

Challenging Lifestyles Session 1
Matthew 5:1-6 – How to Find ‘the Secret of Happiness’

Resource: ‘Challenging Lifestyles’ by Nicky Gumbel, Chapter 1

Timing: 40-50 minutes, leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker: What things, experiences, leisure pursuits, people or memories, make you so happy that when you think about them, you smile?

Introduction

Introduce this week on *How to find ‘the Secret of Happiness’*

Key Point: God wants us to be happy. So he shares his open secret about it: happiness is not about what we have or what we do, but about *who we are*.

Key Verse: “Blessed...blessed...blessed...” (“Blessed” comes 9 times in v.1-12!)

“Blessed” in the Greek is *makarios*, meaning ‘blessed, fortunate, happy – the privileged recipient of God’s favour’. The Amplified Version of the Bible translates it “happy, to be envied, and spiritually prosperous that is, with life, joy and satisfaction...regardless of their outward conditions”.

1. True happiness comes from recognising your need for God (v.3)

The Point: whether spiritually poor or financially poor, we all need God

Jesus speaks to the financially poor and all who are low, humbled, oppressed, or disillusioned

→ The common element is an awareness of our need for God’s help

Before becoming a Christian we experience material dissatisfaction/spiritual satisfaction

Afterwards we experience material satisfaction/spiritual dissatisfaction

→ Contrary to what we might think, surely?! But the more we know God, see and understand what he has done for us, the more we acknowledge our need of him, our poverty.

Illustration: Share about an area of your own life where you are now happy to rely on God’s help, whereas before becoming a Christian you thought you were capable of managing without him.

Application: Many worship songs focus on praising God that we can find happiness by relying on his help. Encourage the group to worship in this way; perhaps play a good example on CD.

2. True happiness comes from having God’s love in your heart (v.4)

The Point: Those who are truly sorry over sin can receive God’s loving comfort

Jesus appears to be stating a paradox “how happy are the unhappy”!

It is a mistake for Christians to think we should always or never be happy (see Ecclesiastes 3:1,4)

We often experience tears when we come to Christ in repentance – godly grief over our sins even when we mess-up as Christians, just like the Apostle Peter did (Matthew 26:75). The Bible says:

→ the Holy Spirit is now given to all Christians (Acts 2:17)

→ the Holy Spirit will comfort us in our godly grief and suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-7)

→ the Holy Spirit pours the love of God into our hearts (Romans 5:5)

God's love, true happiness, therefore comes from the grief that drives us into his arms.

Illustration: Tell a personal story of when in prayer you have wept over the state of our world, just like Jesus was upset over the spiritual bankruptcy in Jerusalem (see Matt 23:37; Luke 13:34).

Application: Tomorrow, in your quiet time with God, write down a few things in your own life, or in the world around you, that you are genuinely sorrowful about then take them to God in prayer.

Buzzgroups: tell each other (1) an area in your life where you are aware of your need of God; and (2) an issue in the world around you that you feel genuinely sad and mournful about.

3. True happiness comes from submitting to God's authority (v.5)

The Point: We must place our strength under submission to God

The Greek word used for "meek" does not mean weak, spineless, feeble, lifeless or dreary!
 → it means gentle, considerate, and unassuming
 → it means broken, not in the sense of destroyed or shattered, but like a horse when it is tamed

Illustration: Moses was "very meek, more than all men that were on the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3 RSV). Moses was hardly a weak and spineless leader, but he had incredible humility.

Meek people become strong and free, with a self-worth based on God's love, not their achievements
 Meek people care less what others think and are therefore freer to look to the interests of others
 Meek people will "inherit the earth" (v.5) – they realise everything is a gift from God we don't deserve
 Meek people begin to learn how to receive those gifts from God, both in this life and the life to come

Application: Take a minute to think about the times when you get defensive [pause for one minute in silence]. Now ask God if he will teach you how to become meek in that area [pause again].

4. True happiness comes from a right relationship with God (v.6)

The Point: Only a relationship with God can satisfy our deepest longings

Hunger and thirst are very strong metaphors for longing
 The desire to be right with God requires total, not partial, satisfaction - total and ongoing, 24/7
 Jesus promises God will fill and satisfy (bless) those who are desperate for total righteousness

Illustration: Read an account from a survival story (e.g. Joe Simpson's *Touching the Void*) about how desperate need can motivated us to persevere and endure incredible trials.

Application: On your journey to work tomorrow, write God a letter or e-mail about the depth of your longing for Him, and asking him to increase it. Recite it to God as a prayer when you get home.

Ideas for Ministry

- All stand in silence. Ask everyone to imagine what your pastorate would be like if everyone recognised their need for God, helped each other in their grief, and if everyone was truly meek and truly hungry for a relationship with God. In a time of open prayer thank God for how the group has shown some of that, and ask God to make it a place where it can happen more!
- Sometimes we are not desperate enough for God, or willing to pay the price that discipleship involves. We look for God to partially satisfy us, but don't give everything over to him. Invite the Holy Spirit to come and assist us to pray prophetically into each other's situation that we noted down earlier. Break into 3's, praying for one another about this.