

INTRODUCTION

This is the second message in the series called "Refresh! What to do when life crashes." I heard a funny story about a newspaper reporter who was dispatched to a community that had been subjected to heavy rains and floods. He took a boat and found a woman named Mrs. Smith who had retreated to safety on her roof. As he interviewed her, they watched a chicken coop float past them. Next, an old refrigerator floated by, followed by a VW bug. They watched as a man's hat floated by, but then the hat reversed direction and started floating back upstream. When it got about thirty feet upstream it floated back down, only to reverse again and travel upstream. This was repeated six or seven times, and the reporter finally asked her, "Mrs. Smith, can you explain the erratic direction of that hat?" She said, "It's just my crazy husband—he said he was going to mow the law come hell or high water."

That may be where some of you are. You ignore the hell and high water and go about your life as if nothing's wrong. Let me remind you again, these messages aren't just for people who struggle with addictions and issues with clinical names. This truth is for anyone who wants 2007 to be the most *blessed* year of their lives.

When you're working online and a web page locks up, you can click on the refresh button and it usually fixes the problem. God's refreshing power can do the same for your life. These refreshing truths are contained in the "beatitudes" of Jesus found at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Just think of them as "attitudes that ought to be." And remember: your attitude determines your altitude.

Matthew 5:1-4. "Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.'"

In addition to the beatitudes, I want us to learn a REFRESH memory verse during this series. If you haven't claimed your verse for 2007 yet, this would be a great choice. Here's how to enjoy refreshing from the Lord: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." (Acts 3:19)

There are seven steps in this REFRESH process. Each one of these steps has a corresponding refreshing attitude: The first step is: Realize I'm not God. When you consult your personal bank balance of moral goodness, you must admit you're morally bankrupt. That's what it means to be poor in spirit. When you stop denying your sinful nature, then you're free to make this refreshing admission: "I am totally helpless." But it's not enough to simply admit you're helpless. That's a bad stopping place. Step #1 is simply the reality check step. Step #2 is the hope step: Earnestly believe that God exists and that I matter to Him. And the corresponding refreshing attitude is expressed this way: "I believe God can help me."

Remember, denial is not a river in Egypt—it's our tendency to refuse to admit our struggle with hurts, hang-ups, and habits. God has an antidote for denial—it's called pain. God knows most of us are so hardheaded; He has to use adversity to get our attention.

Many of us are like Jonah, and we run FROM God instead of running TOWARD Him. God sent a storm into Jonah's life. It wasn't until Jonah found himself in the belly of the fish, that he finally declared moral bankruptcy and mourned over his condition.

I agree with Rick Warren who wrote, "We rarely change when we see the light, we change when we feel the heat. We don't change until our fear of change is exceeded by the pain."

Or I like the way that great theologian, Toby Keith expressed it. In his song, "How do you like me now?" he sings to a girl who rejected him in high school because she thought he was a loser. Now she's married, but unhappy. One verse says, "He never comes home; And you're always alone; And your kids hear you cryin' down the hall; Alarm clock starts ringin'; Who could that be singin'?; It's me, baby, with your wake-up call!" When you find yourself going through the heat of crisis, confrontation, or catastrophe, it may be God saying, "it's me, brother, with your wake up call!" Or, "It's me, sister, with your wake up call!"

God's wake-up call may cause pain and sorrow. But all sorrow is not bad. The Bible says there is a kind of mourning and sorrow that is destructive but when sorrow brings you to a point of repentance, it can lead to blessing. The Bible says, "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." (II Corinthians 7:10)

When Jesus said, "Blessed are those that mourn" He didn't mean you should be a sad-sack or a cry-baby. To mourn doesn't mean you live your life with a miserable countenance. Some misguided people believe the more miserable they are the more holy they are. They have perfected the "Baptist Holy Look," making them appear as if they're suffering from a combination of acid indigestion and a migraine headache!

These words "blessed" are best translated "happy." It sounds contradictory that the way to happiness is to mourn. It's important to understand none of these individual beatitudes are stand-alone stopping places: They are sequential steps. And each step is important on the road to blessing. When you see yourself as being poor in spirit, it will break your heart and cause you to mourn and repent—but cheer up—that's when you can experience the second part of this beatitude you SHALL be comforted. Let's look at this second step in detail and notice three ways to experience God's refreshment.

I. TO BE REFRESHED I MUST ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S EXISTENCE

Is there really a God? Or is He just the product of our imagination? The most basic question of faith is: Did God create man, or did man create God? The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." (Hebrews 11:6). First, you've got to believe God exists. Next, you've got to believe God will respond to you if you earnestly seek Him. That's step one: Earnestly believe God exists and I matter to Him.

According to researcher George Barna, 95% of Americans believe God exists. Percentage-wise there are fewer atheists today than 100 years ago. Currently, there are no atheists like Robert

Ingersol in the 19th Century or Madelyn Murray O'Hair in the 20th Century publicly promoting atheism. There are fewer atheists, because developments in science are convincing more people that the complexity of our universe can only be explained by a Creator.

For instance, *The Washington Post* featured a headline on March 4, 2005 reading, "Atheism in Decline Everywhere." The article claimed: "Two developments are plaguing atheism these days. One is that it appears to be losing its scientific underpinnings. The other is the historical experience of hundreds of millions of people worldwide that atheists are in no position to claim the moral high ground. British philosopher Anthony Flew, once as hard-nosed a humanist as any, has turned his back on atheism, saying it is impossible for evolution to account for the fact that one single cell can carry more data than all the volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Mr. Flew has embraced the concept of intelligent design—a stunning desertion of a former intellectual ambassador of secular humanism to the belief in some form of intelligence behind the design of the universe."

That's not news, because two thousand years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote that God's fingerprints can be clearly seen in the design of our world. The Bible says, "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." (Romans 1:20)

Since the dawn of civilization, human beings have looked up into the night sky and wondered about the meaning of the stars. We're still looking. The amazing vastness of the universe reminds us we really are just the third rock in a solar system among billions of solar systems. As we continue to explore the universe with the Hubble telescope and other devices, we are discovering the universe is but a canvas upon which the Creator splashed a variety of interesting designs. For instance, the Sombrero Galaxy is one of millions of uniquely shaped and beautiful galaxies. Thousands of years ago, the Psalmist wrote, "When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place... The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." (Psalms 8:3;19:1)

It's getting harder and harder NOT to believe in God. I heard a funny story about a woman who lived next to an atheist. Everyday she stood on her porch and lifted her hands and shouted, "Praise the Lord!" Her atheist neighbor would yell back, "There is no lord!" One day she stood on her porch and said, "Lord, I'm broke and hungry, please give me some groceries." The next day she found a huge bag of groceries on her porch. She said, "Praise the Lord!" Her neighbor jumped from behind a bush and said, "Ah ha! There is no Lord! I bought those groceries!" The woman said, "Praise the Lord! Not only did He send me groceries, He made the devil pay for them!" You must acknowledge God's existence. But that's not enough. The next truth is:

II. TO BE REFRESHED I MUST UNDERSTAND GOD'S CHARACTER

Once you've come to the belief that there is a God, then you've got to determine, "What KIND of God is He?" Once there was a group of children in Sunday School who were drawing pictures. The teacher asked one little girl, "What are you drawing?" She replied, "I'm drawing a picture of God." The teacher smiled and said, "Honey, nobody has ever seen God. We don't

know what God looks like." The little girl smiled as she kept coloring and said, "They will soon!"

Most of you who've been through the 12 steps know at step two, a person in recovery affirms he or she is trusting in a higher power for help. I want to introduce you to the Higher Power today. His name is Jesus. Fortunately, you don't have to analyze and meditate to decide what God is like. God is invisible, but He chose to reveal Himself to us 2007 years ago in the person we could see, touch, and hear—Jesus Christ. The Bible says, "He is the image of the invisible God." (Colossians 1:15) So, if you want to know what God is like, study the life of Jesus. The Bible teaches this is what God is really like:

1. God knows all about my situation

The Bible says, "You've kept track of my every toss and turn through the sleepless nights. Each tear is entered in your ledger, each ache written in your book." (Psalm 56:8) God knows me better than I know myself. You may be thinking, "Nobody knows the hell I'm going through in my marriage." God knows. Or you may be thinking, "Nobody knows the depression, fear, and worry that I'm dealing with." God knows. He knows all the dumb stuff we do. He's with you 24 hours a day. He hears everything you say—nothing is off the record with Him. And the amazing thing is He still loves you!

Jesus met a woman one time at a well. He told her to go call her husband. She said, "Sir, I don't have a husband." Jesus said, "Bingo. You've had five husbands, and the man you're shacking up with now isn't your husband." Boom! Don't you know she was shocked? She said, "Sir, I perceive that you're a prophet." No, He wasn't just a prophet, He is God. And He knows the hearts of all people. But isn't it interesting He didn't condemn or judge that woman? He offered her Living Water. If you're messed up, God offers you the same thing today.

2. God cares about my situation

God cares for you like a perfect Father. The Bible says, "As a Father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust." (Psalm 103:13-14) God knows all about you, and yet He still cares for you. He knows you are frail—like dust. God isn't some harsh, uncaring deity who sits on the other side of the universe. He cares enough about you to number all the hairs on your head. You'll never hear God say, "I don't care."

Jesus demonstrated this compassion. One day He stood at a grave and when He saw the tears of Mary and Martha, He wept with them. He wasn't crying for Lazarus, because He knew Lazarus would be resuscitated. Jesus cared so much for the feelings of Mary and Martha He cried with them. And Jesus cares for you so much He is moved when you are hurting. Hebrews 4:15 says He is a high priest who is touched by the feelings of our infirmities.

3. God can change me and my situation

Sometimes we think change is impossible. But Jesus said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 18:27) God may change me, or He may change my situation, or sometimes He changes both. But you must believe He has the power to change your situation. One day Jesus met a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years. He spent his days waiting for the waters of the Pool of Bethesda to stir so he could crawl in and hopefully be healed. Jesus asked him, "Do you WANT to be healed?" That may sound strange, but there are people today who have grown so comfortable in their weakness, they use their pain as an excuse for substandard living. The man told Jesus, "Yes" and he was healed instantly. Do you WANT to be refreshed?

Have you found you lack the willpower to change? When you reach that point God says, "I've got all the power you need." The Bible says, "I pray that you may know...His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead." (Ephesians 1:18-20) If God can raise Jesus from the dead, He can resurrect a dead relationship. If God can raise Jesus from the dead, He can deliver you from any addiction. If God can raise Jesus from the dead, He can restore your health, happiness, and sanity. That's the king of God we believe in. Finally:

III. TO BE REFRESHED I MUST ACCEPT GOD'S OFFER

Look again at the refreshing attitude for this step: I believe God can help me! *The Message* translation of "blessed are those that mourn" is, "You're blessed when you're saddened because it seems you've lost control. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you." (Matthew 5:4 *The Message*)

How do you find God's power to change? When God comes to inhabit your life, His Spirit brings that supernatural power. The Bible says, "The Spirit that God gives us...fills us with power, love, and self-control." (II Timothy 1:7) Is that what you need? Power? Love? Self-control? There is a principle in God's universe that almost sounds too simple to be true. But it is simply profound and profoundly simple. The *key* to receiving God's power is this: I must believe and receive God's help! If I offered you a gift and extended it toward you, you could *believe* it was real and that I wanted to give it to you, but it wouldn't be yours until you reached out and *received* it. Will you admit you need help and receive God's power?

When you're driving your car, there's a dangerous area called a "blind spot." It's when a car is passing you and you can't quite see them in your side mirror or your rearview mirror. That blind spot has caused many accidents. We have blind spots, too. We can be blind to our own hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Our default position is to live in denial and say, "I've got it all under control. I don't need any help." Sometimes God sends other people into our lives to help us see those blind spots.

I once heard an old West Texas rancher say, "If someone calls you a horse's rear once, just ignore it. If two people call you a horse's rear, look in the mirror. But if three people call you a horse's rear—buy a saddle." If three people call you a workaholic—buy a saddle. If three people call you an alcoholic, buy a saddle. If three people call you a rage-aholic, or a control-freak, maybe it's time to buy a saddle. Actually you don't need a saddle, you need a yoke. Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon

you and learn from me...you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

CONCLUSION

The opposite of being poor and spirit and mourning over your spiritual poverty is an attitude of being proud and unbroken in your belief that you can do anything. It's the attitude that says, "I don't need God's help or strength. I can do it myself!" Have ever tried to help a child do something, and they say, "Let ME do it!" That's our old sin nature that rises up and says, "I don't need any help. I can do it myself!" That attitude will get you in trouble. Most of you know I grew up in Lower Alabama, which everyone called L.A. I went to a small high school, where almost all the guys who were athletes played all the sports. One afternoon Coach Odom, our basketball coach, approached some of us and asked us if we wanted to compete in the county track meet the next day. We didn't have a track program, or a track coach, but since we were going to miss a day of class, we all volunteered.

The next day, as we were riding the bus to Opp, Alabama, Coach Odom walked down the aisle of the bus with a clipboard telling us the events in which each of us would compete. He said to me, "Dykes, let's see you look like you could throw the discus." I asked, "What's a discus?" He told me it was a flat piece of hard rubber, and all I needed to do was to fling it as hard as I could. I'd never laid eyes on a discus, but I said, "Sure, coach." Then he said, "You're also going to run in the 880 yard race." I knew how to run, so I was looking forward to that event.

When we arrived, we noticed the other teams had track uniforms and track shoes. Not us. We wore our basketball shorts with t-shirts that didn't match. We all wore our Chuck Taylor Converse tennis shoes. Don't laugh. If you think we were hicks in that little town, I'll have you know we even had sushi in my hometown—we just called it bait!

I stood in line and watched the other guys spin around and throw the discus, so when it came my time, I imitated their throwing action. As Coach Odom suggested, I spun around and flung it as hard as I could. It must have worked, because I won third place in the discus throw.

So, I was feeling pretty cocky by the start of the 880 yard race, because like Forrest Gump once said, "I could run like the wind." Before the race Coach Odom asked if I needed any advice. I said, "No coach, I know what to do."

The starter fired his pistol, and I was off in a flash. After 50 yards, I was way ahead of all the runners, and as I glanced back I thought, "This is a breeze! I'm going to win FIRST place in this event!" By 100 yards, I had widened my lead. By the time we reached the first back stretch I was starting to get a little winded, but I was still out front.

The 880 yard race consists of two times around the track surrounding a football field. What I didn't know was that it isn't a sprint. The other runners were pacing themselves, I wasn't. By the time I reached the first lap around the track, I was wheezing and my side was killing me. Meanwhile the other runners were catching up fast. By the time I reached the backstretch for the second lap, the other runners passed my like I was standing still. Actually I was standing still by

then bending over the grass calling Earl. After a few minutes I got my breath back and stumbled over the finish line to the hoots and catcalls of all my wonderfully affirming friends. I think I set a new Alabama High School record that day for the slowest 440 yard time in history! What happened? I was cocky. I was so confident that I refused the offer of help from Coach Odom. I thought I had the strength to sprint the entire race. But I ran out of strength.

That may be where you are right now. You may be completely out of strength and don't know if you're really going to make it over the finish line or not. When you get to that point, it's a place where you mourn over your lack of ability to save yourself. It's a place where your heart is broken because of your lack of strength. That's when God says, "You're blessed because you mourn—now I will give you my comfort."

Step one: Realize I'm not God. Admit: I'm totally helpless. Step two: Earnestly believe that God exists and that I matter to him. Admit: I believe God can help me. Are you weak? Accept God's offer to help you and you'll find His supernatural power to change!

OUTLINE

REFRESH Memory Verse: "Repent, then and turn to god, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." Acts 3:19

Realize that I'm not God.

Refreshing attitude: I am totally helpless!

Earnestly believe that God exists and that I matter to Him.

Refreshing attitude is expressed this way: I believe God can help me.

I. ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S EXISTENCE

"Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." *Hebrews 11:6*

II. UNDERSTAND GOD'S CHARACTER

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"You've kept track of my every toss and turn through the sleepless nights. Each tear is entered in your ledger, each ache written in your book." *Psalms 56:8*

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"As a Father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust." *Psalms 103:13-14*

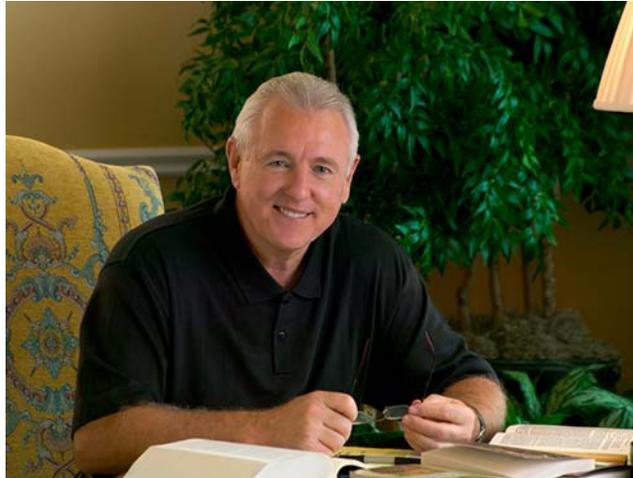
3. God can change me and my situation

"What is impossible with men is possible with God." *Luke 18:27*

III. ACCEPT GOD'S OFFER

"The Spirit that God gives us...fills us with power, love, and self-control." *II Timothy 1:7*

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes