

# SESSION 1



## ... when we SEEK HAPPINESS?

'God is not interested in your *happiness*; he is very interested in your *holiness*'. I clearly remember that confident declaration from a sermon I heard over thirty years ago. It is certainly memorable, but is it true?

In the middle of the twentieth century, J B Phillips produced a justly famous paraphrase of the New Testament. When he came to the Beatitudes (Matthew 5.1-12) he did not employ the customary 'Blessed are ...' Instead, he used the word 'happy'.

- How *happy* are the humble-minded, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs!
- *Happy* are those who claim nothing, for the whole earth will belong to them!
- *Happy* are those who are hungry and thirsty for goodness, for they will be truly satisfied!

If J B Phillips is right, Jesus is very concerned for our happiness. But as the teacher from Nazareth insists that happiness is a by-product of holiness, perhaps that preacher wasn't wrong after all.

In the upside-down world of the Gospels, Jesus sets out his recipe for happiness. True happiness comes from poverty of spirit, mourning and persecution, among other things. Oceans of ink have been spilt in trying to work out exactly what Jesus meant by that remarkable sequence of memorable paradoxes. But the main point is clear enough. Make happiness your aim and you will miss the target. Feed your desire for happiness with a diet of possessions and popularity, or a ruthless search for excitement and success, and you will shoot very wide indeed.

Here, as always, the first will be last and the last will be first. If you want to find true happiness there is only one way. You must 'lose yourself' (Mark 8.35) by focusing on the needs of others, not on your own wants.

### **Martyrs or 'Martyrs'?**

Most of us are very clever at disguising our true intentions and hiding our real objectives, even from ourselves. We've all met people with a martyr complex – those who draw attention to themselves and feed their egos by making a display of their insignificance or hard work for others.

Getting the balance right is never easy, and in an attempt to correct the 'I am a worm' approach to holiness, many modern Christian writers encourage

I do approve of religion. I think everybody should try church before they try therapy. It's extremely healthy for you to spend an hour a week thinking not about what a victim you are, but how wicked you are.

Fay Weldon