

DR. DERWIN L. GRAY

the good life

BIBLE STUDY

**WHAT JESUS TEACHES ABOUT
FINDING TRUE HAPPINESS**

the good life

BIBLE STUDY

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Editorial Team

Scott Latta
Content Editor

Morgan Hawk
Production Editor

Amy Lyon
Graphic Designer

Karen Daniel
Editorial Team Leader

John Paul Basham
Manager, Student Ministry Publishing

Ben Trueblood
Director, Student Ministry

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About the Author

Dr. Derwin L. Gray is the founding and lead pastor of Transformation Church, a multiethnic, multigenerational, mission-shaped community just south of Charlotte, North Carolina. After graduating from Brigham Young University, Derwin played professional football in the NFL for five years with the Indianapolis Colts (1993-1997) and one year with the Carolina Panthers (1998). During that time, he and his wife, Vicki, began their journey with Christ and experienced God's faithfulness and direction as He moved their hearts to know Him and make Him known. In addition to his role at Transformation Church, Derwin speaks at conferences nationwide. He is the author of *Hero: Unleashing God's Power in a Man's Heart* (2010), *Limitless Life: You Are More Than Your Past When God Holds Your Future* (2013), *Crazy Grace for Crazy Times* (2015), and *The High-Definition Leader* (2015).

the good life . . .

**that we desire and,
more importantly, were
created for is available to us.**

Two thousand years ago, on a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee, our good King invited us to discover the happiness we long to experience. The invitation still stands. You don't have to chase shadows anymore. Jesus—happiness himself—is chasing you.

are you ready?

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

.....
**This Bible-study book includes eight weeks of
content for group and personal study.**
.....

Group Sessions

Regardless of what day of the week your group meets, each week of content begins with the group session. Each group session uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members with God's Word and with the video teaching from Pastor Derwin.

START. This page includes questions to get the conversation started and to introduce the video teaching.

WATCH. This page provides space to take notes on the video teaching.

DISCUSS. This page includes questions and statements that guide the group to respond to Pastor Derwin's teaching and explore relevant Bible passages.

Personal Study

Each week provides three days of Bible study and learning activities for individual engagement between group sessions. The personal study revisits stories, Scriptures, and themes introduced in the video teaching so participants can understand and apply them on a personal level.

Each personal study includes the following three sections.¹

UPWARD. Loving God completely is a growth process that involves the personal elements of communication and response. By listening to the Holy Spirit in the words of Scripture and speaking to the Lord in our thoughts and prayers, we move in the direction of knowing Him better. The better we know Him, the more we'll love Him, and the more we love Him, the greater will be our willingness to respond to Him in trust and obedience.

INWARD. To love ourselves correctly is to see ourselves as God sees us and to allow the Word, not the world, to define who and whose we really are. The clearer we capture the vision of our new identity in Jesus Christ, the more we'll realize that our deepest needs for security, significance, and satisfaction are met in Him and not in people, possessions, or positions.

OUTWARD. A biblical view of our identity and resources in Christ moves us in the direction of loving others compassionately. Grasping our true and unlimited resources in Christ frees us from bondage to the opinions of others and gives us the liberty to love and serve others regardless of their responses.

1. Upward, Inward, Outward originated in the work of theologian Ken Boa. See Ken Boa, *Face to Face: Praying the Scriptures for Intimate Worship* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1997).

Week 1

the good life

HAPPY ARE THE
Beggars

Start

WELCOME TO SESSION 1

**Would you say most people you know
are happy? Why or why not?**

What are some ways people seek to achieve happiness?

We're all hardwired to search for happiness, but at some point in our lives, we realize no matter how hard and how long we work, we'll never achieve lasting happiness. The kind of happiness we long for isn't about perpetually feeling good or good things consistently happening to us. The happiness we're hardwired for can only be found in Jesus.

Over the next eight weeks, I'll lead us through the Beatitudes and help us learn how to experience the good life.

Watch

Use this space to take notes during the video teaching.

Discuss

Read Jesus' words together.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

MATTHEW 5:3

How has this week's teaching changed your understanding of what it means to be "poor in spirit"?

Why is becoming poor in spirit so unnatural for us?

When did you first realize your spiritual poverty? How has your life changed since that moment?

Pride blinds us to our need for grace. When has your pride blinded you to God's grace?

How is God extending grace to you right now? How does reflecting upon that grace make you feel toward God?

True happiness comes from becoming more like Jesus. Jesus fully depended upon God. How can you depend more on God and less on yourself over the next week?

OVER THE NEXT WEEK

Marinate on This

Being poor in spirit means we're humble enough to receive the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Being poor in spirit means you see and accept your spiritual bankruptcy so you can make room for Christ's treasures.

We were created to be completely confident and reliant on God. It's only in our weakness that God shares His strength with us.

We can't be poor in spirit when we're seeking to rule ourselves. We can't live the good life when we're wrapped up in our sinfulness.

We can look to Jesus as the ultimate example of happiness because happiness is found in becoming a person who projects the character of Jesus into the world.

The happiness of God's kingdom isn't about perpetually feeling good; it's about the happiness expressed in the Beatitudes, which helps us become like Christ.

Jesus' circumstances were the window through which He expressed His happiness—they weren't the cause of his happiness. Our circumstances do not add or take away from our happiness.

The deeper we immerse ourselves in Jesus and His kingdom, the more He sculpts us into His image and the happier we become.



Blessed are the
POOR IN SPIRIT,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

MATTHEW 5:3



Upward

LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HAPPINESS

How have you tried to find happiness?

Growing up in the United States, you learn from an early age that the good life—the right to be happy—is a fundamental right. The pursuit of happiness is written into the DNA of this country. Way back in 1776, the Founding Fathers wrote in the Declaration of Independence:

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,
that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,
that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

What makes you happy? How often would you say you pursue happiness? Has that pursuit been fruitful?

When is a time your search for happiness turned out differently than you expected?

The founders of the United States believed the good life was ours for the taking if only we could catch it and keep it. But catching it is like chasing shadows. No matter how fast we run, it always seems to be just beyond our reach. After a while, we stop reaching and just settle. The truth isn't that happiness is unattainable, but that we're searching for happiness in places we can never hope to find it.



THE SURPRISING PATH TO HAPPINESS

Jesus is the happiest person who ever walked this earth (we'll return to this thought in the next personal study), and He gave us a manifesto on happiness in a set of teachings known as the Beatitudes. He began this way:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

MATTHEW 5:3

What's your response to this teaching? Is it comforting? confusing? something else?

How does Jesus' teaching contrast with what the world teaches us about happiness?

The world tells us we achieve happiness through what we have: lots of friends, a cool car, good grades, a college scholarship. Those are all good, but Jesus says the path to the good life begins with having nothing.

In the language of the New Testament, the word translated "poor" was commonly used to describe beggars who depended on providers. In the Old Testament, the word implied hope in God alone. Jesus is teaching us that the good life is only for beggars. In other words, the good life is only available to those who realize everything they need comes from God.

But if that's all it takes to be happy, why are so many of us unhappy? What keeps us from being happy? The answer is simple: our pride.



THE FORK IN THE PATH

Read Genesis 1:26-31; 2:7-9,15-25; and 3:1-7.

How had God provided for the man and woman in the garden?

God breathed divine life into Adam and Eve, and as they carried on their lives in the garden, they showed their confidence and reliance on God Himself. He was their source and purpose. He promised to sustain their lives and give them purpose, and they promised to obey God by relying on Him, cultivating the garden, and multiplying His image. They had the good life.

If Adam and Eve had the good life, why did they disobey God's command?

Satan lied to Adam and Eve, tempting them with a distorted vision of the good life. They were already living it, but he led them to believe God was holding out on them. Eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was an act of rebellion. It was the most vicious form of pride, saying, "God, I don't need you."

How does our pride keep us from becoming "poor in spirit"?

God created human beings to rely on Him, but in an act of pride, Adam and Eve chose to be self-reliant. Eve believed the lie that she knew better than God. The Scripture tells us she took the fruit because she saw the tree was "*good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom*" (3:6, emphasis mine). She thought taking from the tree would make her happy, but it resulted in misery. Her pride took her away from happiness. And we still feel the effects of that sin today. Sin results in physical and spiritual death and creates a debt we can never repay.



THE PRIDE DEBT

Read Romans 5:12.

How did Adam and Eve's sin extend to all of us?

Where do you feel the effects of this in your daily life?

We can't live the good life when we're wrapped up in our sinfulness. Adam and Eve chose slavery over freedom, and now we're born into slavery and in need of rescuing. We need to be restored to the good life God designed for us.

Read Romans 5:17.

How did God rescue and restore us to the good life?

The average cost of a college degree has skyrocketed in the last 30 years. In 1989, tuition at the average public four-year university cost about \$3,500 per year. In 2019? \$10,440.¹ Total student loan debt in the U.S. has now topped \$1.41 trillion—an amount big enough on its own to be one of the 15 biggest economies in the world.²

Imagine if someone paid off all that debt at once. Our sin debt was bigger—a deeper and more crippling debt than anything we could ever hope to pay. And God stepped into the middle of that debt, nailed it to a cross, and forgave it. Happy are those who let God pay off their sin debt!



BACK ON THE PATH TO HAPPINESS

Read the following verses.

He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross.

COLOSSIANS 2:14

*How joyful is the one whose transgression
is forgiven, whose sin is covered!*

PSALM 32:1

**Why should realizing what God has done
for us lead us to be poor in spirit?**

**How does realizing what God has done
for us lead us to true happiness?**

Only spiritual beggars who realize they're completely dependent on God will inherit the kingdom Jesus spoke of. The only life worth having comes to us through the blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. We unlock the good life when we discover that it can only be found by being in a right relationship with God.

Prayer

Father God, life, liberty, and true happiness are only available in You. Help us come to You with humble and open arms. Allow us to receive Your life-changing grace. We're delighted to be beggars in Your kingdom.



Inward

THE HAPPIEST MAN WHO EVER LIVED

In this week's video teaching, you heard me say, "Jesus of Nazareth was the happiest person to have ever lived." In today's personal study we'll examine this statement a little closer. Because if Jesus truly is the happiest person who ever lived, to embrace the good life means that we need to align our hearts with His.

**When you picture Jesus, do you imagine
him as happy? Why or why not?**

What made Jesus happy?

Jesus embodied the good life. He's the prototype of what humanity was meant to be. The first Adam cursed humanity by his disobedience in the garden of Eden; Jesus, the last Adam, reversed the curse through His obedience. The first Adam brought us death; the last Adam brought us back to life.

No matter the situation, Jesus had transcendent happiness that gave Him confidence and purpose. His happiness rooted Him in something deeper, better, and more beautiful than His circumstances. Jesus' circumstances weren't the cause of His happiness, nor did they add or subtract. Only spiritual beggars who realize they're completely dependent on God will inherit the kingdom. His happiness was a different kind of joy that seemed to come from a realm beyond ours. Here's how the author of Hebrews described it:

*For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising
the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

HEBREWS 12:2

How was Jesus able to find happiness even in a terrible and torturous situation?

Jesus was able to find happiness even in dire circumstances. Even though Jesus was “a man of suffering” (Isa. 53:3), He was truly happy because He was truly human. He is the only person to live without sin, which distorts our humanity. Salvation restores our humanity. Through Jesus, we gain the capacity to experience real happiness, the God-kind-of-happiness He reserves for citizens of His kingdom.

Jesus is the embodiment of the Beatitudes. He was humble and poor. His short time on earth had lasting endurance because He spent it pursuing God’s justice and righteousness. Jesus, the Prince of peace, brought the peace of God everywhere He went. The cross transformed enemies into friends, failures into successes, and cowards into conquering apostles.

And He still invites people to be happy. According to Jesus, the blessed—or happy—are those whose lives are supernaturally interwoven into Jesus’ life, and who are participating in His kingdom by the Holy Spirit’s power. Our lives are transformed as we become more like Him.



FINDING JESUS THROUGH THE WORD

**Spend a few moments praying through and meditating
on these verses and those on the next page.**

*I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I
in him produces much fruit because you can do nothing without me.*

JOHN 15:5

*I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but
Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith
in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

GALATIANS 2:20

I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me.

COLOSSIANS 1:29

*For it is God who is working in you both to will and
to work according to his good purpose.*

PHILIPPIANS 2:13

*Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or
think according to the power that works in us—to him be glory in the
church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

EPHESIANS 3:20-21

What does it mean to be crucified with Christ?

**Pick one of these verses and read it closely—what does it teach
you about your need to rely on Jesus? Memorize it this week.**

**What is one area of your life you need to begin trusting
and relying on Jesus rather than yourself?**

Only the poor in spirit—spiritual beggars—are welcome in the King's kingdom. At the entrance to Jesus' kingdom is a sign that reads, "Only beggars past this point." We should thank God every day for the privilege of being a beggar.

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for saving us when we couldn't save ourselves. Would you please, by Your Spirit, help us to depend on You every day? As we do that, would You supernaturally allow Your life and Your happiness to flow through us to others? In Your name we pray. Amen.

HAPPINESS 101

**Who is the happiest person you know?
What makes them happy?**

In 2000, fifty books were written on the topic of happiness. Eight years later, 4,000 books were written on it.³ "According to some measures, as a nation we've grown sadder and more anxious during the same years that the happiness movement has flourished,"⁴ wrote Carlin Flora of *Psychology Today*. To highlight the unhappiness in our culture, Yale University now offers a class on the subject that has become the most popular class in the prestigious school's history. Almost 25 percent of Yale's undergrads take the course, Psyc 157, Psychology and the Good Life. Dr. Laurie Santos, who teaches it, writes, "Students want to change, to be happier themselves, and to change the culture here on campus."⁵

In their search, many are learning all the places where it can't be found: relationships, sex, achievements, championships, or anything else. C.S. Lewis, a former atheist who became one of the most beloved Christians of the twentieth century, was on to something when he wrote:

*If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.*⁶

Lewis discovered what King David discovered long before Him. True happiness can only be found in God. David once said:

You reveal the path of life to me; in your presence is abundant joy; at your right hand are eternal pleasures.

PSALM 16:11

Solomon, David's son, once wrote that people make the choices that seem right to them (Prov. 14:12). When we see people seeking happiness in the wrong places, that's what they're doing—choosing a path that seems right to them. Most of the time, they aren't aware it will be unfulfilling. As disciples of Jesus, we have the opportunity to enter into these relationships and help people find what we've found—that the good life comes to us when we become beggars before God.

Whom do you know who is seeking the good life in all the wrong places? What can you do to show them the way to Jesus?

If you could write a short definition for “happiness,” what would it be?

Whom can you pray for this week that needs Jesus' true happiness?

Prayer

Holy Spirit, please help me to see people as You see them—as people whom God loves desperately and who need the same grace I've received.

1. CollegeBoard, "Trends in College Pricing, 2019." <https://research.collegeboard.org/trends/college-pricing>; (Accessed March 9, 2020).
2. Daniel Kurt, "Student Loan Debt: 2019 Statistics and Outlook." *Investopedia*, <https://www.investopedia.com/student-loan-debt-2019-statistics-and-outlook-4772007>; (Accessed March 9, 2020).
3. Carlin Flora, "The Pursuit of Happiness." *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200901/the-pursuit-happiness>; (Accessed June 12, 2019).
4. Ibid.
5. David Shimmer, "Yale's Most Popular Class Ever: Happiness." *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/26/nyregion/at-yale-class-on-happiness-draws-huge-crowd-laurie-santos.html>; (Accessed June 20, 2019).
6. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1952), 136-137.