

## Session 4: BEING HONEST

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1. One of my favorite parts of the Bible is the ‘Sermon on the Mount,’ Matthew 5-7. If you think about verses from the Bible that seem very familiar to you, verses you could almost quote from memory, chances are good that many of them are from the Sermon on the Mount.
2. The *most* familiar part of the Sermon on the Mount is the opening part that we know as “the Beatitudes.”

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*
3. The title “Beatitudes” comes from a Latin word that means “blessed,” but the original New Testament is in Greek, and the Greek word *makarios* has a slightly different meaning.

It means “*happy*” or “*fortunate*” –or even “*lucky*.” And, of course, we would probably also call happy, fortunate, or lucky people “blessed.” But it would put a somewhat different spin on the Beatitudes if we were to say, for example: “*How fortunate are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,*” or “*How lucky for those who are being persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs shall be the kingdom of heaven.*”
4. I want to talk for a few minutes this morning about just one of the Beatitudes: “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*” Or as we might want to say: “*How wonderful it is, how happy it is for the pure in heart. For they shall see God!*”
5. Before I tell you what I think about this beatitude, I want to hear what *you* think. What does it mean to you to say that someone is “pure in heart”?
6. For me, “purity of heart” is what we might also call SPIRITUAL INTEGRITY. We have “purity of heart” when what is “on our inside” is also manifested “on our outside.”

Maybe that’s not exactly what Jesus was thinking about, but it’s what I take away from what he said.
7. *Integrity* is essential for us if we want to live holy lives, if we want to be like Jesus. There needs to be a one-to-one correspondence between our convictions and our attitudes, between our beliefs and our way of life.

The opposite of integrity is *hypocrisy*: pretending, play-acting, “putting on.”
8. I believe that it’s very important for our *prayer* to have integrity, to have honesty. I hope I made that clear when I gave a talk earlier about what I try to do in my prayer journal: that is, to open to God my heart, my self-perceptions, my emotions, my desires, my frustrations, my fears . . . everything about me, holding nothing back.
9. I think this honesty also has to include openness with God about our frustrations and disappointments, including especially our frustrations and disappointments *with Him!*
10. There have been times when I’ve prayed for an extended period of time for other persons, for their needs, for their healing, for various things. And sometimes, if I haven’t felt as if there was any kind of

answer from God, I have poured out my frustration in prayer. In my case, that meant writing it in my journal.

I've said to God, in words more or less like these: *"Why aren't You doing anything for 'N.'? Why are my prayers going without an answer? Or is your answer just 'No'? I am trying to encourage this person to trust You, and all that he is seeing is more pain, more frustration, more darkness. I want to serve You, but I just don't understand what You are doing in this situation. Help me! Do something I can see. Say something I can hear."*

11. Do you ever pray like this? How do you deal in prayer with your frustrations or your (apparently) unanswered prayers? How do you address it with God?
12. As I said in a different context in one of our earlier sessions, I go back to the Psalms as a great collection of prayers by devout Children of Israel and I look at how these Psalmists, with reverence but also in their own integrity, dealt with sorrow and frustration and even their anger at God.

I think people *do* get angry at God, though maybe not everybody wants to admit it. And I think this anger is o.k. Children get angry at their parents, sometimes, don't they? Their anger may be misplaced or childish, but they do feel it. Good parents know when their children are angry and frustrated, and these good parents know how to deal with their angry child. They don't get angry in return and say, *"How dare you have such feelings?"* As psychologists tell us, emotions are not "right" or "wrong," they're just emotions.

Anybody who tells you, *"You have no right to feel that way,"* or *"You ought not to feel that way,"* doesn't understand emotions. These people just want to control everything, and they're discovering that's impossible.

13. I think God wants us to have integrity, purity of heart. And sometimes having integrity means getting in touch with our honest feelings, including anger, disappointment and frustration. And there is a way to do that prayerfully and with reverence.
14. Has anyone in the group ever felt "angry" with God? How did you deal with the feeling?
15. There are quite a few psalms in which the author says, in effect, *"Lord, why don't you DO something? Why do you remain silent? We're dying here! Why do you leave us in this miserable situation? You have the power to deliver us, and you have delivered us in the past. Why now do you leave us in misery? Arise, Lord, and do something!"* I have a handout for you this morning that includes a few passages from Psalms that convey this sense. (Handout: Portions of Psalms 9, 10, 44, 74, and 102.)
16. Moving on, I want to point out another important aspect of having integrity in prayer, purity of heart: *dealing with our desires* – being honest with God about what we want.
17. I'll tell you a personal story that illustrates this. I'll do my best not to string it out too long. Some of you have heard it. (Joan has heard it so often that she could tell it herself!)

In 1977 I had served three years as curate in a suburban parish in Denver. This was my first experience of parish ministry, and it had been a good one. I was 31 years old and ready to seek a call to a parish of my own. So I put my name out via the grapevine, and there were some churches that were interested in me. A friend of mine from seminary was the rector of a small parish in Destin, FL, in those days and in March of 1977 he invited me to come down and lead what back then we used to call "A Weekend of Renewal" for his parish.

I had never done anything like this before, and I had a great time. Lots of people came. My friend told me that a parish in a town 55 miles east was looking for a new rector, and he had invited some members of their search committee to attend the weekend, hoping maybe they might decide to consider me as a candidate in their process. Those people came, and they liked me, and – indeed – they wanted me to come over and be interviewed. I went, and I loved it. The church was St. Andrew’s Church in Panama City, FL. The people were friendly and likeable; it was a big church, located right on the bay. Everything about it was desirable from my point of view.

After I got back to Denver, I went straight to the chapel at our church and I got down on my knees in front of the altar and the Blessed Sacrament and I said, out loud (there was no one else there), *“Lord, I will do anything you want me to do, and I will go anywhere you want me to go. But if you’re interested in what I want, I want to go to St. Andrew’s in Panama City.”*

About three weeks later I got a letter from the chairman of the Search Committee, saying, *“Thanks for talking to us, but we’ve decided to consider other candidates. God bless you.”*

I was very disappointed, but I figured that had been a long shot anyway, and God would have something else for me. I was also a candidate in two other parishes, and within the next month I became a finalist in both. They both made their final decision on the same Sunday afternoon in May. I was sure one of them would call me. —But they both chose the other candidate!

I felt miserable and rejected. And I told the Lord all about it. Praying in my church’s little-used chapel was my habit at times like that, and so I went back there and said, *“Lord, what’s the matter with me? What I am doing wrong? Am I being punished because I was so blunt about saying what I wanted? Lord, you know my heart. I will accept your will and I’ll go wherever you send me.”*

By July I still had no other ‘prospects’ I was interested in. Then I received a phone call from Senior Warden of the church in Panama City, FL, who had turned me down back in April. They had called a priest, and he had accepted, but with the reservation that if he were elected bishop of Wyoming (where he was a candidate) he’d take that instead. And that’s what happened!

So they were going back to their list names and wanted to know if I wanted to be reconsidered. I thought about it only a minute – wondering how I could stand to be rejected by this church a second time – and then I said “Yes.” Two days later they called me to be their rector! (They didn’t tell me at the time, but some years later the chair of the search committee confessed that I had been number four on their list, maybe lower. Their ‘better’ candidates had all taken other jobs, and I was the only one still available.)

18. The moral of my story is this: When you pray, be HONEST with God about what you *really* want. But be sure that you know your own heart and whether you truly *desire* something or not. And that means testing your desire against Scripture and what you already know of God’s will.
19. Psalm 37:4 says, *Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*
20. Has anyone had an experience in praying for “the desire of your heart” that you’d like to share?