

# CONTROLLING MY REACTIONS

## Don't Worry - Be Happy!

### Part 3 of 8

Rick Warren

Matthew 5:5 "Happy are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

#### 1. Clearing up the confusion

\* What meekness is NOT: \_\_\_\_\_

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\* What meekness IS \_\_\_\_\_

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#### 2. When do I need to control my reactions?

\* When someone serves you ...

Be \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_.

"Don't just think about your own affairs, but be interested in others too, and in what they are doing. Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ's." Phil. 2:4-5 (GN)

\* When someone disappoints you ...

Be \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_.

"Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters."  
Rom 14:1

"If a person is trapped in some sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens." Gal. 6:1-2

\* When someone disagrees with you ...

Be \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_

"A gentle answer quiets anger but a harsh word stirs it up." Prov. 15:1 (GN)

"Wherever there is jealousy or selfish ambition, there will be disorder ... But wisdom from above is pure, powerful, gentle, and friendly." James 3:16-17 (GN)

"The Lord's servant must not quarrel ... those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in hope that God will give them a change of heart ..." 2 Tim. 2:24-25

\* When someone corrects you ...

Be \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_

"Let everyone be quick to listen, but slow to use his tongue, and slow to lose his temper." James 1:19 (Ph)

\* When someone hurts you ...

Be \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_

"Do not repay evil for evil ... overcome evil with good." Rom 12:17, 21

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his own spirit, than he who captures a city." Prov. 16:32

"God's Spirit does not make us timid, instead his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control." 2 Tim. 1:7

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**Rick Warren**

Matthew 5:5. We're in a series of Jesus' Eight Secrets of Happy Living. Today we're going to look at the most misunderstood attitude -- the attitude of meekness. *"Happy are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."* That sounds ridiculous. We're talking about pushing to get ahead, climb over others, scramble over the top. When the meek inherit the earth, some bully's going to take it back anyway. The word "meek" has lost it's meaning. It doesn't mean what it used to mean. Today it's a slur. If you call a man meek, he'd be insulted. You don't put it on your resume. What do you think of when you think of meek? Casper Milktoast. Some spineless jellyfish with no conviction. We say "Meek as a mouse". A lady said to her husband, "Are you a man or a mouse? Squeak up!"

What is meekness? Meekness is not weakness. There are only two men in the Bible called meek: Jesus and Moses. Neither of them were pushovers. Meekness means strength under control. The Greek word referred to a wild horse tamed or medicine that could tame a fever. Strength under control.

Some of you read about the Hell's Angel group that went out to Cook's Corner. They walked in. There was a truck driver setting over in the corner eating his dinner. One of the Hell's Angels walked over to him, picked up the plate of spaghetti and smashed it on the driver's head. He took the guy's beer and poured it in his lap. The truck driver didn't do anything. Got up, paid his bill and walked out. The Hell's Angel looked over to the bartender and said, "Not much of a man is he?" The bartender said, "Not much of a truck driver either. He just ran over twelve choppers going out of here!"

Meekness is strength under control. Jesus said, "Happy are those who don't over react to people." Five ways to work on your reactions:

### **1. When someone serves you, be understanding not demanding.**

Philippians 2:4-5 *"Don't just think about your own affairs, but be interested in others too, and in what they are doing. Your attitude should be the same as Jesus Christ's."*

How do you treat people who serve you? Waitresses, secretaries, clerks, tellers at the bank, fast food operators. Are you understanding or demanding?

Last week, after church, I went over to Fred's McDonald's. The place was packed out and I happened to get a trainee. The poor guy was messing all up and I said, "It's OK. Don't worry about it. You get a lot of people here on Sundays." He said, "Always when church let's out. This place is packed from that church over there!" I said, "I'm the pastor." He said, "You're the pastor?" I got to thinking, What is the reputation of our church in all the nearby restaurants? Are those Saddleback people understanding or are they demanding?

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Americans have a reputation overseas of being very, very pushy, very rude, very demanding, and not understanding. The secret of great service is to treat people with respect.

#### **2. When somebody disappoints you be gentle and not judgmental.**

Romans 14:1 *"Accept him who is weak in the faith without passing judgement on disputable matters."* Happiness comes when you can accept people who have not attained your level of perfection. They don't have to reach up to your standards to be loved.

*"If a person is trapped in some sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens."* How do you react when somebody messes up his life? Do you excited about it: "I told you so! I could see it coming! Only a fool would have done that. I wouldn't have been that dumb." Do you have a secret sense of satisfaction when other people blow it? Meekness is when people disappoint you, you are gentle, not judgmental.

The one thing that angered Jesus most, more than anything else in life, was self righteous religious people who were always judging others.

#### **3. When someone disagrees with you, be tender without surrender.**

The fact is, you can't please everybody in life. Just about the time you get Crowd A satisfied, Crowd B gets upset. One minute you're the hero, the next minute you're the zero. You need to learn to be tender without surrender. The test of maturity is how do you handle disagreeable people, people who irritate you, people who like to contradict you, people who like to get in arguments, like to quarrel with you. You have three alternatives:

You can retreat in fear,  
You can attack in anger, or  
You can respond in love.

Meekness is not compromising your convictions. You can be tender without surrender. It's not being passive, being a doormat, giving in, always letting the other person have their own way. That's not meekness, it's weakness.

It's also not reacting in anger, if someone disagrees with you, you blow them away. Some people use verbal overkill, they explode people. Everything is a win/lose situation.

I have a book by Gen. George S. Patton, Patton's Principles for Managers Who Mean It. Got a lot of one-liners in it. One is: You never fight a battle where winning doesn't make any difference. Don't get into an argument over something that doesn't matter anyway."

Proverbs 15:1 *"A gentle answer quiets anger; but a harsh word stirs it up."*

James 3:16-17 *"Wherever there is jealousy or selfish ambition, there will be disorder... But wisdom from above is pure, peaceful, gentle, and friendly."* Circle "gentle". That's the same

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word as "meek". Meekness and gentleness means strength under control -- a gentle giant. An argumentative spirit indicates an ego problem. If you like to quarrel, if you like to get into arguments, you've got an ego problem. Jesus says, that a person who is meek is happy because he is tender without surrender. Meekness is learning to disagree agreeably. Meekness is being able to walk hand in hand without seeing eye to eye. In a marriage, when two people agree on everything, one of them isn't necessary. You eat with a knife and a fork, not two knives. We need variety.

When people disagree with you, you can be passive, a doormat -- "Go ahead, have your way." -- or you can fight them tooth and nail, blow up, get angry, fight back, be sarcastic. Or you can respond in love -- a gentle answer.

2 Tim. 2:24-25 says meekness is a qualification for spiritual leadership, "*The Lord's servant must not quarrel... those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in hope that God will give them a change of heart.*" The Bible says that I am not to argue with people. I am not to get in a quarrel. I am to gently instruct and hope that God will give them a change of heart. At Saddleback, we say "In the essentials we have unity; in the nonessentials we have liberty; in all things we have charity." We allow for diversity in the body of Christ. Different gifts. Different strokes for different folks.

We need to learn to be understanding, not demanding with people who serve us. And we need to be learn to be gentle, not judgement with people who let us down. We let people down. Happy are those who treat others the way God treats them. And we need to be tender without surrender when somebody disagrees with us.

#### **4. When someone corrects you be teachable, not unreachable.**

Meekness is a teachable spirit. Meek people are eager to learn. Meek people don't pretend they know it all. They know they don't know it all and they don't try to pretend they know it all.

James 1:19 "*Let everyone be quick to listen, but slow to use his tongue, and slow to lose his temper.*" This is one of my favorite verses. It tells how to control your temper. If you do the first two, the third is automatic. If you're quick to listen, and slow to speak, you will be slow to anger. But if you're slow to listen and quick to speak, you'll be quick to anger. You need to listen. Use your ears. Be teachable, not unreachable.

When your mate makes a constructive suggestion to you, how do you relate to it? Do you get uptight, defensive? Don't consider the source, consider the suggestion. Meek people don't have all the answers. Be very wary of people who have all the answers. Those are people you need to be afraid of. They're dangerous.

Are you open or closed to new ideas? Are you open to change or closed to change? "We've always done it that way!" A meek person -- when someone corrects you, you're teachable, not unreachable.

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I've been privileged to travel all around the United States and overseas. I've talked to a lot of people. The wisest people that I know are the people who are the most eager, the most willing to learn. They have a teachable attitude. They don't think they know it all. Will Rogers used to say, "I never met a man I didn't like." I honest believe I never met a man I couldn't learn from. Everyone of you could teach me. We could teach each other. We've all had different experiences. Everyone is ignorant, just on different subjects. We need each other. We can learn from anybody if you just know the right questions.

Proverbs says, "*Counsel in the heart of man is like a deep well. But the man of understanding will draw it out.*" Ask questions. That's the secret of intelligence. Learning to draw it out. I have a list of 15-20 questions that, whenever I'm with some pastor that I admire, I ask these same basic questions. Questions like, What are the most important decisions you've ever had to make in the ministry? What are the five books that have made the biggest difference in your life? How do you manage your time? Questions that get to the issue and help me see what that guy is really like so I can learn. Always learning, always growing. Have you learned to learn from your kids? You can learn from your kids. Do you realize you can learn from your in laws? My in laws have taught me a lot. Do you realize you can learn from your enemies? Your biggest critics often help you out the most. Unintentionally. They may mean to hurt you but God can use that criticism to teach you and make you more sensitive in a certain area even though they have a wrong motive for it. Meekness, we're teachable not unreachable.

Proverbs 13:18 "*Whoever listens to correction is honored.*" Sign I saw this week: "I'd rather change my mind and succeed than have my own way and fail." A meek person is not a weak person, wimp, a Casper Milktoast. A meek person is understanding, not demanding; gentle, not judgmental; teachable, not unreachable.

#### **5. When somebody hurts you, be an actor not a reactor.**

Take the initiative. Romans 12:17, 21 "*Do not repay evil for evil but overcome evil with good.*" A fact of life is you will be hurt. You will have hurts in life. Life hurts. You will be hurt by other people -- intentionally many times. The meekness issue is how do you respond to it? What is your normal reaction when people hurt you intentionally? Retaliate! Get even! We're usually at our most creative best thinking up methods to get even. We are so good at thinking up creative strategies for revenge.

To retaliate is to react. They both start with "re" which is a response. All a reaction. Reaction. But to respond with forgiveness, even when they haven't asked for it, is to act, to take the initiative.

John Powell, in his book, Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am?, said he was walking down the street with a friend and they stopped to get a paper. The man selling the paper was grumpy and discourteous, very rude. The friend, as he was walking away, said to the man, "You have a nice day, now!" John Powell asked his friend, "Is that man always that rude to you?" "Yes". "Are you always that nice to him?" Friend said, "Yes, I'm not going to let one man ruin my day."

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Booker T. Washington, the great black scientist, faced prejudice all his life said, "I will never allow another man to control or ruin my life by making me hate him."

When you say, "You make me mad!" you are admitting that they are controlling your emotions. The other person has the power to control your emotions. The moment that you start retaliating, that you start seeking revenge, that you start trying to get even, you give up control of your life. You are no longer in control. You are reacting, not acting. That's a position of weakness. Jesus said the meek person knows how to let it go.

One of the clear examples in the Bible is Moses. Number 12 he was being criticized and insulted and put down. The issue was that he married a black lady, Zipporah was from Ethiopia. It was an interracial marriage and Moses' brother and sister didn't like it. They were griping. Moses refused to defend himself. He said, "God, I'm going to let You take care of this." God always has better ways of getting even than we do. God said to Miriam, "You like white skin? How about a lot of it?" and He gave her leprosy. Moses did not say a word. He would not retaliate.

God says be an actor not a reactor in how we respond to life.

Meekness is the ability to handle a hurt without retaliating. The best definition of meekness in the Bible is Proverbs 16:32 *"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his own spirit, than he who captures a city."*

What determines your emotions? Can you control your own emotions or does somebody else? Your emotions are either controlled by circumstances or by character. It's your choice.

"That makes me so mad... so sad... feel so bad..." Circumstances are controlling how you feel. I choose to feel happy. I choose to not be depressed. Happiness is a choice. Your emotions are either controlled by circumstances or by choices. Meek people are self controlled, controlling their reactions toward life.

Jesus promised, "Happy are the people who can control their reactions, for they will inherit the earth." What does "inherit the earth" mean? You'll be in control of your situation. The world is yours. The person who has self control of his emotions the world is his. He controls the situation because he's not controlled by it. If you are a meek person, you are no longer a victim. You control your choices.

Victor Frankl, the famous psychiatrist, went through Auchwitz. He said, "They took my clothes, my wife, my kids, my wedding ring. I stood naked before the SS and I realized they can take everything in my life but they cannot take my freedom to choose how I will respond to them." That is a freedom you will always have. How do I react? How do I choose to react to those people who hurt me?

Jesus is saying that happiness belongs to people with self control. You say, "That leaves me out! I can't control my reactions! I can't get them under control!" Right. But I know somebody who can help you get them under control.

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"God's Spirit does not make us timid, instead His Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control." God says, When I put My spirit in you, I don't turn you into a wimp.

The results are three fold: power, love, self control. The secret of controlling your reaction is letting God's Spirit fill your life moment by moment. He'll break all those bad habits, all those patterns of reacting, all those old ways of being negative, defensive, reacting in fear, in anger, in sarcasm. He can break all those old patterns in your life and fill your life with power, love self control.

That is meekness. Power controlled by love. Even though you could blow them away you don't. Jesus is the prime example of this. We're talking about the lifestyle of Jesus Christ. He's hanging on the cross and He could have called ten thousand angels. He could have blown up the world. Power controlled by love. This is the happy, relaxed, stress reduced type of life style. You roll with the punches. Things don't fluster you because you're in control of your reactions even though you can't control the situation.

Some of you are stressed out. You're stressed out by relationships. What do you need more than anything else? You need to develop the quality of meekness, the quality of controlling my reactions by the Spirit of God. When He comes into my life He gives me power controlled by love.

Prayer:

Would you pray this simple prayer in your heart? "Jesus Christ, I need Your Spirit of power in my life. And I need Your Spirit of love and I need Your Spirit of self control. I ask You to put your spirit in me." If you've never invited Jesus Christ into your life ask Him to come in. Say, "I don't understand it all. But Jesus Christ, I need You to help me. This next week when people serve me, help me to be understanding, especially at home. And Jesus Christ, when people disappoint me, help me to be gentle, not judgmental. And when people disagree with me, help me to be tender without surrender." You don't have to give in your convictions but you don't have to be argumentative either. "When people want to correct me and offer suggestions, help me to be teachable and not unreachable. And, Lord, when people hurt me, help me to be an actor and not a reactor, to choose to respond with love and forgiveness and not react in retaliation. But to leave that to You. I want to be like You, Jesus Christ. I need Your help and power in my life."

If you prayed that prayer, I believe God heard you. I invite you to let me know about your decision.

Father, thank You for Your word. Apply it to our lives and help us to be like Jesus. For we pray it in His name, Amen.