

Spiritual Mountain Climbing – Step Nine
“Suffering”
Pastor Dale Campfield – Eastgate Community Church
June 14th, 2009

Intro:

Matt 28:19 “Go and make disciples of all nations...”

ECC Process of Discipleship: Making an IMPACT...To Love...To Grow...To Serve

We have 3 priorities – To love...which is expressed in our Sunday morning celebration. To grow...which is expressed in our Connection Groups. To serve...which is expressed in our daily lives in the places we live, work and play; as well as through the local church. The vision of E.C.C. is to gather together weekly for corporate worship, loving God and each other; then to come together in small Connection Groups for discipleship and fellowship, and are regularly involved in reaching out to others with the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through community outreach. To Love...To Grow...To Serve!

Series Title: SPIRITUAL MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

Premise of Series: EIGHT UPWARD STEPS IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN, BASED ON THE BEATITUDES, LEADING TO A LIFE OF IMPACT FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Matt 5:1-12

1 And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him.
2 Then 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 those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for 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.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.
12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus preaches a sermon which we know as "The Sermon on the Mount", which is also recorded in Luke 6. Here, Christ taught the people, and in His teaching gave the passage known as the "Beatitudes". In this teaching, there are 8 steps given to us which lead to a spiritual summit. We will consider each of these steps in turn, one at a time, to see what we can learn from this sermon to make an IMPACT in our lives for the Kingdom of God.

The word “**Blessed**” in the Greek means (happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous — with life-joy and satisfaction in God's favor and salvation, regardless of their outward conditions)

THE NINTH AND FINAL STEP UP THE MOUNTAIN: SUFFERING FOR CHRIST - As did the prophets and martyrs before us. Verses 10 – 12 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:10-12

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Question: Why is this one on the top step the highest excursion level?

Now we've reached the top rung of the ladder, the highest excursion level of our mountain climbing series. We've taken all the steps to joy, & right at the top are these words, "Blessed are those who are persecuted..." "What? What did you say? At the top of the ladder is what?" "Blessed are those who are persecuted..."

"You're kidding! I've climbed all these steps & I've finally gotten to the top, & God says what?" "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Why would that be at the top? Well, let me tell you why I think it is there. I think it is at the top because the world doesn't know how to respond to people who are living so close to Jesus that everybody sees it.

I think the persecuted people He is talking about are those who are so close to God that when they walk into a room there is something about them, their mannerisms, & their speech that makes everybody else uncomfortable.

And people are not sure whether to applaud or to persecute. Unfortunately, in our world, most of the time the world chooses to persecute.

So Jesus is saying, "When you're persecuted for righteousness' sake, you're at the top of the ladder, & you know what joy really is."

The fact is... if we walk in obedience, we are going to be persecuted.

John 15:18-19

If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you.

1 John 3:13

So don't be surprised, dear brothers and sisters if the world hates you.

Examples of Persecution Throughout Church History

Throughout the history of the Church there has been great persecution.

- It all began with Christ and His sufferings, and then His disciples as they began the early church in Acts.
- There were the 10 great persecutions from AD 100-300, where Christians gathered from all over the known world were thrown to the lions in the coliseum. Nero had Christians wrapped in animal skins and smeared w/ their bloody scent so they would be attacked even more ferociously.
- Then he lit his garden at night w/ Christians wearing robes dipped in wax!
- Foxe's Book of Martyrs tells many more tells of those pulled apart on the rack, boiled in oil, flayed alive, or roasted on a gridiron...and much more too gruesome to go into. (*see notes at the end of this message on this*)
- Christians were forced to flee to the catacombs in Rome to get away from the persecutions. An estimated 2-4 million died there over a period of 300 years.
- During the dark ages an estimated 50 million Christians died for their faith. Many of those were killed for 'protesting' the heresy of the Catholic Church during the "Holy Wars" and conquests.
- When the communists seized China it was about 1 million Christians who were slaughtered. Yet the house churches are thriving today, even in the face of death if caught. Bibles are still being confiscated.
- And it's happening today: Unnumbered thousands have died in the revolutions in Africa in the last few decades. In the Sudan great persecution is underway, thousands have been killed, many more tortured and threatened. Some buried alive in the desert sun as punishment. But the winds of persecution are only fanning the flames of revival!
- And today the rise of "Islam", has led to the barbarous torture and killings of many more than the media will report on, because they are deemed to be 'infidels'. That number includes many Jews, and many Christians.
- This is persecution in severe form. But it comes in many other forms than just physical violence. Millions today in more than 100 countries are imprisoned for their faith in Christ.

But some today are persecuted when they lose their job because of taking their stand about something. We have people right here who were dismissed because they took the stand not to work on the Lord's Day. Some may be denied advancement in their workplace, or endure sneering and jeering and whispering of others around them when they read their Bible on break.

Some are rejected by their families for converting. This happens all over the world, but also right in the USA.

You will receive persecution when you are rejected by someone you witness to, or when a door slams in your face on a visit. What is important is not HOW you are persecuted, but THAT you are [if living right], and HOW you respond to it.

Illus: Orel Hirschheiser

A number of years ago Orel Hirschheiser was pitching for the Los Angeles Dodgers. They had just won the World Series, & Orel had been named "The most valuable player of the series."

One of the TV shows about the series showed him in the dugout just before the 9th inning started. He was leaning against the wall & his lips were moving. It was obvious that he was saying something to himself.

So when he was a guest on the Tonight Show, Johnny Carson asked him what he had been saying. "I wasn't saying anything," Orel responded. "Well, then, tell us what you were doing." Finally Orel replied, "I was singing."

"You were singing?" Johnny said. "I didn't know you were a singer." "Aw," Orel said, "I'm not." Johnny persisted, "What were you singing? Sing it for us now." "Nah, I don't want to sing." But by that time the audience was chiming in with "C'mon, sing it, sing it to us!"

Finally, Orel Hirschheiser started to sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below." And Johnny Carson was speechless. The whole audience was dead silent. Then one person started clapping, & soon the whole audience joined in applause.

If ever a beatitude was a paradox this one is. How can the persecuted be blessed? Can you even imagine someone saying, "I'm so happy I have people to pick on me and beat me up," and actually mean what they are saying!? No one in his or her right mind finds pleasure in pain.

Jesus must have known his followers would have a hard time with this statement. Out of all the beatitudes this is the only one Jesus repeated for emphasis. Jesus doesn't just say the persecuted are blessed once; JESUS SAYS IT TWICE! We are even told to "rejoice and be glad!"

As Americans we find it hard to "rejoice and be glad" if we have a bad day let alone if we should ever face persecution. The Apostle Paul apparently understood what Jesus said. He not only knew it to be true intellectually, but Paul lived what Jesus said. In Acts 16 when Paul was in the city of Philippi, he was overtaken by a mob, arrested, beaten, locked in chains and put into prison. This is not my idea of a good day. Most of us would have been inclined to just want to try to get some sleep and hope things looked better in the morning. Yet at about midnight Paul and his companion Silas were not sleeping and they weren't up singing the blues, comparing cuts and bruises or telling sob stories. Instead these two sore, uncomfortable and weary men were singing praise to God and praying! Years later Paul would write to the church in Philippi from another prison in Rome, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philip. 4:4 NIV)

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO PERSECUTION?

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:10

When sticks and stones are being thrown at you – you need to stick it out. You need to endure! You need an attitude of endurance. Today I want to give you eight positive steps for handling harassment; no matter to what degree it may come.

The first step is:

1. Recognize the SOURCE.

Ephesians chapter six verse twelve says:

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” Ephesians 6:12 (NKJV)

Folks, God and Satan are enemies. God is the enemy of the devil. The devil does not want God to win. He will use any and every means to attack God. If your enemy can’t get to you – he’ll attack your children. He’ll attack your family. He’ll attack your friends. He’ll attack anything you care about. Because he knows that if he hurts the ones you love – he’ll be hurting you.

The devil – Satan – can’t get God – so he does the next best thing – he attacks God’s family. He attacks God’s children. In Revelation chapter twelve verse ten Satan is called, “The accuser of our brothers.” He is at war with God and if he can’t harass God – he’ll attack God’s family. When you are under attack – recognize the source.

2. Reserve the right to LEAVE.

Sometimes we simply need to LEAVE. We are not promised a blessing if we go looking for trouble. None of us need to develop a martyr complex. Just like Snagglepuss we need to sometimes say, “Exit, stage right,” and then we need to make our exit and leave.

Jesus knew when it was time to get out of a hot spot. On one occasion a mob wanted to stone Jesus to death, but He left (see John 8:59). Another time Jesus knew the Pharisees were plotting to have Him killed so He left withdrew to another area (see Matthew 12:14-15). Likewise the Apostle Paul knew when it was time to “get out of Dodge.” He was lowered in a basket from the city wall of Damascus (see Acts 9); a plot was devised against Paul in Iconium, so he went on to Lystra and Derbe (see Acts 14).

3. Refuse to RETALIATE.

In Romans chapter twelve we find: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Try to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone. Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for His wrath. For it is written: Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, says the Lord.” Romans 12:17-19 (HCSB)

Did you know that in the Bible – Jesus was accused of being a drunk? Did you know that He was accused of being a glutton? In other words – He was accused of being a party animal. Do you know that He refused to retaliate? He could have pointed out every sin of every accuser – but He didn’t. He left room for God. You know what that’s called? It’s called trust! It’s called – Faith! He put his trust in God - He had faith that God would take care of the situation.

When you’re persecuted – when you’re harassed – when people treat you mean because your a Christian – you need to believe that God is big enough to take care of it someday. We need to trust and have faith that God is our protection. That He is our fortress. That He is our shield. That’s why this verse says, “Leave room for God’s wrath.” He is big enough and we need to trust Him. We need to have enough faith in God so that we don’t repay “evil for evil”. We need to have enough faith in God that we don’t need to avenge ourselves. I need to trust Him - you need to trust Him. Put your trust in God so that whatever comes your way – you know that He will handle it. Refuse to retaliate – leave it for God to take care of.

4. Respond POSITIVELY.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:21 (NKJV)
When evil attacks us – we are to respond with good. Is it normal for you to return good when someone is attacking you? Is it normal for you to bless a person who is cursing you? No! It’s not normal for me either. But that is what the Bible tells us to do – return good for evil. But let me say this:

If you’re always trying to get even you will never get AHEAD. When someone starts teasing you – when someone starts taunting you – and you retaliate – who is in control? They are! They are pushing your buttons and you respond in a negative way - you become their puppet. They could be looking for a fight and you have played right into their game. How many of you have said to someone, "You make me mad!" Do you know what you are telling that person? You’re telling them - they have control of your emotions. Here is what Jesus tells us to do:

“Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,” Matthew 5:44 (NKJV) Is it easy? No! Unusual? Yes! Is it what God wants you to do? Yes! Is it what God expects you to do? Yes! Jesus says, “Don’t react – respond in love.” When people put you down – build them up. When people hassle you – be nice to them. Folks in life there are many things you cannot control – but you can control how you respond to evil. Respond with something that is good. Respond in love – and God will smile on you.

5. Remember to LOVE.

We need to remember to LOVE OUR ENEMIES. It's easy to think of way to get even when someone has hurt us or those we love. We can be quick to begin to scheme our retaliation against those who have wronged us. Unfortunately, revenge is bitter sweet. We may feel better for a moment, but before long we will get more of what we've dished out; like the saying goes, "What goes around, comes around."

God wants us to love our enemies and break the cycle of revenge. Instead of lashing out with anger, we are called by God to love those who mistreat us.

Romans 12:17-21 17Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (NIV)

6. Release your PRAYERS.

We should PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE US. The bottom line is simple; HURTING PEOPLE HURT OTHER PEOPLE. The person who injures you is often the victim of personal pain that may be buried and forgotten. They attack others in the same way they have been hurt. Likewise, many of those who may be the source of persecution are not believers; they are people who need Christ.

Jesus challenged the thinking of His day. His teaching is still radically different from what many people believe today.

Matthew 5:43-44 43You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' 44I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer. (MsgB)

It's hard to love people who are not loveable. Prayer helps us to love the unlovable people in our lives. Likewise, we are powerless to change people; however, prayer does more than change things. PRAYER CHANGES PEOPLE.

Why should we love and pray for those who mistreat and abuse us? They are not our real enemies. Ephesians 6:12 For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms. (NLT)

The beatitudes: building blocks to be like Jesus. These are the attitudes, qualities and characteristics which produce in us a Christ-like lifestyle. The beatitudes: paradoxical statements of joy. Christ offers us a blessed happiness this world and circumstance cannot take away from us.

The beatitudes bring us into the life of peace. Peace in this life and the life to come.

7. Refuse to COMPROMISE.

We need to GUARD AGAINST COMPROMISE. As we said, one way to end persecution is to become like those who would oppose you.

We need to remember we are called to please and obey God and not men. Peter and John were ordered to stop preaching and teaching in the name of Jesus, but their response should be ours, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God” (Acts 4:19 NIV).

Paul understood how compromise can take many different forms, but the motive is the same. Compromise seeks to escape possible persecution brought on by taking a stand for Christ.

Galatians 6:12 Those who are trying to force you to be circumcised are doing it for just one reason. They don’t want to be persecuted for teaching that the cross of Christ alone can save. (NLT)

8. Rest in God’s PROTECTION.

Psalm thirty seven says:

“Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret--it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the Lord, They shall inherit the earth.”
Psalms 37:7-9 (NKJV)

It’s an interesting fact that this psalm is written by David. Why do I say this – because if you’ll remember the story of David it is a story of persecution and harassment? Do you remember what happened between King Saul and David? David as you remember killed a giant called Goliath. That event impressed everyone. Everyone everywhere started singing the praises of David. Everyone except for Saul. Saul got jealous – Saul got envious – evil thoughts entered Saul’s mind. Evil thoughts entered Saul’s heart. Saul started looking at David as an enemy. As time passed the envy and jealousy in Saul grew – in fact it grew to the point where it became hatred. Saul was so jealous of David that he threw a spear at David and hoped to “pin him to the wall”. (1 Samuel 18:11) David had to run. David had to hide. You talk about harassment – you talk about persecution. David knew persecution. David knew harassment and yet he could write:

“Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him...”Psalms 37:7 (NKJV)

Let me ask you today – where are you at today? Are you being persecuted? Are you being harassed? God knows it – He sees it – and He cares and He is concerned about how you handle harassment. God is more concerned about your character than He is about your comfort. You see God is in the character building business. He wants you to be successful. He wants you to overcome evil with good.

How do you deal with harassment? When harassment comes do you recognize the source? Do you refuse to retaliate? Do you respond in a positive way – a way that God would be pleased with? Do you rest in the Lord and have faith in His protection? If you do – God smiles. Remember:

CONCLUSION:

Matthew 5:10

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

SUMMARY: We have reached the climax of the Beatitudes. We have learned that all of us have much room for growth and progression in the things of God. We need to learn humility, repentance, and meekness. We must develop a spiritual appetite for the things of God, for the Word of God, for communion with God; we must develop the ability to listen for God to reveal Himself and His will to us. We must grow in mercy, in the ability to forgive as we have been forgiven; to forgive as Christ did. Our hearts must be made pure before God by the Holy Spirit. We should be a peacemaking influence, both in the natural world, and in the church world. Finally, if called on to sacrifice, or suffer, for the cause of Christ, we must be willing to do so, realizing that He will be with us in all things, and has made great promises to us. Let us set out to climb this spiritual mountain, and not rest till we reach the summit.

EXTRA NOTES TO STUDY

- I. All people suffer in some ways due to being human, and living in this world.
 1. All, including the ungodly, suffer from natural disasters, sickness, disease, financial troubles, etc.
 2. All suffer at times because of things that they bring on themselves.
 3. The righteous are at times called on to suffer for the cause of God, not for either of the above reasons. Mt 10:22a; 10:39; 19:29a; Ac 9:16
 4. The righteous sometimes suffer by a direct attack of Satan. Job; Peter; Jesus
- II. Jesus suffered many things at the hands of evil people.
 1. At the hands of unrighteous men. Is 50:5-7; 53:5; He 13:12
 2. At the hands of religious leaders, who were not really followers of God. Is 50:6
 3. At the hands of civil authorities. Is 53:5; He 13:12; 1 Pe 3:18
 4. At the hands of acquaintances, friends, and family. Is 53:3; Mt 13:55; Jn 6:61; Lk 4:24-30
- III. Suffering brings many of God's promises into effect.
 1. We may share in His glory. Ro 8:17
 2. We cannot be separated from His love. Ro 8:35-39
 3. We have the comfort of God. 2 Co 1:3-11
 4. We have the hope of resurrection. Php 3:10-11
 5. We shall reign with Him. 2 Ti 2:12
 6. We receive commendation from God. 1 Pe 2:19-20
 7. We will be restored. 1 Pe 5:10
 8. We will receive final salvation. Mt 10:22
 9. We will receive more than just compensation. Mt 19:29
- IV. We have many examples in Scripture of suffering for God.
 1. Zechariah 2 Ch 24:21
 2. John the Baptist Mk 6:27
 3. Abel Lk 11:51
 4. Stephen Ac 7:58
 5. James Ac 12:2
 6. The apostles Ac 5:41
 7. Moses He 11:25
 8. Many others He 11:37; Re 6:9
 9. Paul 2 Co 12:23-33

According to Fox's Book of Martyrs, the following men all suffered physical persecution:

- a. James, the son of Zebedee, the elder brother of John, and relative of the Lord was beheaded. It is said that on his way to be martyred, James' accuser was so impressed by his courage and conviction that he repented of his sin, professed himself to be a Christian, and was beheaded along with James.
 - b. Philip was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified, A. D. 54.
 - c. Matthew was slain with a halberd (a sword-like weapon) in the city of Nadabah, A. D. 60.
 - d. James the Less, at the age of ninety four was beat and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.
 - e. Matthias was stoned at Jerusalem and then beheaded.
 - f. Andrew, the brother of Peter, was crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground. Hence, St. Andrew's Cross.
 - g. Mark was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria.
 - h. Peter, it is thought, was crucified upside down at his own request because he did not feel worthy enough to be crucified in the same manner as His Lord.
 - i. Paul was beheaded.
 - j. Jude was crucified.
 - k. Bartholomew was cruelly beaten and then crucified.
 - l. Thomas was martyred by being thrust through with a spear.
 - m. Luke, it is believed, was hanged on an olive tree.
 - n. Simon was crucified, A. D. 74.
 - o. Barnabas was put to death about A. D. 73.
3. None of these men were without warning (Matthew 10:17-18; 24:9; John 16:2, 33; 1 Thessalonians 3:3-4). They knew what price they would have to pay to follow Christ, and they all paid it willingly.
- C. Scandalously "Blessed are ye when men shall . . . say all manner of evil against you falsely"
1. The Psalmist wrote, "False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not" (Psalm 35:11).
 2. The chief priests and elders sought false witness against Jesus (Matthew 26:59-60).
 3. Stephen was persecuted scandalously (Acts 6:13).
 4. Paul faced the same treatment (Acts 24:5-6, 12-13).