

**The Blessed Life**  
**Week 2: Those Who Mourn**  
**Matthew 5:4**

In the months leading up to my mom's death, I was responsible for making sure she was taken care of. And that was a little tricky because we lived about 15 hours away in Rhode Island. My grandma lived nearby, so she was able to spend a lot of time with mom, but I was the one who had to manage the details of her failing health.

I was the one responsible for moving mom from her apartment to assisted living and, ultimately, to a nursing home. I was making sure she got the care she needed. I was wading through the mess of Medicare and hospital bills. All while trying to be a husband and dad and minister at a struggling church plant. I didn't feel like I was doing any of it well. I was trying my best, but I couldn't escape the feeling that I was letting everyone down, so I just kept trying harder and harder.

When mom passed away in July 2016, I didn't feel like I could be a grieving son. There was too much to do. I had to prepare her funeral that I was going to speak at. I had to comfort our family. I was the executor of her estate and there was stuff that needed to get done. Paperwork to file, lawyers to line up. I needed to make sure that mom's stuff was in a place where we could keep it safe until we had time to go through it all.

If you've ever been through that process, you know how much there is to do, and we had a short time to do it. When we finally got back home, I was exhausted emotionally, physically, spiritually. But I didn't have time to grieve. I had to pull myself together to lead and serve our church. And my first Sunday back, a lady caught me a few minutes before worship started and said, "Shawn, I'm sorry about your mom, but I was in the hospital while you were gone and you didn't even call me to see how I was doing." I had to step out for a little bit after that one.

The next couple of months were just a lot of the same thing. I felt guilty for not being enough...and being too much. I was doing my best to serve the Lord, my family, our church, but I felt empty inside. I was a mess, but I didn't have time to deal with it. I didn't MAKE time to deal with it. There was too much to do. I had breakfast with a friend a couple of months after mom had passed, and I told him I still hadn't cried.

One day, I was driving along 295 that goes around Providence, listening to an album by Andrew Peterson called The Burning Edge of Dawn. There's a song on that album called The Rain Keeps Falling and I resonated with every word. Here are some of the lyrics...

I tried to be brave but I hid in the dark. I sat in that cave and I prayed for a spark, to light up all the pain that remained in my heart, and the rain kept falling.

I'm scared if I open myself to be known, I'll be seen and despised and be left all alone. So I'm stuck in this tomb and you won't move the stone, and the rain keeps falling.

There's a woman at home and she's praying for light, my children are there and they love me in spite, of the shadow I know that they see in my eyes, and the rain keeps falling.

That was the line that absolutely wrecked me. I had to pull over because I couldn't see through my tears. Those words exposed the pain in my heart. I was broken and angry and hurting and lonely and overwhelmed and sad. And on the shoulder of 295 that day, God, in His kindness, knelt down and gave me His shoulder to cry on. And I got to experience our Beatitude for the day, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt 5:4).

In my car that day, sobbing, tears pouring down, I think Jesus would point to me in that moment and say, "That's the blessed life." But that's not the image that comes to mind for most of us. We'd probably say that the blessed life is one free from grief and mourning. But like we saw last week, The blessing of the Beatitudes is in the promise, not the position.

The comfort I received from the Lord in the car that day, that's the blessing. It wasn't the grieving. It was finally letting go of the burden I was carrying and allowing myself to feel the pain of loss, that's what opened me up to receive the blessing of God's comfort. And it helped me take some steps towards healing that I wouldn't have been able to take otherwise.

But grief and mourning and loss doesn't sound like the blessed life to us. And so, we spend a lot of time and energy avoiding these emotions. Instead of embracing them, we do everything we can to run from them. When we come face to face with loss, we often go into a protective mode that keeps us from feeling the weight of our pain.

Some of us try really hard to ignore it. We keep ourselves busy and distracted. We avoid quiet moments because the silence might make us come face to face with our pain. So we overcommit ourselves. We fill our lives with noise and activity and devices, trying to ignore the pain we feel.

We try to numb it away. We turn to anything that might provide temporary relief, or escape, from our pain. We try to avoid it with shopping, alcohol, pornography, overeating. Some people numb their pain by hyper-focusing on the needs of others. If they can focus on someone else's pain, then they don't have to feel their own.

Some people try to minimize it through a kind of "toxic positivity." They insist on being happy all the time, even in the face of suffering. They deny their pain. Say they're fine or that it's no big deal. They feel like they have to be strong and that they can't crack under the feelings of sadness and grief or their whole life might come crashing down.

For some, a past pain has made them put up walls to **prevent it** from ever happening again. Their hearts become hard and they don't let anyone in because they don't want to experience the pain of loss again.

Maybe you can relate to one of these ways of coping with your pain. In my life, I've used all four of them and then some. But I'll tell you...those times when I've been honest with myself and the Lord, honest with others about the pain in my life...those times when I've grieved and mourned loss in my life, those are the times I've experienced the comfort Jesus talks about in this Beatitude.

We want to skip the grief and go straight to the comfort. We want to avoid the position and get to the promise. **For most of us, pain doesn't have a place in our pursuit of the blessed life.** But Jesus comes along and says that the blessed life belongs to those who acknowledge the pain in their own lives and in the lives of others. The blessed life is for those who mourn oppression and persecution and personal sin. It's for those who grieve social evils and the brokenness in our world that effects the lives of so many.

When we embrace the pain of suffering and loss, when we mourn over it, THAT is when we experience the blessing of God's comfort. And Scripture describes His comfort like this...

**Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."** God is near to those experiencing loss and pain.

**Isaiah 66:13, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you."** God's comfort is tender and nurturing. Kind and compassionate.

**Psalm 147:3, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."** God not only comforts, but he actively heals us when we're hurting.

**Isaiah 41:10, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."** God's comfort gives us courage and strength and protection.

We experience God's comfort when we grieve. Not because He removes us from our suffering and pain, but because He draws near to us. He enters into our grief and mourning with us and His presence brings us comfort.

I said last week that the Beatitudes invite us to be open to things we might otherwise be closed off to. When we put ourselves in a posture of openness and honesty with ourselves and the Lord, we begin to receive the blessed life that God desires for us. And this morning, I want to invite you to be honest with the Lord about a pain you might be feeling today. A sense of loss you might be grieving.

Maybe you're struggling through physical loss. Someone you loved passed away. It could have been recently, it could have been years ago, but talking about grief today has brought up some of those emotions inside of you again. Maybe you're experiencing pain today from sickness or cancer. Maybe your body isn't letting you do things that you used to take for granted and it's causing you to grieve. Are you experiencing any kind of physical loss today?

Maybe your loss is more psychological? You feel lonely, anxious, stressed. Maybe you feel a deep sense of shame or regret today for something you've done. Someone you've hurt. Maybe you've been abandoned by someone you thought loved you. You're carrying around a deep sense of depression and despair?

Or maybe this morning you're grieving something happening in the world around us. Corruption, dirty politics, war, famine? Maybe someone you love is being bullied at school, abused at home. Maybe today you just find yourself grieving the state of our world and the pain it's causing in the lives of so many people.

Are you mourning a loss today? I want to invite you into the palms up/palms down position we practiced last week. With your palms down, bring whatever it is your mourning today to the Lord. Lay it down and invite Him to carry it for you. (Spend some time in silent prayer.)

**Mourning comes to us in a variety of ways, but only God is the source of all comfort.** And so, think about the passages we read earlier about God's comfort. Turn your hands over into a receiving posture. What kind of comfort do you need to receive from Him as you mourn the loss you invited Him into?

Do you want to receive more of His presence. Do you need to experience His tender love and kindness? Do you want to receive His healing that mends our broken hearts and binds up our wounds? Or do you need to receive His courage and protection as you walk the road you're on?

These are the ways God promises to comfort us, so whatever it is you need, with palms up and open, spend some time praying to receive it from Him.

I'm going to close with a written prayer from our prayer team. You can follow along with the words on the screen...

*Lord, I am devastated. This is not how I wanted things to go. It's tempting to blame You for my dashed hopes and broken heart.*

*But, I acknowledge the truth that you did not cause my suffering, for in You, there is no darkness at all. Grief, loss, mourning, sickness, death...these were not part of your plan for humanity. Sin and a broken world are to blame for my loss, not You. When I hurt, You hurt, too.*

*Help me God to feel my devastation and express it authentically while at the same time allowing myself to be led into your comfort. Even though all I can see is the pitch black darkness of grief, open my eyes to see how you are drawing close to me right now. Holy Spirit, help me to participate with you in the way you're moving me toward peace and healing. In your presence, I can find peace even with a broken heart. Amen.*

In Isaiah 53, Jesus was described as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He knows what it's like to mourn, to experience deep sorrow, and to carry the weight of suffering. Yet, in His grief, Jesus also experienced the comfort of God that met Him in His darkest moment and gave Him the courage to go to the cross.

And on the cross, Jesus bore the weight of all our suffering, all our guilt, all of our shame. All of Heaven mourned as He took His final breath. But, on the third day, God turned their mourning into dancing. He rescued Jesus from the tomb and gave Him life again, defeating the curse of sin and grave.

And while we continue to mourn the pain of loss and brokenness in our world, a day is coming when “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4)

For those who put their faith and trust in Jesus, a day is coming when God will make all things new. But, while we wait for the fullness of His comfort to be revealed, may we take heart knowing that the blessed life belongs to those who mourn, for they will be comforted both now and for all eternity.