

INTRODUCTION

This morning, I'm beginning a new teaching series entitled, "Refresh! What to do when life crashes." I got the idea for this title several months ago when I was on my computer and a web page I was viewing locked up. I moved the cursor up to the "refresh button" and double-clicked my mouse—"Voila!" the web page reloaded and I kept working. In that moment I thought, "Wow! That's what happens to us when our lives get clogged up. When we position our trust in God, He refreshes us so we can live an abundant life again."

The Biblical basis for this series is found in the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 5. These simple, profound principles are often called "the beatitudes" from the Latin word *beatus* which means "blessed." I like the word "beatitudes," because these are "attitudes that ought to be!"

I heard about a father who was trying to take a nap on a Sunday afternoon in his living room. His little boy kept bugging him saying, "Daddy, I'm bored." So his father, trying to make up a game, found a picture of a world map in the newspaper. He ripped it up in about fifty pieces and said, "Son this is a really fun jigsaw puzzle. I want you to put it all back together." He lay down to finish his nap, thinking his son would be occupied for at least the next two hours so he could sleep. But in about 10 minutes his son woke him up saying, "Daddy, I finished it. I put it all back together." The man said, "You're kidding!" He knew his son didn't know all the names and locations of the nations, but there was the world map reassembled before him. He asked, "How did you do that?" His son smiled and said, "It was easy, dad. There was a picture of a person on the other side of the page with the map. I just put the picture of the person together and turned it over. When I got my person put together, the world looked just fine."

It's amazing how much better the world looks when a person is put back together! That's what this REFRESH series is about—tapping into God's power to restore and refresh lives that have crashed and been broken. This series is NOT only for people who have hurts, hang-ups, habits, and hassles with clinical labels. The truth is life is tough for all of us. We've all hurt other people and we've all been hurt by others. This series is for anyone looking for personal and spiritual refreshment. This truth is for you if you want to be blessed more in 2007 than in any previous year of your life. In these few verses we're going to study, Jesus repeats the word "blessed" nine times. I have a friend who wrote his entire doctoral dissertation on the meaning of the word "blessed" in the beatitudes. It's the word *makarioi*, which can best be translated "happy." For all humans, and especially Americans, we believe in our God-given rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." If you are like millions of others pursuing happiness, you'll only find it when you seek to follow God's plan for your life. Let's see how Jesus begins what is often called the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:1-3. "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."

Do you need spiritual and personal refreshing? Computers aren't the only things that crash—cars crash, planes crash...and even lives crash. Are you struggling with Overworking? Overeating? Alcohol or Drugs? Overspending? Grief? Guilt? Anger or rage? Fear or Anxiety? Divorce? Rejection? Abuse? Sexual addictions? Codependency? Insecurity? Perfectionism? Gambling?

Lying? Procrastination? The Need to control? The list goes on and on—you can fill in the blank with your own struggle.

In 1935 Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith, from Akron, Ohio, developed a 12-step process of recovery for people addicted to alcohol. This was the beginning of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and these same twelve steps based on scripture have been adopted and adapted by numerous other recovery groups. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in California has reworked these steps into a national ministry known as Celebrate Recovery. Over the next few weeks, I'm going to borrow some of these principles to share with you—seven steps to refreshment. The first letter in each of these seven principles will spell the word REFRESH. The first principle is:

Realize that I'm not God

That's what Jesus meant when He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Jesus wasn't talking about being financially poor or spiritually poor. The first step on the road to blessing and refreshment is to admit you are morally bankrupt. When you check the bank balance of your moral power to do right and to be right, you must admit to yourself there are insufficient funds and you are morally overdrawn. As we think about this important first step, let's consider three important truths:

I. THE REASON I STRUGGLE: MY SINFUL NATURE

The Bible teaches we are sinners by nature and by choice. That means we were born with a moral DNA predisposing us to sin, and when we get old enough to make choices, we choose to sin even though we know it's wrong. This moral bankruptcy is the basis for our need for a Savior.

Have you ever noticed you sometimes do things you shouldn't? For instance,

1. Do you ever stay up late when you know you need sleep?
2. Do you ever eat or drink more calories than your body needs?
3. Do you ever feel that you need to exercise, but you don't?
4. Do you ever look at some sexually explicit images on your computer you know are immoral, but you watch them anyway?
5. Do you ever take prescription or illegal drugs you know you shouldn't but you take them anyway?
6. Have you known you should be unselfish, but you act selfishly instead?
7. Have you ever tried to control someone or something and found it was uncontrollable?

If you answer is YES to any of those questions, welcome to the human race. That's because we all have a sin nature.

Have you ever been tempted to do something and you KNEW would be self-destructive? But then you did it anyway? I recently saw a funny picture of a penguin and a sleeping polar bear. It was altered to make it appear as if the penguin was standing over the snoozing bear with a pair of cymbals about to wake him. There's going to be a crash, and then it won't be pretty! We're the same way—we do things we KNOW we shouldn't. The Apostle Paul, probably the greatest, most Spirit-filled Christian in history described this personal struggle with these words, "I know that

nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." (Romans 7:18) Let's admit it. I've got a sin nature and I'm going to have it until I get to heaven.

This sin nature motivates me to want to be God. That's the essence of sin at its ugly core. My fallen nature me think I'm at the center of my own little universe, and everything and everyone revolves around me. This desire to be God expresses itself this way, "I don't want anybody telling me what's right and wrong. I want to call my own shots. I want to make my own decisions. I want to make my own rules." That's called playing God. We want to say, "It's MY life, I want to be in control!" And the more insecure you are the more you are driven to control.

This is humanity's oldest problem. Adam and Eve struggled with it just like we do. God placed them in Paradise, and they wanted to control Paradise. God said, "You can eat anything you want in this entire garden except one thing: don't eat the fruit of this one tree." The serpent came along and whispered, "Hey, eat this fruit and you'll be god! You'll be in control!" And of course, that's what they did. Someone once said God should have told them they could eat any animal except the serpent—they would have broken that rule as well, but at least we wouldn't have the devil around anymore!

We can't blame the devil for our problems. He only suggests. God gave each of us a will, and we ALL choose sin on our own. We choose to play God. How do we play God? We deny our humanity and try to control everything for selfish reasons.

We try to control our image. We don't really want people to know us the way we are, so we have to play image games. We wear masks so people don't see us as we really are. We deny our human failings. When we're afraid we say, "Oh, I'm not afraid." When everything is falling apart in our lives and someone asks how we're doing, we put on a mask and smile and say, "Fine." That's called playing God.

We try to control other people. Parents try to control kids and kids try to control their parents. Husbands and wives try to manipulate each other by pushing their hot buttons.

We try to control our own problems. We like to say things like, "Oh, I can handle this issue on my own. I don't need help, and I certainly don't need counseling! I'm okay I really am. I can quit anytime I want to. I'll work on it on my own." The more you try to control your problems alone the worse they get. That's called playing God.

II. THE RESULT OF MY DENIAL

As long as we deny we have this inherent sinful nature, we cannot be poor in spirit. And most of us are in denial—and that's not a River in Egypt. When it comes to our sin we want to say, "Oh, I'm okay," and God says, "No, you're KO'd." We say, "I'm fine," and God says, "You're fallen." We say, "I'm weak," and God says, "You're wicked." We say, "I'm correct," and God says, "You're corrupt." As I've said before, the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. God says in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can

understand it?" God knows it and the sooner we admit it, the sooner we'll be on the road to refreshment. When we deny our humanity we suffer from four negative dynamics:

1. Fear

When Adam sinned, he experienced fear for the first time. When God sought him he said, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." (Genesis 3:10) When we try to play God and control everything we don't want to open up to anyone because we're afraid they won't like us as we really are. So we just fake it and live in fear that somebody will discover the real me.

2. Frustration

It's frustrating to try to be the general manager of the universe. I can remember those old TV shows where a guy would come out and spin plates on rods. He would get dozens of plates spinning, and had to run frantically from one to the other to keep them spinning. Eventually one would fall, and then another, until they all came crashing down. That's life. It's frustrating to keep the vocational plate spinning, the financial plate spinning, and the relational plate spinning. But we try to play God and say we can handle it ourselves. You're not God—He keeps millions of planets spinning in orbit—and He doesn't need poles to do it! Don't you think He can manage your problems?

Paul expressed this frustration when he wrote, "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, I inevitably do what is wrong...something else deep within me...is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin..." (Romans 7:21-23)

3. Fatigue

Playing God will wear you out. There was a time when King David tried to play God and deny his sin. He later wrote, "My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity." (Psalm 32:4-5) Sometimes we try to run from pain by staying super busy. We ignore our pain by working 100 hours a week. Or we jump into some hobby or sport and it becomes a compulsion so we've got to be on the golf course, the tennis court, the mahjong group, or the dominos table. You can even get so involved in religious activities, and it becomes an outlet to hide your pain. And before long you wonder why you're exhausted. When you play God, you feel like Atlas with the weight of the world upon your shoulders. Stop it. The last time I checked there was a "no vacancy" sign above the Trinity.

4. Failure

When your job description is trying to control your universe, you are guaranteed to fail. The Bible says, "You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up; then God will show mercy to you." (Proverbs 28:13 GNB)

That's a pretty sad list: fear, frustration, fatigue, and failure. If you're dealing with any of those dynamics, you're in the right place. We have declared Green Acres is a safe zone where people with fears, failures, fatigue, and frustrations can come and find help from God and help from other

strugglers. We want to be a church where people can talk about their real hurts, habits, and hang-ups. We want to be a safe haven where you can find acceptance and love rather than judgment and condemnation. There is not a person in this room who has it all together. We're just all on different places along the journey of life.

Jesus was a great physician who came to heal the sick—physically and spiritually. He said He came only for the sick because "the healthy" don't need a doctor. When He talked about "the healthy" I think He spoke with His tongue firmly in His cheek, knowing that we ALL need a spiritual doctor. Our church and every Jesus-church much constantly remind ourselves that we aren't a showcase for shiny saints; we are a hospital for sick sinners.

So, let's start down our journey on

III. THE ROAD TO REFRESHING

Every New Year, people talk about making resolutions to improve their lives. All the gyms were full this week. But to see how strong human willpower is, watch to see how many of those folks are still coming in February!

Human resolutions are great, but there is something much better: Heavenly refreshment! We all need God's refreshing! During this series, I want us to learn a REFRESH memory verse. If you don't already have a verse for the year, and would like one, this would be a great choice. It's from Acts 3:19. Let's read it together: "Repent, then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." The word "repent" simply means to change the way you think—to change your attitude. In aviation, there is a simple aerodynamic principle that states, "Your attitude determines your altitude." That means if you put the aircraft in a nose high attitude, it will gain altitude. If you place it in a nose-down attitude you lose altitude. Flying is pretty simple—you pull back on the yoke the trees get smaller, you push forward on the yoke and the trees get bigger. So, attitude determines altitude. The same is true in life. Your attitude about life will determine the altitude of your achievement.

Each week as we study beatitude of Jesus, we're going to learn a step and a corresponding refreshing attitude. I've already introduced the first step: Realize I'm not God. As you take that step there is a refreshing attitude that accompanies it. The first refreshing attitude is: "I am totally helpless." I like the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases "blessed are the poor in spirit." *The Message* reads, "You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule."

When you realize you have a fallen nature that causes you to want to play God and deny your sinfulness, it brings you to the point where you admit you are totally helpless. Are you at that point yet? You'll never go any further toward recovery or refreshment until you admit you are helpless. You know you have embraced this attitude when you make these three personal admissions:

1. I can't change my past

We've all been hurt. We've all failed. But all the regret or resentment in the world will never change my past. But God wants me to forget those things which are behind and press on toward the goal He has for me. He is a God who says, "See, I am doing a new thing!" (Isaiah 43:19)

2. I can't control other people

I want to. I try to manipulate people. I use all kinds of games and gimmicks, but it doesn't work. I am responsible for MY actions, not the actions of anyone else.

3. I can't cope with my pain...alone

We're all into self-help strategies. Just look in the bookstore at the dozens of self-help books. But the truth is when your life has crashed, you can't help yourself. A few years ago I did an entire series on "No! That's NOT in the Bible." The first message in that series corrected the horrible misquotation "God helps those who help themselves." That's NOT in the Bible. Actually, the opposite is true: God only helps those who admit they're helpless. People too proud to admit they need help will find resistance from heaven. The Bible says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6)

Grace is God's power to change. Grace isn't just some mysterious power that saved you once upon a time back when you were a child or a teenager. God's grace is sufficient for you right NOW, but He only gives it to the humble. The opposite of being poor in spirit is to be proud in spirit. Could it be that you've been too proud for God to help you? Sometimes we deny our pain and strut into church and sit so haughty, so unbroken, and so unbent. We act as if we are doing God a great favor by showing up for church! Who are you trying to fool? We may be fooling others, and we may even be fooling ourselves—but we can't fool God!

CONCLUSION

If you're still a little unsure about what it means to be "poor in spirit, let me introduce you to a woman who was poor in spirit. Her life illustrates what it means to possess the refreshing attitude, "I am totally helpless."

In Matthew 15, this unnamed woman came to Jesus to beg Him to come heal her sick daughter. She wasn't a Jew; she was a Canaanite woman (that would be like a Palestinian today). Jesus ignored her for awhile, but she continued to ask Him and the disciples for help. Finally Jesus dismissed her by saying, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." Upon hearing that, the woman fell to her knees before Jesus and cried, "Lord, help me!" Jesus' reply, on the surface, seems to be so harsh and cruel you can hardly believe these words came from the lips of the Savior. He said to this Canaanite woman, "It wouldn't be right to take the children's bread and toss it to dogs." (Jesus used a word for dog that meant a pet—a little lap dog.) The implication was too obvious to miss. He was calling her a dog. How would we have reacted if we'd been called a dog? We would probably have acted like a dog and growled back, "How DARE you call me a dog? Who do you think you are?" Or like a dog we might have crawled off whimpering, "Did you hear the way he talked to me?"

You've got to wonder why Jesus spoke to her that way. I think He called her a dog with a twinkle in His eye. Jesus knows the hearts of all people, and He knew how she would respond. As He expected, this humble woman didn't growl, whimper, bark or bite. She simply replied, "You're so right, Lord, but even the dogs (and she used a different word for dog—one that meant a mangy stray)...even the yard-dogs get the crumbs that fall from the children's table." She was poor in spirit. She was expressing, "Lord, you're right. I'm a dog who doesn't deserve a thing from you ... but will you just please toss me a crumb? Because even a crumb of your grace is enough for me and my need!" When Jesus heard her reply, He smiled and said, "Your faith is amazing! Your request has been granted!" And the Bible says at that very moment her daughter was healed.

Let's learn from her what it means to be poor in spirit. She admitted she was totally helpless and hopeless without a crumb from Jesus. So she humbly fell on her knees and cried out to Him for help. And today, that's the same kind of attitude that gets heaven's attention. Why don't you try it yourself? God loves you and He is waiting for you to call out to Him for help. Remember, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

This week, why don't you declare bankruptcy? Why don't you admit to God you are morally bankrupt and you need Him to bail you out? God will respond to that kind of humility! Next week, we'll look at the second step on the road to refreshing!

OUTLINE

Step One: Realize that I'm not God

I. THE REASON I STRUGGLE: MY SINFUL NATURE

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." *Romans 7:18*

How we play God: We deny our humanity and try to control everything for selfish reasons

II. THE RESULT OF MY DENIAL

1. Fear
2. Frustration
3. Fatigue
4. Failure

III. THE ROAD TO REFRESHING

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*

REFRESHING attitude: I AM TOTALLY HELPLESS!

I can't:

1. Change my past
2. Control other people
3. Cope with my pain...alone

"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." *James 4:6*

Grace = God's power to change



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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