free from a prison cell, so we are newly empowered to grow and change. God's path for finding healing is summarized in Matthew 5:4 above: first we mourn, and then we are comforted. The “comforted” part of this promise is appealing, but the “mourn” part doesn't sound like fun, so choosing God's path is not our first human inclination. In our discussion we will learn more clearly about the benefits of God's path to comfort and hope, and why this path is the only useful choice for healing our lives.

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE – SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.

God's Path to Comfort and Hope

1. SEE WHO GOD REALLY IS: God is a loving father.

Who does not condemn us and why not, according to Romans 8:34?

- Why do many people think God is condemning them?
- Describe a situation where a father may seem condemning to one person and seem loving to another.

How does Psalm 86:15 describe God?

- Why do we sometimes think we can do something so bad that God would stop loving us?
- At times, why do we think we have a limited number of mistakes before God would stop loving us?
2 Corinthians 1:3 also describes God. What kind of father is he?
- Why might it feel strange to find comfort from the one whom we wronged?
- Why would people whose earthly father hurt them think our heavenly Father would also?
What comforts the author of Psalm 23:4?
- Why can we forget that the rod and staff of discipline and direction can be comforting?
- Why might we think a loving God would not discipline us?

Worship – The Bible is full of descriptions of God that range from apparent harshness to pure love. Sometimes our hurts make us focus on the harsh descriptions and forget the loving side, so we may feel that God is looking for ways to condemn us. And we may project the imperfections of our earthly father onto our heavenly Father. But God is a loving Father. Our feelings can't always be trusted – what we feel is not always real, though we can use our feelings to help us worship God. This week, reflect on how God has shown his love to you. Then look for an opportunity to help someone else see that God is a loving Father. Praise God by passionately sharing with someone the many ways God has shown his love for you.

2. SEE WHO YOU REALLY ARE: I am broken; I am loved.

According to Romans 3:23, who has fallen short and sinned?

- What types of escapes do some people take to avoid facing their sinful nature?
- Are some sins worse than others? Why might people think someone else's sins are worse than their own?
- Describe how acknowledging our sin can be a spiritually growing experience.
- Since we are all broken and will still sin, how are Christians supposed to be an example of Christ?



Read Luke 12:2. What will happen to those things that are concealed?

- If all will be revealed, why do people try to hide the truth about themselves?
- How does society deal with weaknesses of character? How might this impact peoples' willingness to face their human strengths and weaknesses?
- How might pride factor into facing the truth about ourselves?
- What are ways to remind ourselves that God loves us regardless of our concealed flaws?

What is the description of God's love in Jeremiah 31:3?

- What is the difference between God's love and human love?
- Why is it important to admit our brokenness?
- What are reasons some people might be reluctant to share their hurts and issues with their families?
- How will reluctance to honestly face our issues affect our relationship with God and others?

According to Psalm 119:76, where does our comfort come from?

- Give some examples of unconditional love.
- Why might it be necessary to feel worse before we can feel better?
- What are ways to truly feel God's comfort?
- How might people deal with others in their lives who aren't supportive of their spiritual growth?

Who has saved us according to Romans 3:24?

- Even though Jesus has already taken away our sins, what is his impact on our ongoing spiritual growth?
- What connection could be made between the apparent human weakness of Jesus on the cross and the ultimate power of God? How might this compare to our need to "mourn" and possibly look weak in order to gain God's comfort?

Fellowship – We are each loved by God for who we really are. To grow spiritually it is important that we face our sinful nature and turn to God for comfort. To do this we need others with whom we can share our pain, hurts, and habits, and receive their unconditional love and support as they support us in our journey to know ourselves and God better. What are you doing to bring Christian people around you as you grow closer to Christ? This week reach out in truth to one other Christian about one of your sinful issues. Feel the freedom of God's love and healing as you reveal more of yourself.

3. SEE HOW GOD CAN CHANGE YOU: God gives the power.

Read Isaiah 40:28-31. How does v.28 describe God? What will God do for those who are weary and weak (v.29 -30)?

Describe what happens when we wait on the Lord (v.31).

- What are some natural wonders of the world that God has created?
- What happens mentally and physically to those who are weak and weary?
- How different is the power that is coming from within us and the power that is coming from God?
- How can an eagle soar so high in the sky? And can it soar on its own?

According to Philippians 2:13, what will God do within us?

- In what ways will God work within us?
- What are examples of getting worn out by trying to change with our own power?
- What would happen if we try to achieve God's purpose in our lives on our own?

Discipleship – An eagle can soar high without much effort because it spreads its wings wide and catches updrafts to ride the wind. Likewise in our lives, we need the wind power that God generates for us. We cannot know and accomplish God's purpose in our lives on our own, so we have to trust that he will achieve his purpose in our lives. Although we may not fully understand in advance what God will do, learning how to commit our lives to him daily is the growth that discipleship requires. Describe how we can submit all we do to God daily.

Take a moment to review any assignments/challenges made during the personal application and commitment section of your previous meeting. Seeing God at work in the lives of those who commit to him is essential for growth.



PERSONAL APPLICATION AND COMMITMENT:

Last week we worked on humility, which now allows us the courage to seek hope and comfort in our life in Godly ways. Everyone has a personal way to deal with pain – some destructive and some healthy – but we know when we allow ourselves to feel pain with God’s presence and the support of others we will be comforted. It’s what the Bible tells us in Matthew 5:4, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Let this Scripture take root in your spirit by memorizing this verse. Then take action towards lasting change by focusing and practicing one of the following areas that lead us down God’s path of comfort:

- 1) Seeing who God really is.
- 2) Seeing who you really are.
- 3) Seeing how God can change you.

Share your commitment with the group, whether by reflecting on God’s great love and mercy, reading how he changed other people in the Bible, or seeking out a safe and supportive accountability partner to encourage you in your weaknesses. Then follow up by sharing your progress and challenges in the next group meeting.



Sermon Discussion Guide Leader Notes

Goals for this Week's Study

- Begin by having your group name several ways that people self-soothe to find comfort and hope.
- Ask the group if they know the many different names of God which show he is loving rather than condemning. Then share your hope for the group that we will each have the courage to honestly see who we really are in our broken areas, and still know we are loved by God.
- Also, share with the group the goal that we will be able to access God's power to change through his power, his Word, and the intercession of other believers.
- Pray: Loving and merciful God, Our Father, you know our tendencies to hide or fix our pain by our own tiring efforts and habits. There is nothing we can hide from you. Quiet our pain by the presence of your love. Help us take time to immerse our spirit in your stillness and allow us to see and know your true love for us. We ask and thank you ahead of time for placing people in our lives to comfort us in our pain and guide is in your ways. Keep us diligent in studying your Word and putting it into practice.

Preparing to Lead Your Group

- ✓ **PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God's wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God's instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.
- ✓ **PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60-90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God's five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.
- ✓ **PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

Using This Sermon Discussion Guide

- This Sermon Discussion Guide is only a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. For most groups there are too many questions to answer in one session together. After considering the needs of your group you may choose one of the following options:
 - One section of questions
 - One or two questions from each sectionFeel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, add Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.
- The questions relating to the five purposes are helpful to develop balance and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can bring your group to an awareness of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.
- Personal application is key to everyone's growth and should be included in every discussion. When asked how he or she intends to apply a certain principle a group member may say, "I need to spend more time in the Bible and in prayer." It is important for you to help group members make applications that are more specific and commit to a specific plan of action by asking, for example, "How are you going to begin?" An example is to get up 30 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.
- As the leader your goal is to help bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their need for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.