

Fil-Am Community Church
Pastor David Bennett
Life's Healing Choices, (Part 2)
Matthew 5:4...

“THE HOPE CHOICE”

It's good to see you here in the second week of Life's Healing Choices. Last week we started a look together at the Beatitudes of Jesus at the beginning of the most famous sermon ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus began by saying Here's eight things that will make you happy. Here are eight things that will bring you true fulfillment in life. We're walking through those eight things these next eight weeks here at Fil-Am Community Church, talking together about how you and I can make Life's Healing Choices based on those eight things that Jesus taught us.

First one we talked about last week. The first choice we talked about last week was from Jesus' first Beatitude, Matthew 5:3. Jesus says, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" That's the reality choice, **the choice to realize I am not God** and admit that I am **powerless** to control my tendency to do the wrong thing, and my life is unmanageable.

I don't know about you. There are two choices there. The first one is easier for me than the second one - realize I'm not God. How many of you have a pretty easy time saying, I'm not God. I think we're ok on that.

It's this second one that's the tough one, it is...

- ✓ Admitting that I'm powerless.
- ✓ Admitting I'm not in control.
- ✓ Admitting my faults and my failures.

I don't know about you, but last week as we began the series and Pastor Rolly was talking to us about...

- ✓ Admitting my faults to God
- ✓ Admitting my faults to one other person that I trust or some other people that I trust

The human side of me hears that and says, "I don't want to do that."

- ✓ Who wants to do that?
- ✓ Who wants to admit faults?
- ✓ Who wants to admit failures?

That's exactly what we are going to be addressing over the next eight weeks.

For a lot of us I think the picture we have is like a picture of going to a dentist. It is something we never look forward to doing, and a lot of us just want to go ahead and get it over with as soon as possible.

The issue is, in order to fix a cavity or do a root canal, there will be a little pain and discomfort but that is to prevent a lot of pain and discomfort later.

We have mentioned in many Boundaries for Marriage classes that the only way to clean a wound is to break out the scrub brush and alcohol pad, you have to get in there and clean out the wound in order for it to start to heal, if not it may just fester and turn into a bigger problem.

With that information, don't look at Life's Healing Choices as just a trip to the dentist. Get through these eight weeks as fast as you can. Just get through the unpleasant experience.

Let me give you an entirely different picture of what Life's Healing Choices is all about.

It's more like the door being opened to a prison cell, that you have been in for a long time, and all of a sudden you're out and you're free for the first time in your life. Free from...

- ✓ Our hurts,
- ✓ Our hang-ups,
- ✓ Our habits can build the four walls of a prison cell in our lives.

You feel locked up. You feel like, I can't get out. Life's Healing Choices is all about opening the door and walking out into this **fresh air of freedom.**

I'm not talking about getting out for some exercise or a long weekend but I am talking about **Complete Freedom!**

Galatians 5:1 *"It is for freedom that Christ set us free."*

Amplified Bible 5:1, *"In [this] freedom Christ has made us free [and completely liberated us]; stand fast then, and do not be hampered and held ensnared and submit again to a yoke of slavery [which you have once put off]."*

For some of you it may be experiencing that freedom, for the first time in your life. Realizing,

- ✓ Yes, I can **live** out the life that God has made me to live out.
- ✓ Yes, I can **do** those things I thought I never could do.
- ✓ Yes, I can **set aside** that habit that I thought would have a hold of me for the rest of my life.
- ✓ Yes, I can be **released** from that pain of the past that's had a hold of me for so long.

Those things can happen. That's the fresh air of freedom.

That's what God is able to do in my life and in your life during Life's Healing Choices.

This study just like the Bible is full of power and authority and you will get out of it what you put into it. It can have all the power and contain all the answers to all the questions mankind will ever have but if you don't pick it up and apply it, you will never feel that freedom.

That gets us to the topic of today's sermon ...

The **second choice** is the **Hope** choice.

It is the choice to earnestly believe...

- ✓ That God **exists**,
- ✓ That I **matter** to him,
- ✓ That he has the power to help me to **change**.

It's based on this Beatitude - Matthew 5:4 "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*"

You realize that Jesus' path to comfort and hope is entirely different than our path to comfort and hope

He's saying that the thing that I am most often trying to avoid is God's path to real comfort.

The truth is I don't want to mourn. I don't want to feel bad about my faults. The minute that I admit that they're there and I mourn that, that's God's path to comfort.

- ✓ I don't want to mourn the **past** and the things that have happened, the hurts that have happened.
- ✓ I don't want to mourn the fact that this **habit** has gotten a hold of my life and I can't seem to get rid of it, I can't control it.
- ✓ The truth of the matter is, what I want to avoid is God's path to real comfort.

I have a path to comfort and hope... God has a path to **Comfort and Hope**.

We've got a lot of different paths to comfort and hope. And all of them have to do with how I can get to a place of comfort, a place of hope as quickly as I possibly can.

We just want to get there quick, get it over and done with like that Dentist visit.

Because of that our paths to comfort and hope can be things like alcohol, many run to the bottle and escape the cares of the world.

- ✓ I don't feel **comfortable** about life.
- ✓ I didn't like the way that my day went so what do I do?
- ✓ I take a **drink**. Maybe it'll make me feel better.
- ✓ That becomes my path to comfort.
- ✓ That's what comforts me.

Or it might be your **drug of choice**, whatever drug you take that makes you feel more comfortable about life.

For some people their path to comfort and hope is...

- ✓ Gambling
- ✓ Shopping
- ✓ Food
- ✓ Work
- ✓ Self-Pity
- ✓ You fill in the blank _____

We could go on and on and on. But it boils down to one word we're talking about and that word is ***Escape***. We try to escape to a place of comfort and hope. We try to get there as quickly as we possibly can.

The problem is this. All the things that I think would give me comfort, all this escape, it only gives me a momentary escape at best. It gives me no comfort in the end. In fact it normally leaves me addicted because I've got to try to get more and more of that thing to try to give me comfort when it's never going to give me comfort in the first place.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." How does God give us comfort and hope? What is his path? Three simple things we're going to talk about the next few minutes together.

God's path to comfort and hope begins with Point number one, which is ...

1. See who God Really is.

Sports Buffs know a lot about celebrities and athletes whom they have never met. They can cite statistics on number of touchdowns, homeruns, strikeouts, and points scored.

Gossipers know a bunch about the latest scoop on people who they don't talk to, like who is divorcing who and who is hanging out with whom.

Pop culture junkies, read tabloids even though the people they are so interested in don't have a clue that they are alive.

However, a Christian can come to church for years and never know about God. True knowledge of God requires a two-way conversation.

Many Christians want to know God. But don't want to put in the efforts to do so...

That's where it should start. You need to see who God really is.

How do I know that I can trust God to comfort me? I only know that if I see him for who he really is.

How do I know that I can trust God to comfort me if I think that God is out to condemn me? Many of you think the same way.

If you feel that way let me ask you a question:

- ✓ What are you going to trust?
- ✓ Are you going to trust your **feelings**?
- ✓ Are you going to trust the **event** that changed human history?

That event was Easter, the Resurrection!

The Bible says in Romans 8:34 *"Who then will condemn us? Will Christ? No! For he is the one who died for us and came back to life again for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us there in heaven."*

I totally understand that some of you may feel that God is condemning us, and that changes your perspective of how you look to him.

But let me share with you: Jesus came to this planet, Jesus lived his life for you, then he went to a cross and he died on that cross for you. Think about John 3:16-17, specifically that he came "Not to Condemn" but through him we could be saved.

When I recognize that he died for me, he loves me that much, so I can begin a relationship with him, so he can restore that relationship. When I see that, there's got to come a point in life where I begin to think maybe my feelings aren't right here. Maybe my feelings don't match reality.

Who are you going to trust? Your feelings or what God has not only said about you but what he has demonstrated for you?

Who is God? 2 Corinthians 1:3 says this, *"God is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort."*

The Amplified Bible says it this way...

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of sympathy (pity and mercy) and the God [Who is the Source] of every comfort (consolation and encouragement),"

He is the Father who is full of mercy and all comfort.

- ✓ God is all about being a part of your everyday life.
- ✓ God is about being close to you.
- ✓ God is about having a relationship with you.

Because of that the Bible says in Psalm 23:4, *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*

If I'm going to have hope I've got to see who God really is. I've got to see that he doesn't come into my life to direct me to make me feel judged. But to let me know he really cares.

I know that many of you, as we're walking through Life's Healing Choices, you're looking at some of this in small groups.

If you're not in a group yet, it's not too late, if you would like to join a group see any of the directors and we will see how to accommodate your needs.

God's path to comfort and hope continues with Point number two which is...

2. I have to see who I really am.

Whenever I am tempted to become self-important and authoritative, I'm reminded of what a mother Whale said to its baby whale... She said, "When you get to the top and start to "Blow" that's when you get harpooned." (James Dobson)

We began to talk about this last week with Pastor Rolly. One of the things I have to see about who I really am is that, **I am broken**. That's who I really am. I am broken.

The Bible says this in Romans 3:23 *"For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard."*

Although we understand this verse a part of us wants to hide from that truth; just wants to pretend that it's not there and cover it over instead of just being honest about it. I don't know about you but I spend way too much of life and time and energy hiding from just this simple truth, that I am in fact broken.

The truth of the matter is, in the end I'm not going to be able to hide from it anyway. Luke 12:2 *"But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be made known."*

That verse scares the crap out of me. You read that and think "What? I thought if I could just get through the rest of this life, keep my hurt, habit, or hang-up secret and not tell anybody and then I get to go to heaven, that it would all get erased. If I could just make it until I die, then I'm going to be ok and nobody will ever know."

Then this verse comes. You want to see another look at it? Here it is in the Message paraphrase. *"You can't keep your true self hidden forever; before long you'll be exposed. You can't hide behind a religious mask forever; sooner or later the mask will slip and your true face will be known."*

It reminds me of the sermon I did a while ago on baggage, where I walked up and down the cafeteria with all these bags on my shoulders, but that is exactly what we are talking about here. We spend so much of our life and time and energy hiding from the truth of who we really are. When the truth of the matter is people know anyway.

- ✓ We think we're hiding it.
- ✓ People can see it anyway.

In the end it's going to be known anyway. If this scares you to death, the fact that we're all going to know in the end who we really are, that's not the picture that Jesus was trying to give at all.

In the end we're all going to realize we're all in the same boat, and share in some of the same struggles.

- ✓ We're all broken.
- ✓ We're all together.
- ✓ We're all one in this.
- ✓ We're all in the same boat.
- ✓ We're not going to be pointing fingers at each other.
- ✓ We're going to be pointing at the one who loves us, One Jesus Christ.

There is something freeing about that. But you don't have to wait till the end.

Right **here** and **now** you can begin to recognize that. And as you recognize that it brings a new **freedom** into your life. It brings a new **hope** into your life. You begin to finally see who you really are.

The truth of the matter is I'm broken. But don't stop there. You want to see who you really are.

It can't be just that I'm broken, but, I am loved ...

- ✓ I am loved by the one who knows me best.
- ✓ I am loved by God who knows that I'm broken.
- ✓ He loves me with his all.

How does God love you? He loves you like no human being has ever loved you. The human love that you've experienced in this life, it is entirely different from God's kind of love.

Human love fades but God's love is everlasting. Human love fails.

Many of you have had a failed love. Someone who has failed you. That's one of the biggest hurts in your life. Maybe it was a...

- ✓ Parent.
- ✓ A husband or a wife
- ✓ One of your kids,
- ✓ A close friend.

Human love fails. Because human beings are imperfect. But God's love? It is unfailing.

Psalm 119:76, "*May your unfailing love be my comfort.*" Be comforted in the fact that God's love is never going to fail you.

- ✓ Human love fades but God's love is everlasting.
- ✓ Human love fails but God's love never fails.
- ✓ Human love is often earned. But God's love is a gift.

We often earn love from each other - you do this for me, I do this for you. You treat me nice, I treat you nice. You scratch my back, I scratch yours. That's how we love oftentimes as human beings.

God doesn't love like that. God's love is a pure gift. Romans 3:24 says, "*God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins.*"

- ✓ The gift of a relationship with God.
- ✓ The gift of forgiveness.
- ✓ The gift of a new life.

In Life's Healing Choices that's the first healing choice. That's where it all begins. If you're not sure that you've made that choice, the choice to begin a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Start there. That is the bedrock. That's the foundation.

You can do that **right now**. It's a gift. How do you receive a gift?

Just by saying yes to it. God's saying here's the gift.

- ✓ I want to give you my forgiveness.
- ✓ I want to give you a new life.
- ✓ Will you trust me instead of trusting yourself?

You say you want a relationship with me. Just say it in your mind right now. You can pray it right now, with your eyes open. You don't have to close your eyes to pray. Just say, "God, right now..."

- ✓ I do want that gift.
- ✓ I want that gift of forgiveness.
- ✓ I want that gift of a new relationship with you.
- ✓ I want that gift of the kind of life only you can give.

Jesus Christ, come into my life." As you pray that prayer, you're receiving the gift that recognizes that you are loved. I am loved. Then once you've received that gift then you live it out every day of your life.

Some of you, you received that gift a while ago, or possibly even years ago. You know you have the gift of God's relationship within you. You know that you're loved. But the truth of the matter is, life lately hasn't been telling you that. The circumstances of your job, of your marriage or something with your kids, or what's happening in your life, everything happening right now makes you feel just the opposite.

The most lasting truth about you is this: you are loved. You are loved by the God who made you, who **wants** to have a relationship with you.

So whatever your circumstances, whatever life is throwing your way right now, hold on to that truth every day of your life: **I am loved.**

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." That goes to who we really are and what God wants to do in our lives.

When I begin to take a look at who I really am there are some truths about me that help me to get a hold of Life's Healing Choices.

I want to deepen my relationship with God. But I have to admit where I'm trusting myself and trying to do it my own way.

This leads us to the third part of receiving hope. If I want to experience God's hope and God's comfort, I've got to see who **God really is**; I've got to see **who I really am**. And finally I have to see

God's path to comfort and hope continues with the last point number three which is...

3. I've got to see how God can change me.

In order to enjoy perfume or cologne you must first break the seal of the bottle in which it comes.

To see a plant rise for the ground, the soil must be broken by the substance inside.

To enjoy the taste of roasted peanuts, there must be a breaking of the outer shell.

For a baby Chick to experience life, it must first breakthrough the egg that surrounds it.

Many times if you want to see or experience God you must allow yourself to be broken first!

So let us deal with the issue of God changing us, some people, many people don't want to go through the process of change, they just want the change.

It is like looking at your body and say I want to lose weight, but you don't want to consistently exercise or change you eating habits, in short you don't want to go through the process in order to achieve the results, I am not preaching to you but to myself.

You can say I've tried this a hundred times, a thousand times, I've prayed a prayer for change. I've tried to climb up that mountain again and again and I keep finding myself back at the same place.

I've disappointed myself; I've disappointed others so many times. I feel like I've disappointed God. I'm not going to try to climb up that hill one more time. Why should I even try? Who am I kidding?"

That negative reaction to change comes from **one place**. It comes from the place that's feeling like it's all on my shoulders.

- ✓ That somehow **I've** got to change my life for God.
- ✓ That somehow **I've** got to change my life for myself.

- ✓ The idea that **I've** got to change my life, it just wears me out.

Where do I find the power to change?

There are a couple of verses over at the end of Isaiah 40, a chapter that begins "*Comfort, comfort my people.*" It's a chapter all about how God comforts us. At the end here's what God says about the kind of power that he wants to give into your daily life.

*"Have you never heard or understood? Don't you know? That the Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of all the earth? He never grows faint or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to those who are tired and worn out; he offers strength to the weak. Even youth will become exhausted, and young men will give up. But those who **wait on the Lord** will find new strength. They will **fly high** on wings like eagles. They will **run and not grow weary**. They will walk and they will **not faint**."*

It's **not all on your shoulders**.

You want to have hope, you realize that **God's power** to change is **God's power** to change.

It's not me changing for God. It's God changing me through his power. It's hoping in him.

I want to give you a picture if this. I know living this out in everyday life you've got to get a picture of how does this work. How does it work to trust in God's power rather than my power?

Here's the truth about you. God has designed your soul to catch his love. It's not a matter of you trying to hope.

It's a matter of you saying, God...

- ✓ I need you, Father God
- ✓ I'm not going to get there on my own.
- ✓ I trust you.
- ✓ I trust you moment by moment.
- ✓ I trust you day by day.

I realize I need you; I need your strength, your power.

Let me just say to you the way to get there is not try to achieve the attitude of hope. But to recognize that **God and God alone** can give you the kind of hope that you've never experienced. That's what growth and hope is all about.

The last verse talks about what God's willing to do for you and what God's willing to do for me.

The Bible says this in Philippians 2:13 "*For it is God who is at work within you, giving you the will and giving you the power to achieve his purpose.*"

It is God who is at work within you, giving you the will. He'll give you the desire, and giving you the power.

That's where the unlocking of the prison door comes in. That's where the freedom comes in, when you recognize it's not all about me and my power and my energy. But it's all about God and what he alone can do in my life.

The more you and I can help each other to see that in our groups, together on the weekends, in personal conversation, the more I can remind myself of that, the more I'm going to connect with the God who alone can give me the kind of hope that we're talking about.

Let us pray

Father God, I thank you for what you are doing in my life. Thank you for opening the prison doors and offering me that so needed freedom. Thank you for allowing me to see you better to be able to come to you with all my wants and needs. Thank you for allowing me to look deep within myself and see who I really am. I realize that I am broken and in need of a savior. Finally Father God, I thank you for changing me, for helping me when I can't seem to help myself.