

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom
of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for
righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.
Blessed for the peacemakers, for they will be called
children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of
righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute
you and utter every kind of evil against you falsely
because of me.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in
heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who
were before you.

-Matthew 5:3-12

The Ladder of the Beatitudes

Jim Forest

Rung by rung

Blessed is the person whose desire for God has become like the lover's passion for the beloved.

-Saint John Climacus

Blessed

In English the first verses of the sermon on the mount are called the beatitudes. The traditional Russian phrase is “the commandments of blessedness.” The first word of each beatitude isn’t an everyday word. We have to ask ourselves before going further what *blessed* and *beatitude* mean.

Beatitude comes from the Latin word *beatus*, meaning “happy, fortunate, blissful.” In the context of the gods in Elysium, it meant supremely happy, in a state of pure bliss. In the late fourth century *beatus* was the word Saint Jerome opted for in his translation of the “blessed are” verses.

“I would expect that, like so many other Latin Writers, Jerome was assuming that the meaning would enlarge within its textual context,” Latin scholar Harold Isbell tells me. “However, don’t overlook the possibility that because Greek is a more nuanced language, it conveys degrees of meaning that the hard-headed Roman would not suspect. Then there is ‘beatific,’ as in ‘beatific vision,’ which in the Christian tradition of the West refers specifically to the vision of God, an entirely appropriate but quite unmerited fruit of God’s creative Act.”

While most English Bibles use “blessed,” some modern translations prefer “happy”: “How happy are the poor of spirit . . .”

“‘Happy’ isn’t good enough,” Rabbi Steven Schwarzschild once told me. “The biblical translator who uses such a word should change jobs, maybe write TV comedies with nice happy endings. The problem is that, if you decide you don’t like ‘blessed,’ there isn’t a single English word which can take its place. You might use a phrase like ‘on the right track’ or ‘going in the right direction.’ Sin means being *off* the track, missing the target. Being ‘blessed’ means you aren’t lost – you’re on the path the Creator intends you to be on.”

Beatitude of Poor in Spirit:
Poverty of Being in Control

Beatitude of Mourning:
Poverty of Personal Losses

Beatitude of Meekness:
Poverty of Power

Beatitude of Righteousness:
Poverty of Opinion

Beatitude of Mercy:
Poverty of Giving and Receiving

Beatitude of Pure in Heart:
Poverty of Presence and Time

Beatitude of Peacemakers:
Poverty of Criticism and Stinking Thinking

Beatitude of the Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake:
Poverty of Speaking Out, Risk, Dare, Comfort

Beatitude of Insult, Persecuted and Falsely Accused:
Poverty of Critical Negative Incident

Blessed are the poor in spirit ...

Blessed are they who have nothing to lock up.

-Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

We are joined to one another and to Christ like flour in a loaf.

-Saint John Chrysostom

Blessed are the poor in Spirit –

God's power and knowledge = Spirit

God is rich in Spirit, and we are poor and limited.

When we surrender our smallness, we can then receive the rights/privileges of the kingdom of heaven.

What areas of your life, living and choice making do you need to surrender so that you can make space for God to fill you with gifts from the new kingdom?

I want to surrender _____ . I am open to receive _____ .

How do the Beatitudes help us live well our choice for poverty / simplicity?

The Sacrifice of Poverty/Simplicity

The Benefits of Poverty/Simplicity

GRATITUDE CONTINUUM

Birth Present Age

LOSS CONTINUUM

Birth Present Age

Blessed are they who mourn...

In the deserts of the heart, let the healing fountain start...

-W.H. Auden, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats"

When we die, we will not be criticized for having failed to work miracles. We will not be accused of having failed to be theologians or contemplatives. But we will certainly have some explanation to offer to God for not having mourned unceasingly.

-Saint John Climacus

We could also say, "Blessed are they who grieve," or "Blessed are they who weep." The word used in the Greek New Testament, *penthein*, signifies intimate, intense, heart-breaking sorrow.

Poverty of spirit is inseparable from mourning. Without poverty of spirit, I am always on guard to keep what I have for myself, and to keep me for myself. An immediate consequence of poverty of spirit is becoming sensitive to the pain and losses of people around me, not only those whom I happen to know and care for, but also people I don't know and don't want to know. To the extent that I open my heart to others, I will do whatever I can to help-pray, share what I have, even share myself.

The most common grief is linked with death, the anguish of a devastating loss, having to live without someone we still love, desperately miss, and will never see again in this world.

Perhaps the worst grief is experienced by those people who are so numbed by loss that cannot cry.

...for they shall be comforted.

The key word in Greek, *panakalein*, means not only "to be comforted or consoled" but "finding an ally or helper." It also signifies being invited to a banquet. *Panakalein* has still another meaning in classical Greek: "to exhort or encourage." In the plays of Aeschylus it was used to describe troops cheering each other on as they went into battle. For Aristotle, the verb meant exciting and energizing the mind. In this beatitude the word suggests the very opposite of a grudging pardon or conditional forgiveness.

This is forgiveness such as the father of the Prodigal Son showered on the son whom he feared he had lost forever. Having demanded and been given his share of the inheritance, the boy had left home and lived a wasteful life until he was reduced to attending pigs, as low a calling as a pork-adoring Jew could imagine. Finally, finding himself living with hogs and sharing their food, he decided to go home, not expecting pardon-he realized he had forfeited all filial rights-but hoping his father might allow him to live among the servants. The father saw his repentant son in the distance, ran out to meet him, embraced him, kissed him, welcomed him home, replaced his rags with fine clothing, gave him a golden ring, and had a feast prepared, "for this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found: (Lk 15:24)

Loss Letter to my Father/Mother/Brother/Sister/Employer/Husband/Wife

Dear _____, this is what I learned from you...

Dear _____, this is what I am grateful for because of you...

Dear _____, this is what I need to give back to you....

Dear _____, this is what I lost because.....

Dear _____, this is what I want/need from you....

PRAYER FOR DEPARTED SOULS

(This is said during the Prayer of the Faithful)

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation. I freely choose to praise and thank you for all you did through your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to teach me how to live life to the full. I pray for _____ (departed person) and ask that you take him/her into your kingdom of eternal happiness and peace. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Love, I commission to go home to meet you, Father, and the fullness of your glory. I seek your forgiveness, Lord, for not doing this earlier. I ask that _____ may know my personal love and reconciliation. Here I wish to show forth to _____ and his/her angels all you achieved: that in the bread I will hold is your life and teaching, your body and blood, your brokenness and healing through your stripes. That in your shed blood is the gift of freedom from all guilt and shame and I am cleansed from the stain of sin. That through the torn veil we have direct access to you. That in rising, you defeated Satan and his companions, and you became available to all the departed.

May the angels of mercy with _____ see you ascend and open heaven's gates. May _____ be gathered together with your heavenly hosts and go on towards heaven and be reunited with all your saints and angels.

Now, Lord, because _____ no longer needs to grieve, may I be healed and become the person you intended me to become, to live your praise and glory. Amen.
(Paraphrased from Kenneth McCall, Healing the Family Tree)

PRAYER FOR RECONCILIATION

(This prayer can be said anytime, anywhere until you get physical evidence that grace has come unto yourself and the person you are praying for)

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation. I freely choose to praise and thank you for all you did through your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to teach me how to live life to the full.

I pray for _____ (name of person you want to reconcile with) and ask that you take him/her into your loving arms and fill him/her with your mercy and peace. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Love, I commit _____ to your authority and ask that you present him/her to the Father and the fullness of God's glory.

I seek your forgiveness, Lord, for not doing this earlier. I ask that _____ may know my personal love and reconciliation. Here I wish to show forth to _____ and his/her family all that you have achieved: that in the bread I will hold is your life and teaching, your body and blood, your brokenness and healing through your stripes. That in your shed blood is the free gift of freedom from all guilt and shame and I am cleansed from the stain of sin. That through the torn veil we have direct access to you. That, in rising, you defeated Satan and his companions, and you became available to all who seek your mercy.

May the angel of mercy embrace _____ and at this moment may he/she be empowered with your loving gentleness. I choose to surrender all my concerns, thoughts, and feelings for _____ and place them at the foot of your cross to become what you choose them to become.

Lord, because I choose to surrender _____ to your loving care, I no longer will be pressured or concerned about this relationship. May I be healed and become the person you intended me to become, to live your praise and glory. Amen.

(Paraphrased from Kenneth McCall, Healing the Family Tree)

