

## A Better Person Mt. 5:13-16

Many People fall into the habit of complaining and criticizing. They seem to concentrate on what is ugly and ignore what is beautiful, focusing on what is wrong and neglecting to see what is right. It is easy to become negative about everything – your life, your family, your community and your nation. We realize that worldly evil surrounds us. And it discourages us to see the constant battle militant unbelievers are waging against faith in Christ Jesus and the pressure to remove God from everything in our society. Bible history, however, reminds us that God is in control of everything. In the end, the Lord Jesus will lead us to victory.

We can mourn the fact that our world is growing spiritually worse day by day and just give up; or...we can resolve to make our little corner of this world a better place. We can accept responsibility for who we are, what we believe, and how we live. We can become the salt and the light that God intended us to be. We can make our world a better place by making ourselves better people who love the Lord and live according to His teaching.

**First**, we would all do well to count our blessings. You know, learning to be truly thankful for all things will brighten your life and make you a better person. **1 Thess. 5:18** urges us to “*give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*” In all circumstances, good or bad? Yes, in all circumstances! We can easily rejoice at victories and blessings; but it takes maturity to rejoice over the troubles and struggles. The apostles rejoiced in **Acts 5:41** “*that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name*” of Christ Jesus. **James 1:2-4** says, “*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*” God is using that trail that you face today to make a better person out of you, so be thankful for it. If you can see your trail as something good, you can rejoice even when life is difficult.

King David went through many life-threatening experiences, but in **Psalms 34:1** he said, “*I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.*” Count your blessings, and you will see you have much to be thankful about. **1 Jn. 3:1** says, “*See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God; and such we are. For this reason, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.*” God has marvelously blessed us in making us His children. The world won’t ever understand us or even share our morals and values. But if we have to make a choice between following the world or following the Lord, we choose the Lord. What we have in Christ is better than anything that this world offers.

**Phil. 4:8** says, “*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*” We have to acknowledge the evil, yes; and the negative in our world from time to time; but we don’t have to focus our hearts there. We waste for too much time looking at the evil, but when all we see is the evil it turns our hearts bitter.

**Second, we must read the Word of God and take its teaching seriously.** If we wish to feed and nourish our souls, we cannot find anything better than the word of God. How long has it been since you read an entire book of the Bible? Have you ever read the Bible all the way through? While 88% of people in the U.S. might own a Bible, and 80% might say it is sacred, it is also true that 66% have said they wish they read it more often. We need to understand that the Bible has the answers to the most important questions of life. It reveals who we are, where we came from, why we are here, and what happens to us after death.

You can measure the success of any nation or culture by how it treats God and the Bible. Those nations that forsake God and His word may appear to prosper for a while, but as time passes, they crumble from the inside. Because they turn their backs on God and His values, they have no moral foundation. When people are unafraid to lie, have no respect for authority, become selfish, and put their lusts before their families, their society falls into great misery. When people listen to God and put His commandments into practice, they find life filled with good things and with peace.

James contrasts human wisdom with God's wisdom. **James 3:16-17** says, *“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”* When people do their own thing and live according to their own values and rules, it brings nothing but evil. But when people live according to the wisdom of God, they find peace. They are gentle to each other; and you can reason with them. They are willing to help those who need help; they bless everyone around them. They treat everyone the same and aren't hypocrites. You see, God's way lifts people up instead of tearing them down.

**Third, we must pray God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.** If everyone followed God's will on earth, it would be a lot like heaven. Crime and war would cease; all people would be treated like family with respect. People would live honorably and speak the truth with one another. And instead of being filled with anger, they would ask for forgiveness and they would grant forgiveness. They would settle their differences with prayer, remembering the cross. They would see sin as it truly is, destructive; and thank God for showing us a better way in Christ.

If you don't like the people in government, have you prayed for them – not against them? **1 Tim. 2:1-2** says, *“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”* Whether we like people in high places or not, we should pray for them, so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives and be godly and dignified in every way. Throughout history there have been leaders who oppose the way of the Lord, but we should still pray for them. In fact, the Lord Jesus in **Mt. 5:44-45** said, *“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”* We are the Christian, we are the ones that should do the right thing, even if we are mistreated and slandered for it. We should do what is

good for others, even when they don't deserve it? Why? Because we are sons of our Father; and that is who we are.

**Fourth, we must change our hearts and change our lives; that is, we must repent.** We must turn from evil and live our lives in faith. It does little good to pray for change if we are not willing to change ourselves. God asks us to repent, knowing that we have the ability to change. We can change; and, in fact, God commands us to change. Paul told an assembly of pagans who didn't even know God in **Acts 17:30-31**, *"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."* Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change of life.

Some say people can't change; but the Bible everywhere assumes people can repent and should repent. Why would God command people to do something that is impossible? Some think people are born so corrupt that they can't ever change, but the Bible shows how people do change. **Romans 6:17-18** says, *"But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."* Here Paul is describing slaves of sins who obeyed God's will from the heart, and were freed from their sin, and then became slaves of righteousness. Johah chapter three tells how the people of Nineveh believed in God and repented of their wickedness and violence. Zacchaeus was a sinner, but he made things right and became very generous to the poor. The prodigal son came to his senses and he came home, leaving his sinful life behind.

According to the Bible man can repent. If we want God to bless our nation, it is time we repent, and that should begin first with God's people. We should turn from our wicked ways and seek God's forgiveness? Reading God's word and praying are necessary; but we also must repent of our sins. We can't expect God to bless us while we continue in sin. We can't treat life as trivial or God's plan for marriage as optional and expect God to bless us. Just because something becomes legal doesn't mean that God approves of it. Changes in human law doesn't change God's law.

You can be legal in the eyes of the government but still be sinful in the eyes of God. Human law will let you get drunk at home, but God condemns drunkenness in **Gal. 5:19-21**. Human law will let you take the life of the unborn, but God condemns the shedding of innocent blood in **Proverbs 6:16-19**. Human law may permit sexual behavior between consent adults, but God still condemns fornication in **1 Cor. 6:9-10**. Just because you can escape the courts of men doesn't mean you will escape the judgment seat of Christ. **Revelation 20:11-15** says that He will judge us according to our deeds by what is written in the books; that is the Bible. Have you repented?

**Fifth, we must share our faith in Christ.** The gospel is good news that will bless everyone who hears it. If the gospel is good for you, it is good for your family and friends. How can anyone listen to the message of salvation and then keep it to himself? An angel told Cornelius to

send for ***“Peter, who will tell you words by which you and your household will be saved” (Acts 11:24-25)***. When Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, he found that Cornelius had called together his family and friends to hear him speak. And ***Acts 10:27*** says that there were ***“many people assembled.”*** You see, Cornelius couldn’t keep the good news to himself; he wanted all of his loved ones to know. And I hope you are encouraging your family and friends to know the Lord and to keep His will.

An old hymn says, *“Brighten the corner where you are! Brighten the corner where you are! Someone far from harbor you may guide across the bar! Brighten the corner where you are!”* Let us begin today to brighten our corner of the world. We can make a difference in ourselves that will encourage others to change. In ***Mt. 5:16*** Jesus said, ***“In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”*** Is your light burning? Do people see good in you and praise God for your faith and love? Be the salt of the earth and the light of the world; make a difference!

Being a better person begins with becoming a Christian; nothing is more important than putting Christ in your life. Becoming a Christian begins with faith in Christ and love for Christ. When you believe and love Him, you will put your trust in Him; and you will remove sinful ways and replace them with righteous ways; you will confess Him to everyone; and you will be baptized in His Name for the forgiveness of your sins. ***Romans 6:3-4*** says, ***“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”*** According to the apostle Paul, we are baptized into Christ through faith in the working of God. Just as God raised Jesus up, He raises us up to walk in newness of life. Be baptized today!