

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL

Aiming Higher

Those who stand for higher standards than current conventions are always seen as critics who are best disposed of.

Donald Guthrie

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Blessed Living

IF WE TAKE GOD'S WORD—and especially the New Testament—as a handbook for Christian living, then surely there is no portion of Scripture more at odds with the contemporary standards and principles of this world than that part of the Sermon on the Mount known as the Beatitudes—in Matthew, verses 2-12 of Chapter Five. This should not surprise since, indeed, they were concepts equally as foreign to the time in which they were uttered by Jesus.

The verses we call the Beatitudes are not evangelism; they are not a template for salvation, outlining what someone must do before gaining entrance to the kingdom. They do not, in and of themselves, outline New Testament doctrine; the believer who lives his life strictly according to the counsel of the Beatitudes—no more, no less—would be on thin doctrinal ice.

The Beatitudes are, however, a succinct, easily understood portrait of a Spirit-filled life. The verses represent

God's perspective on a spiritually-healthy believer's heart, and it will be to our profit to understand them more fully.

The Highest Good

Any consideration of the Beatitudes must begin with a clarification of the word that begins each verse in most translations: "Blessed." The Greek word so translated is *makarios*. Some people, and paraphrases such as *The Living Bible* and the J.B. Phillips *The New Testament in Modern English*, prefer to update the Greek with the word "happy," as in "Happy are the poor in spirit..." But this is too thin; the word encompasses much more.

As for "happy," it will not do for the Beatitudes, having been devalued in modern usage. The Greek "describes a state not of inner feeling on the part of those

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying...

to whom it is applied, but of blessedness from an ideal point of view in the judgment of others" (Allen).

D. A. Carson

[*Makarios*] means more than mere happiness. The word conveys the idea of congratulation, rather than describing a state. The person to whom these beatitudes apply is to be envied.

Guthrie

There is a deep, profound, spiritual joy that is far superior to any amount of superficial happiness. It speaks of God's riches poured into a life, of a clearer understanding of one's role in His kingdom, of intimate communion that need not always be revealed in a cheerful face.

It is this sort of blessedness that is described in the Beatitudes. And it is a blessedness to be envied—and lived. ♦



Spiritual Poverty

MAN IS BORN WITH A CAPACITY FOR GOD, but with no guarantee that that space will be filled with Him. The Son of God was manifested on earth as a human being, not as a chickadee, or camel, or slug. He came as a person, because it was with people that God desired a higher relationship—not slugs. So it was in people that God instilled this holy capacity.

We begin empty. The person who never fills that void with Christ and His gospel—the truth that He, and He alone can save—will die apart from God, thinking all the while that their God-space had been filled with something better.

Brokenness

But there *is* nothing better, and Jesus says that those who are truly blessed are the ones who have acknowledged the emptiness inside their souls, and have confessed that it is a space Christ alone is able to fill.

“Poverty” is the cry of the broken, repentant heart. Though he was the great king of Israel, and could purchase

anything he desired—even another man’s wife—David later acknowledged his own spiritual poverty and wrote

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.
Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Make me to hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.
Hide Your face from my sins
And blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalm 51:5-10

Admitting one’s spiritual poverty is a sign of humility; refusing to make this admission is a sign of pride. Jesus illustrated the difference with a parable about a Pharisee and a tax collector.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

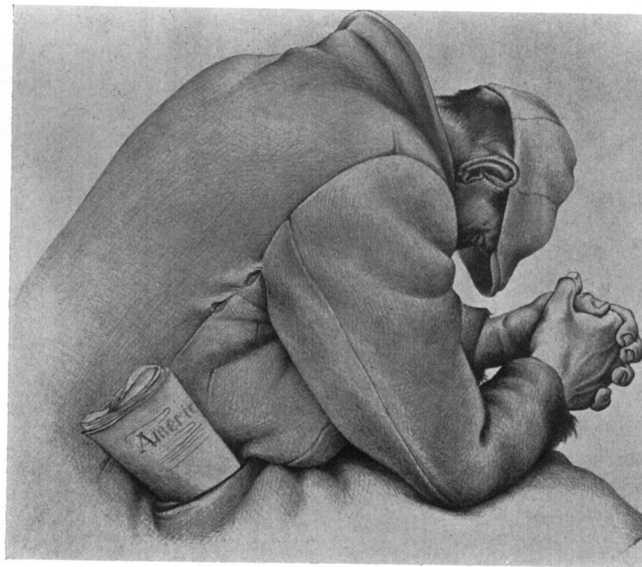
And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 18:9-14

A Heart Filled to Overflowing

The arrogant man, always expecting that he is owed more than he has, shakes his fist in God's face and cries out, "I don't deserve to be treated like this!" But the humble man, aware that he, in himself, is bankrupt, lifts up open hands to God and, with bowed head and grateful heart, cries, "I don't deserve to be treated like this."

To be "poor in spirit" is to understand that in ourselves we are utterly unworthy before God, deserving nothing, but that through Christ we are granted the right to stand before Him with confidence. To be poor in this world is to have an empty purse; to be spiritually poor is to have one's heart filled with God. ♦



*Jesus, I am resting, resting
In the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
Of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee,
And Thy beauty fills my soul,
For by Thy transforming power,
Thou hast made me whole.*

*Oh, how great Thy loving kindness,
Vaster, broader than the sea!
Oh, how marvelous Thy goodness,
Lavished all on me!
Yes, I rest in Thee, Beloved,
Know what wealth of grace is Thine,
Know Thy certainty of promise,
And have made it mine.*

*Simply trusting Thee, Lord Jesus,
I behold Thee as Thou art,
And Thy love, so pure, so changeless,
Satisfies my heart;
Satisfies its deepest longings,
Meets supplies its every need,
Compasseth me round with blessings:
Thine is love indeed!*

*Ever lift Thy face upon me,
As I work and wait for Thee;
Resting 'neath Thy smile, Lord Jesus,
Earth's dark shadows flee.
Brightness of my Father's glory,
Sunshine of my Father's face,
Keep me ever trusting, resting,
Fill me with Thy grace.*

Jean S. Pigott

Grief's Consolation

THIS WORLD WITH ALL ITS TINSELED CHARM would convince us that grief is something from which we should flee. The counsel of the world is to flee any and all discomfort, unpleasantness, sorrow and pain, hard times or trials.

The world says that anything unpleasant is bad, but Jesus says that everything in the hands of God is good—even when it is unpleasant.

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Matthew 5:11-12

Blessed Assurance

There is, however, another kind of mourning. When a member of the family dies, we mourn; when tragedy strikes either ourselves or someone we love, we grieve. The believer can be considered fortunate (blessed) be-

cause in times of sorrow, there is comfort found in the arms of the Lord.

But there is yet another type of mourning—grief over sin.

For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.

2 Corinthians 12:20-21

A person who, as in the first Beatitude, acknowledges his or her dependence on God, will be grieved over the existence of sin—sin either personal or corporate. Those sensitive to the cloying smog of sin will be found

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

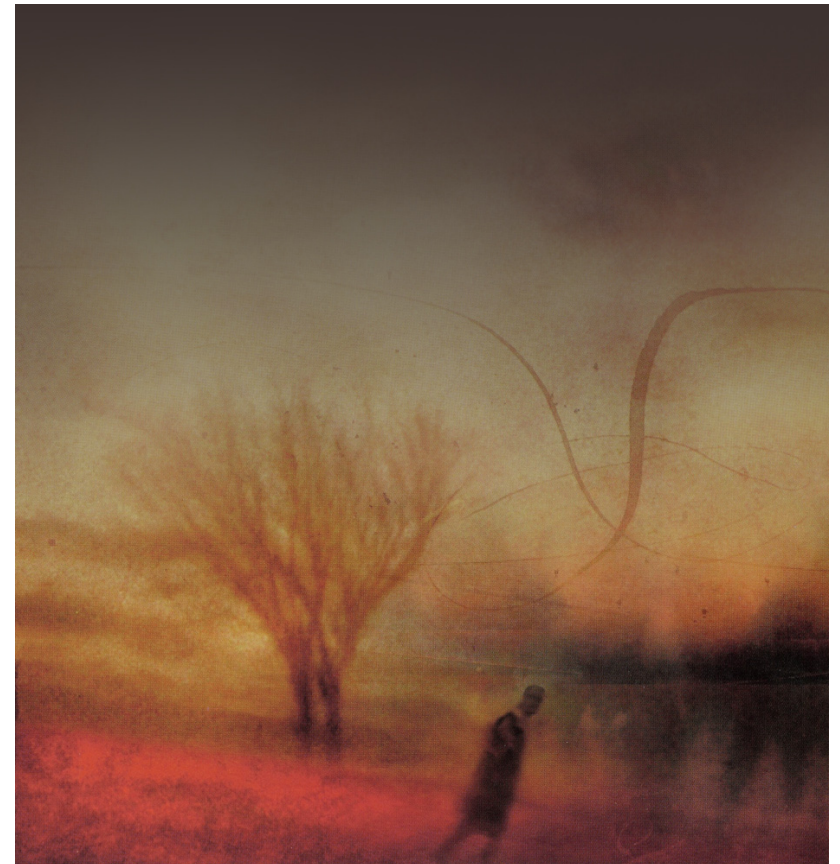
on their knees, and in that hallowed posture will find consolation in their grief. ♦

An Armenian arguing with a Calvinist remarked, "If I believed your doctrine and were sure that I was a converted man, I would take my fill of sin." "How much sin," replied the godly Calvinist, "do you think it would take to fill a true Christian to his own satisfaction?" Here he hit the nail on the head. "How can we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" A truly converted person hates sin with all his heart, and even if he could sin without suffering for it, it would be misery enough to him to sin at all.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The meek man... knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him, and he has stopped caring.

A. W. Tozer



Superiority

GOD THE FATHER KNEW that we would need the help of a visual aid. He knew that we would need help with some of the concepts that would be part of His new-covenant Kingdom.

So He sent Jesus.

The concept of Christ-like humility and gentleness is difficult to understand in the context of contemporary culture—just as it was in the culture of first-century Israel.

We live in a time of the “art of the deal,” a time in which strength through deceit is lauded, a time when “looking out for number one” has become a worldwide religion. In our time the gospel of brash self-sufficiency is preached from the school room, the seat of government, even the pulpit.

In the world of men we find nothing approaching the virtues of which Jesus spoke in the opening words of the famous Sermon on the Mount. Instead of poverty of spirit we find the rankest kind of pride; instead of

mourners we find pleasure seekers; instead of meekness, arrogance; instead of hunger after righteousness we hear men saying, “I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing”; instead of mercy we find cruelty; instead of purity of heart, corrupt imaginings; instead of peacemakers we find men quarrelsome and resentful; instead of rejoicing in mistreatment we find them fighting back with every weapon at their command.

Of this kind of moral stuff civilized society is composed. The atmosphere is charged with it; we breathe it with every breath and drink it with our mother’s milk. Culture and education refine these things slightly but leave them basically untouched. A whole world of literature has been created to justify this kind of life as the only norm alone. And this is the more to be wondered at seeing that these are the evils which make life the bitter struggle it is for all of us. All our heartaches and a great many of our physical ills spring directly out of our sins. Pride, arrogance, resentfulness, evil imaginings, malice,

“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.”

greed: these are the sources of more human pain than all the diseases that ever afflicted mortal flesh.

Tozer

Clarity

Thus it is not surprising that we would need help in the person of Christ to grasp a concept so foreign to our nature. We must look to the example of His life for a clear illustration of what it means to be truly meek. Jesus took many opportunities to teach His disciples the idea of humility—

They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, “What were you discussing on the way?” But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”

Mark 9:33-35

through on-hand illustrations—

Taking a child, He set him before them, and taking him in His arms, He said to them, “Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me does not receive Me, but Him who sent Me.”

Mark 9:36-37

as well as being an example Himself when it appeared that His reputation was being challenged by strangers.

John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent him because he was not following us.” But Jesus said, “Do not hinder him, for there is no one who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is for us. For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward.”

Mark 9:38-41

The wily executive, leaving boot prints upon the backs of others on his way up the corporate ladder, may become rich; the duplicitous politician may acquire great power; the crafty, morally bankrupt celebrity may gain worldwide fame. But it is the meek—the one gently resting in the superior strength of Christ—that will inherit the Lord’s dominion over the entire earth. ♦

The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God has declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is, in the sight of God, of more importance than angels. In himself, nothing; in God, everything. That is his motto. He knows well that the world will never see him as God sees him and he has stopped caring. He rests perfectly content to allow God to place His own values. He will be patient to wait for the day when everything will get its own price tag and real worth will come into its own. Then the righteous shall shine forth in the Kingdom of their Father. He is willing to wait for that day.

Tozer

a Hunger for Heaven

SATISFACTION COMES ONLY TO THOSE who understand that they need satisfying. Only those who admit their hunger can be truly filled.

Deal bountifully with Your servant,
That I may live and keep Your word.
Open my eyes, that I may behold
Wonderful things from Your law.
I am a stranger in the earth;
Do not hide Your commandments from me.
My soul is crushed with longing
After Your ordinances at all times.

Psalm 119:17-20

If we feel like a stranger on this earth, the remedy for our discomfort will not be found in anything of this earth. Our solace, our peace, will be found in the things of God—those things which not only instruct and counsel, but envelop us in His love and protection.

God's word reminds us of His ongoing commitment to us, of His justice, grace and mercy. His word describes the righteousness and holiness of our heavenly Father, bringing conviction as well as comfort. His word will answer the questions that nag at us from those who have no portion of His grace. His word will enlighten, encourage, and strengthen.

To be truly filled with His righteousness, we must hunger for it. ♦

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

Psalm 42:1-2a NIV

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”

*Draw me to Thee, till far within Thy rest,
In stillness of Thy peace, Thy voice I hear—
For ever quieted upon Thy breast,
So loved, so near.*

*By mystery of Thy touch my spirit filled,
O Magnet all Divine;
The hunger of my soul for ever stilled,
For Thou art mine.*

*For me, O Lord, the world is all too small,
For I have seen Thy face,
Where Thine eternal love irradiates all
Within Thy secret place.
And therefore from all others, from all else,
Draw Thou my soul to Thee...
...Yea—Thou hast broken the enchanter's spells,
And I am free.*



*Now in the haven of untroubled rest
I land at last,
The hunger, and the thirst, and weary quest
For ever past.
There, Lord, to lose, in bliss of Thine embrace
The recreant will;
There, in the radiance of Thy blessed face,
Be hushed and still;
There, speechless at Thy pierced feet
See none and nought beside,
And know but this—that Thou art sweet,
That I am satisfied.*

Gerhard Tersteegen

Building up the Weak

IT IS ILL-ADVISED TO ISOLATE ANY ONE BEATITUDE in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount—to remove any one from its companions. They, as a package, represent a cohesive description of someone who is Spirit-minded, following a logical sequence in which if one is true, they all are.

Someone who is humble will also be merciful; someone who is meek or gentle will surely be merciful with others; and someone who has hungered after righteousness, and has been satisfied by his quest, will be quick to extend mercy to another.

Mercy—the demonstration of heartfelt compassion—is in short supply these days, both within the church and without. One of the easiest ways for those without to condemn the workings and beliefs of those within, is for them to point out Christians' lack of mercy for each other—and, especially, for those without.

Organized religion was in a similar state during the time of Jesus.

Jewish piety had a deliberately merciless approach to those who did not know the law. To keep the law was

of greater moment than sensitivity towards the weakness of those who failed to keep its demands.

Donald Guthrie

Tough Love

Compounding this paradox, when members of the body of Christ *do* get around to displaying mercy, it can very often be misguided.

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

Mercy is not winking at sin, and Paul demonstrated that it often includes what we today would refer to as "tough love."

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

1 Corinthians 5:3-5

Out of all the players in this story, it was the apostle Paul who demonstrated the purest form of mercy, for he was the only one concerned about the sinner's eternal soul. ♦

Were there no guilt in the world, no pain and no tears, God would yet be infinitely merciful; but His mercy might well remain hidden in His heart, unknown to the created universe. No voice would be raised to celebrate the mercy of which none felt the need. It is human misery and sin that call forth the divine mercy.

A.W. Tozer



*New every morning is the love
Our wakening and uprising prove;
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,
Restored to life and power and thought.*

*New mercies each returning day
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.*

*If, on our daily course, our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.*

*Only, O Lord, in Thy dear love,
Fit us for perfect rest above,
And help us this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray.*

John Keble

Pure Motives

PURITY CAN BE A FRIGHTENING PROSPECT to such generously imperfect human beings. How in the world can we attain to anything so obviously outside our reach? Because absolute purity is impossible in the flesh, we can find a clue to the meaning of this Beatitude in the story of King David.

The life of David was anything but pure. He was a man of war and bloodshed, of political intrigue and, ultimately, of adultery and murder.

Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"

David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, and said,

"I am pregnant."

2 Samuel 11:2-5

Later, the king compounded his sin of adultery with murder.

Now in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. He had written in the letter, saying, "Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die." So it was as Joab kept watch on the city, that he put Uriah at the place where he knew there were valiant men. The men of the city went out and fought against Joab, and some of the people among David's servants fell; and Uriah the Hittite also died.

2 Samuel 11:14-17

As a result of his profound sin, David and his family experienced gross corruption, incestuous rape, and attempted patricide. Near the end of his life, seventy-thousand Israelites paid the ultimate penalty of death for another sin he committed. On the day of his death,

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

David looked back on a life of countless failures and disappointment. Yet, even with all this, David was declared a man after God's own heart.

"After He had removed [Saul], [God] raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will.' From the descendants of this man, according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus."

Why? How could such a flawed man be so close to God's ideal? How, indeed, could an adulterer and murderer be someone declared by God to be a "man after My own heart"?

A Persistent Devotion

The answer lay in his heart. Throughout his entire life David met disappointment with praise, crisis with worship, and great sin with brokenness and confession. He never permitted his mistakes, or God's sovereign decisions, to stand between him and his Lord. Time and again, when a lesser man would have railed against what some might have called bad breaks or unfair treatment, King David knelt in devotion to his God.

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the

Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. However, because by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born to you shall surely die." So Nathan went to his house.

Then the Lord struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was very sick. David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them. Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died... When David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead;

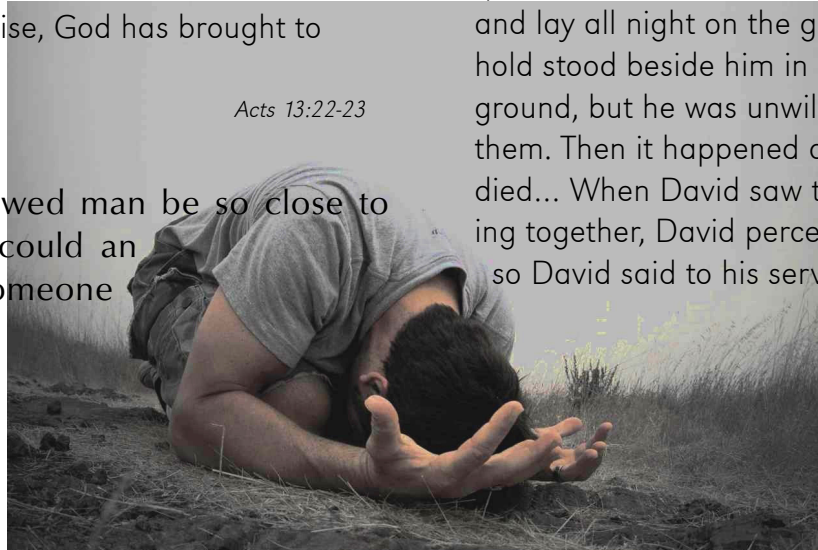
so David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?"

And they said, "He is dead." So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshiped.

2 Samuel 12:13-18a,19-20a

Those who are "pure in heart" are not perfect. Striving after perfection is a fool's occupation. Purity of heart means, instead, that in our imperfection—in our failures and missteps and blatant sin—we never lose our connection with the Lord. We never turn on Him. We never blame Him for what happens. In all things we continue to worship and praise His name—and in our praise we see His face. ♦

Acts 13:22-23



an Active Pursuit

IF WE WOULD STUDY TO BE CHRIST-LIKE, we would study to be peacemakers, for He is the supreme peacemaker, placing Himself between not only Jew and Gentile, but between both communities and the heretofore untouchable holiness of God. Christ, at the cross, became, in His person, our peace.

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.

Ephesians 2:13-18

But Jesus was no milquetoast appeaser; He was no simple-minded fool looking to just get along so all would be happy and placidly at ease. That's not an accurate picture of the Son of God, for He was willing to pay the ultimate price for the peace we enjoy with God. His peacemaking was gritty and tough, devoted to the right. And it cost Him His earthly life.

In fact, this Beatitude has little to do with simply "getting along," but is a call for us to become active peacemakers. ♦

This beatitude is not, however, directed to those who are at peace with others, but to those who actively create conditions of peace. Admittedly the difficulties of creating peace are immense. But Jesus was not simply commending an impossible ideal. The disposition towards peace is a moral and spiritual quality which can be achieved only by spiritual means.

Donald Guthrie

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

the Cost

JESUS TAKES IT FOR GRANTED that those who display the qualities of the previous beatitudes will not escape persecution.

Guthrie

The Common Enemy

It's a little awkward for anyone in the western world to speak of the possibility of—let alone actual—persecution for the faith. Compared to the saints of old, and contemporary saints in some parts of the world, we have enjoyed—even with today's opposition to western Christians and their faith—nothing less than an easy, effortless road.

But absent tangible persecution in the classic sense—physical or psychological opposition because of one's faith—there is still the universal experience of opposition from the evil one. Every Christian has experienced his unique style of confrontation—very often when we are at our highest spiritually.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

Satan has a special gift for sniffing out believers who have been soaring close to the Lord. He knows he can safely leave alone Christians who are flirting with the baser life; they've already done half his work for him. But his radar is set for those climbing ever higher toward righteousness. His priority is to nail them with an unhealthy dose of temptation or doubt, before they soar too close to the Son.

...in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Ephesians 6:16

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...

An easy path without fear or temptation is not necessarily sign of a healthy spiritual life; it may just mean Satan doesn't need to bother with you.

Constant bombardment from his "flaming arrows," however, is a sure sign that we're on the right track. ♦

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
Matthew 5:1-12