

LIVING
IT OUT



**DAILY
BIBLE
STUDY**



CEDARCREEKCHURCH

When Our Best Intentions Make a Mess of Things:

September 25, 2017

Nothing is better than having a second set of hands around the house, in the office, or while working on a project. Having a second set of hands makes any task easier and faster, unless that second set of hands are those of a toddler. I know this because I happen to have two toddlers, and they've entered the horribly wonderful stage of wanting to help with everything... and I mean everything. "Daddy, can I help you with the dishes?" "Daddy, can I help you in the yard?" "Daddy, can I help you type on your computer?" Don't get me wrong, I love that my girls are watching, learning, and wanting to pitch in, but I'm also a guy who values efficiency. It takes me five minutes to do the dishes or pick up the yard on my own, but 25 minutes with my toddler sidekick. A couple of days ago, my girls wanted to help clear the table. The result was a mess that ended in a fully swept, vacuumed, and mopped kitchen floor.

Anyone with kids knows the wonderful tension of balancing the attempt to teach young children basic life tasks with making it anywhere on time. The reason is that, despite a toddler's best intentions, they will make a mess. It's as sure as death and taxes. My daughters want to help, but in that desire, they often create more work.

We've all tried to make something better and had it backfire on us. It's one thing for a toddler to make a mess cleaning up the kitchen; it's something completely different when you, as an adult, despite your best intentions, make life worse while trying to improve it. Our culture is filled with "self-help" books, experts, seminars, podcasts, and more that represent a 10 billion dollar per year industry in the United States alone. We live in a culture that is all about improving, achieving, and making ourselves better. There seems to be a desire for something more wired into all of us. Unfortunately, when we attempt to achieve this "better" life on our own, we nearly always find ourselves falling short. Perhaps that is because we are using our own human wisdom to find what we think we need. If we're attempting to find the "better" in our life based off the advice of this world, then we're missing the most important part. In 1 Corinthians 1:20b, the Apostle Paul wrote, "God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish."

This past weekend, Ben talked about this idea of how sometimes when we try to make something better, we can actually make it worse. In fact, he showed how Jesus turned the culture and wisdom of his day upside-down. In Matthew 5:3-10, Jesus shares what we know as "The Beatitudes." The Beatitudes are a

collection of sayings that reveal the foolishness of the world's wisdom. The Beatitudes tap into the way that God has wired life to actually work better.

Our culture tells us things like, "If you believe it, you can achieve it," "Ignorance is bliss," "No good deed goes unpunished," or "Nice guys finish last." Jesus flips that thinking on its head as he reveals the Beatitudes:

Matthew 5:3-10

³*God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him,^[a]
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.*

⁴*God blesses those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

⁵*God blesses those who are humble,
for they will inherit the whole earth.*

⁶*God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,^[b]
for they will be satisfied.*

⁷*God blesses those who are merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

⁸*God blesses those whose hearts are pure,
for they will see God.*

⁹*God blesses those who work for peace,
for they will be called the children of God.*

¹⁰*God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right,
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.*

This past weekend, Ben unpacked how the first three Beatitudes fly in the face of common cultural beliefs. Americans love to say things like, "If you believe it, you can achieve it." In the first Beatitude, Jesus taught us that it's okay to admit our limits. Those who are "poor" are really those who know their limits, especially spiritually, and admit their need for Christ above all else.

The second Beatitude, "God blesses those who mourn," confronts cultural thinking that says things like "ignorance is bliss" or "never let them see you sweat." To mourn is to admit that something is wrong. Jesus is saying that it is important to be present in reality and not try to avoid or ignore the issues we face. Those who mourn understand that things aren't perfect. By being in touch with reality, they're able to be comforted.

The third Beatitude, "God blesses those who are humble," confronts the notion that to get ahead and achieve, we have to show strength and make progress at the expense of others. Those who are humble understand that life isn't all about them. A humble person can set their pride aside and receive what Christ has in store for them.

Every one of these Beatitudes helps reveal the fact that following Jesus makes life better and makes us better at life.

Questions:

What are some sayings you've used to try to make life better that may actually make life worse?

What are some actions you've attempted to make life better that backfired?

How does your approach to making life better change when you factor God into the equation?

Prayer:

Dear Lord, you are all wise. You created me, and thus you know what I need. Forgive me for attempting to use worldly wisdom to make my life better instead of relying on you and your wisdom. Help me to see the areas where I'm trying to make my life better without you. Align my thinking with your teaching in the Beatitudes so that I am poor in spirit, humble, and able to mourn properly. Thank you for inviting me into your story. In Jesus name, amen.

This post was written by Alex Woody, a regular contributor of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

How Life Is Be Better When You Leverage Your Limits:

September 26, 2017

My daughter is five, and as her interests blossom, it's fun to speculate with her about what she wants to be when she grows up. She changes her mind, but sometimes she says things like "a cook," "a moon-walker" (astronaut, I presume), or "a mommy." I see qualities in her that would be great in certain career paths, and I find myself quietly hoping for all of those qualities to be used to the fullest. I see her fiddle with toys, taking them apart and putting them back together, or setting up Legos in a really creative way. I think engineer or architect! When she calmly pets a cat or cares for her little brother, I think veterinarian or nurse! Then I remember, oh yeah, she's five, and I have no idea what God's plan is for her. And while I think it's natural for a parent to be inclined toward lofty, grand dreams of what their children's future may hold, God has even bigger plans for them.

When my daughter says she wants to be a moon-walker, I tell her something to the effect of, "You can do whatever you put your mind to!" But is that speaking truth? One thing you may have heard, or may have even said to a child or friend is, "If you believe it, you can achieve it." We say this with wholly good intentions, especially as a parent or coach to a child. It is meant to encourage, to inspire one to act on a dream. This statement lives on into our preparation for careers and may help build confidence. So why the concern over this statement?

Matthew 5:3

God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Some translations of this verse say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This means that they are conscious of their emptiness without God. They know they need God and don't have to know everything. These people are blessed because they truly rely on God. They know that we all have limitations, and that's okay. In fact, knowing one's limitations is important in being successful. They know that without God, they cannot achieve anything, no matter how much they "believe it." With God, we can realize he created us with a purpose, and he will guide us into knowing what that purpose is. He brings us to fulfillment and helps us get things done.

The well-meaning encouragement we tend to offer to people in our lives can be misleading in that it doesn't acknowledge or allow for limitations. It also is self-limiting in that we aren't able to dream as big as God can plan. It also gives all the credit and power to us, rather than God. God has something better for you, for all of us. We can't fathom the depth of the plans he has for us in his kingdom.

All we can do is rely on him, realize our limits, and give it to God, and then the kingdom is ours.

What effect has the phrase, "If you believe it, you can achieve it," had on you? Has it helped you? Have you given this encouragement to others?

In what way might this phrase unintentionally limit someone?

Do you feel like you are conscious of your emptiness without God? Would you say you rely on him? How can you get to the point of complete and humble reliance?

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for making us all unique, with different skills and gifts. Please help me to continually realize my need for you, and my emptiness without you. Help me to rely on you fully, and to acknowledge my limitations, giving them to you. Please use me however you can for your kingdom, all for your glory. Amen.

This post was written by Ashlee Grosjean, a regular contributor of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

How to Experience Comfort From Loss And Disappointment:

September 27, 2017

The lyrics of Bobby McFerrin's song "Don't Worry Be Happy" go like this:

*Here's a little song I wrote
You might want to sing it note for note
Don't worry, be happy
In every life we have some trouble
But when you worry you make it double
Don't worry, be happy*

The sentiment of this song can essentially be distilled into the cliché, "Ignorance is bliss," which means that if you do not know about a problem you do not worry about it.

Do either of these phrases describe your way of dealing with loss or mourning?

Let us compare these phrases with today's Bible verse, which comes from Jesus' teaching of the Beatitudes to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:4

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

What does the Bible mean by mourning? The Bible has many examples of mourning over death. One would be

Genesis 23:2

And Sarah died at Hebron in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

Most of us do not think of Jesus as having human emotions, but after speaking with Lazarus's grieving sisters, *Jesus wept.* (**John 11:35**)

We also see examples of mourning over the calamity of sin of God's people as in **Psalm 119:136,**

Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed.

The good news, according to the Apostle Matthew, is that we are assured there is comfort for those who mourn. Mourning, or intense grief, is an emotional response to loss and can be expressed in a variety of ways. In the Eastern culture of Biblical times, mourning was very dramatic with weeping and carrying on. Other parts of the world still mourn in the same way today. In our culture, mourning is processed in a variety of ways. It can be verbal, by talking about the

loss with anyone who will listen, for as long as they will listen; by journaling or writing down the broad range of emotions associated with the loss; by expressing grief through some art form; or by internalizing the loss and shutting the world out. Jesus is not promising that all our pain will go away; he says that mourners will find God's comfort.

If you are not a Christ-follower or are not positive what Jesus taught is true, you may try to circumvent mourning like the song says, *don't worry, be happy*. It is much easier to avoid responsibility for our discomfort and sad feelings from loss than it is to deal with them. In the Pixar movie "*Inside Out*," Riley is a happy 11-year old girl who suffers a life-changing event when her family moves from the Midwest to San Francisco. The character Joy tries to comfort Riley by keeping her thoughts preoccupied with happy events to help her through this difficult time, but the character Sadness consumes Riley's thoughts. Sadness systematically shuts her down. It is not until Joy and Sadness are in the far reaches of Riley's mind that Joy realizes that Riley needs to deal with Sadness and the loss of her old life to become happy again. It is unrealistic to believe that ignorance is bliss. Just because you do not know about something, does not mean you can avoid the mourning process. Mourning is acknowledgement of loss and disappointment, and we need to work our way through all the emotions of the event.

God wants to be our comfort and our go-to in times of mourning. How are you at mourning?

I continue with my personal experience of loss and mourning because both my parents passed in 2016. My mom passed on March 3, very suddenly of a massive CVA. She returned from a church meeting at 9:30 p.m. and was gone by 11:30 p.m. This turned my world upside-down even though she was 81 years old. You might think that 81 years is a good, long life, but I do not believe anyone is prepared for death when it happens suddenly. I was raised as a Christ-follower, but I did not actively seek God's comfort until my dad passed on May 27. I expected Dad to follow Mom, but that did not prepare me for this additional loss. My sorrow was overwhelming and all-consuming. It was not until I let go and let God in that I realized I was not in control. God did provide much-needed comfort, but he did not take away all my pain. I believe this past year is when God carried me through life, as I did not have the strength to stand. God is good, all the time.

God wants us to meet others in the dark days of loss and comfort them. How are you at comforting others?

Prayer:

Dear Glorious Heavenly Father, thank you for the promise of comfort during our times of mourning. When we put our trust in you and actively seek you, you are always there. If we feel distant from you, it is because we have moved away. Help us to have empathy in comforting others when they experience loss. In your gracious name we pray. Amen.

This post was written by Jennifer Macke, a regular contributor of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

When Nice Guys Don't Finish Last:

September 28, 2017

Have you ever felt as though someone has taken advantage of you? Maybe it was by a coworker, a relative, or a friend. You could have felt as though someone took advantage of the time you had invested in them, or that the money you spent for an individual wasn't worth it. Or, it could have been the extra hours you stayed at work that seemed to go unnoticed.

While we sometimes feel as though the good that we are doing in certain areas of our lives goes unnoticed, or we feel unappreciated, it's important to ask ourselves, "What is my motive for doing good?" Is it important for me to get attention or credit for going the extra mile? Paul says in **Romans 12:3**: *Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in the evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given you.*

It can be easy to compare our lives to the lives of others and think of all the good things we are doing but it does not mean anything to God if we are not doing it from a pure, servant's heart.

In **Matthew 5:5**, one of the Beatitudes says, *"God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth."* Other Bible versions use the word "meek" instead of humble, but what do these words mean? Humble people see themselves as servants of God. They are comfortable and confident with their own gifts, strengths, and resources that God has given them to bless others. They do not use what they have to be in the spotlight or to gain attention, but rather to do the work of the Lord.

So what does the last half of that Beatitude mean? "For they will inherit the whole earth?" This is easy to skip over, but there is importance to understanding this. Because we are human, we can only have a human perspective and human understanding in this life. **Revelation 21:1** says, *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared."* While our human minds cannot comprehend or imagine the life after this, we are told that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Those who serve and love God will experience the new earth for eternity.

What are your motives for doing good? Is it for being in the spotlight, or is it to serve God?

Is there a specific area in your life that you feel has gone unnoticed and are hoping someone will give you credit for?

How can you begin to change your motives from self-seeking to humility?

Prayer:

God, thank you so much for the passages on the Beatitudes and for the way we can reflect and learn from them. Please reveal to me any impure motives I have had in doing good. Create in me a pure heart. Thank you for the work you are doing in me. Help me to be confident in the gifts and strengths you have given me and help me to use them for your glory and furthering your kingdom. Amen.

This post was written by Rachel Marroquin, a regular contributor of the LivingItOut Bible Study

That Saying You Thought Was in the Bible.

September 29, 2017

Why is there always so much, too much, to do? It seems like you can spend an entire lifetime working, waiting for a chance to “just catch up.”

I’ve been waiting for such a chance for months now. I think I need to try a new approach.

Some say, “God helps those who help themselves.” This isn’t modern advice; it’s been around long enough that some people believe it’s from the Bible itself. (Spoiler alert: it’s not. However, this expression can be traced as far back as ancient Greece.) It seems like sound advice, and there is at least some Biblical truth to it. There are several Bible verses that encourage us to work hard, such as **Colossians 3:23**:

“Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.” Proverbs also includes plenty of warnings against the dangers of laziness.

But after these past few months of working hard, I’ve realized a bit of advice of my own: I can’t help myself. No matter what I try, I never have enough time or energy to do what needs to be done.

Why?

Because I’ve been trying to do it all on my own. And here’s another spoiler alert: I’m not strong enough to do it all on my own. None of us are.

Yes, the Bible encourages us to work hard. But God also *“blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him”* (**Matthew 5:3**), as we discussed in Tuesday’s LivingItOut. And God definitely has no use for human pride.

However, the knowledge that we can’t do anything without God’s help should not be a discouragement. Although we *“cannot be fruitful unless we remain in [Jesus],”* (**John 15:4**), we also *“can do everything through Christ, who gives [us] strength.”* (**Philippians 4:13**)

And while some people will debate whether “God helps those who help themselves,” there’s one thing that’s certain; when it comes to salvation, we absolutely cannot help ourselves. If salvation were entirely up to us, no one would ever be saved. But that’s alright, because God didn’t leave it up to us. Instead, he took all of it (our temptations, our sins, and the price they carry) onto himself when Jesus sacrificed his life for us on the cross.

Romans 5:6-8

⁶ When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

But you know what? Perhaps, even here, one might say, “God helps those who help themselves.” Yes, he paid the price on his own. There’s nothing we can do to earn it or deserve it. We can never save ourselves. At the same time, in order to experience this gift of salvation, we must accept it. So then it is up to us. But wait, there’s more. Ephesians 2:8-9 states that even our very faith is a gift from God. So we are back to God alone doing the work. Confused? Good. Now your God is big enough. I don’t know about you, but I want to follow a God who is beyond my comprehension. If you are reading this, and you haven’t accepted Christ’s gift of salvation, I pray that you would by accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior. Please, help yourself, and enjoy, and be sure to thank God for the gift of faith to receive this salvation.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, please help us, because we can’t help ourselves. We know it is your will for us to work hard in your name, striving to reach our rewards at the end of the race, but we also know we will not make it without your wisdom and strength. We ask that you would provide these things for us, as well as the skills and energy we need to accomplish your will. For while we can do nothing without you, we can do everything with you.

Thank you, God, for offering these things to us, and for sacrificing your Son on the cross for us. We could not save ourselves, but you made a way for us to be saved. May many see our work, and the way we rely on you instead of ourselves, and be saved. Let your will be done. Amen.