

BLESSED ARE THE STRESSED

Secrets to a Happy Heart
from a Crabby Mystic



Mary Lea Hill, FSP

ALSO BY MARY LEA HILL, FSP

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(with Marie Paul Curley, FSP)

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*In memory of my parents, Lee and Alvada,
and my brother and sister,
Lawrence and Marjorie,
who even now enjoy eternal happiness.*

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Introduction

The beatitudes are arguably the best known part of the Gospel. I suspect that they are, on that evidence alone, among the most important words in the New Testament. Because they are familiar to us, they easily roll off the tongue as we read them, almost as easily as the words of a well-known song repeated unconsciously. Generally it is said that familiarity breeds contempt, but I would say that with the beatitudes familiarity breeds comfort.

And so a question arises here: Is this sense of comfort a good or bad thing? Was comfort actually the motivation of Jesus when he proclaimed the beatitudes? A question also arises about the word *blessed* itself. What does it imply? Sometimes it is translated simply as *happy*. The secret to understanding the beatitudes lies in understanding these words.

As an introduction, let us just say that the difference between happiness and beatitude is easy to see in our culture. How many people do we know who are happy with how things are in their lives? How many are totally content with who they are and with what they have achieved, and wouldn't change a thing? They are happy as far as this world's happiness goes!

Our culture, however, tells us we are not happy and certainly not satisfied. We actually deserve more and better. Advertising has become the new asceticism, and it is dictating the parameters of our earthly paradise. These advertisers are, in fact, not wrong in prompting us toward more and better, because we are always in search of something beyond what we have. We know this *more* and this *better* to be the ultimate good, beauty, and truth whom we call God. Saint Augustine could offer his famous quotation as a good advertising slogan for eternal happiness: “Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they rest in you.”

Blessed Are the Stressed is not a scholarly treatment of the beatitudes; rather, it is a friendly stroll through them. We will stop to regard this aspect and that meaning in an attempt to get a better idea of how Jesus defines holiness. Together let us look at the beatitudes, savoring the words, mulling over the promises, but, most importantly, making them the hallmark of our lives.

THE BEATITUDES

When he saw the crowds he went up the mountain. After he sat down his disciples came to him, and he opened his mouth and taught them, saying,

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

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

*Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst to do God’s will,
for they shall have their fill.*

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

*Blessed are the pure of heart,
for they shall see God.*

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

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for doing God’s will,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and say every sort of evil thing against you on account of me; rejoice and be glad, because your reward will be great in Heaven—they persecuted the prophets before you in the same way.” (Mt 5:1–12)



*Then he raised his eyes to his disciples and said,
“Blessed are you poor,
 for yours is the Kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who hunger now,
 for you shall have your fill.
Blessed are you who weep now,
 for you shall laugh.
Blessed are you when men hate you and exclude you and
 insult you and reject your name as evil on account of
 the Son of Man; rejoice on that day and leap for joy—
 behold, your reward will be great in Heaven,
 because their fathers did the same to the prophets.
But woe to you rich,
 for you have your delights!
Woe to you who are full now,
 for you shall be hungry!
Woe, you who laugh now,
 for you shall mourn and wail!
Woe, when all men speak well of you,
for their fathers did the same to the false prophets!”
(Lk 6:20–26)*



“The beatitudes are the final crowning of the divine action in a soul. They are the efficacious means to attaining absolute happiness. They are an invitation to practice the virtues, even the most difficult ones.”

—BLESSED JAMES ALBERIONE¹

Coming to Terms

Some concepts

We used to have a convent in a very interesting part of New York City—somewhere between dangerous and not-so-much. Ambitious would-be criminals occasionally hoisted themselves up the side of the building, seeking access through the roof; all manner of grates and bars kept us in, and guard dogs kept others out. So, it was hardly surprising when a visiting Italian sister, on her way out for the day, reported to the superior what she thought was a bomb at the front gate. Sister superior quickly mustered the troops. Several sisters jumped into gear and summoned New York's Finest, who came immediately with a full bomb squad. They briskly shepherded all the sisters to safety in the back yard. Moments later, from several big, burly cops came New York's finest laughter. They announced to the twittering flock of nuns that the threat was only a sleeping vagrant. When the original herald of the news came home and told what happened, she just rolled her eyes and said in her distinctive accent,

“That’s what I said: there’s a *bom* out front!” She had probably hoped we would make him lunch; instead we made a scene!

Terms are interesting and important, but very often lead to confusion because they can so easily be misunderstood or misused. Before wading into the accounts of the beatitudes we need to check out a term. What exactly does *blessed* mean?

Our first time being blessed probably took place in this context: “*Achoo!*” “Bless you!”

We take this exchange for granted, but how did it begin? We are told that blessing the sneezer began during one of the influenza attacks of the past. It was hoped that the one who sneezed would not be headed to the sick bed. Now it’s like an automatic reflex. Even if it’s muttered mindlessly, I prefer it to alternative responses like “*Ewww!*” or “Just use your sleeve, will you?”

“God bless” is exactly what it says, while the less committed “Bless you” implies at least best wishes. Every attempt to live out one of the beatitudes invokes God’s care and kindness. God’s special grace lands on us. What could be better? That’s top-tier!

... Respond with blessings, for this is your calling and in this way you will obtain a blessing. (1 Pt 3:9)

And you

Are you in the habit of freely bestowing blessings? What about being a blessing to someone?

way over the edge of the trail. *No thanks*, I thought. *I don't want a constant bird's-eye view of where I'll end up if I slip off this time.*

I'm certain had I ever made it to ride atop a horse, even at a steady clop, the first thing out of my mouth would have been, "Whoa, Nelly, or whoever you are!" Yes, I'm skittish, but also cautious.

This is how it is with half of the beatitudes as Luke recalls them. Midway in the account, he switches from *blessed* to *woe*. These woes serve to stop us in our tracks like a big old "Whoa!" *Hold up a minute and consider this. Danger ahead, watch your step. Woe* is a note of warning. It's as if, in this version of the beatitudes, Jesus is saying, "Whoa to you rich, for you have your delights! Whoa to you who are full now . . . , whoa, you who laugh now . . . , whoa when all speak well of you. . . ."

*If only my people would listen to me,
if only Israel would live up to my ways,
in an instant would I subdue their enemies
and extend my hands against their oppressors.
(Ps 81:14–15)*

And you

Looking at your own way of discipleship, can you imagine the Lord whispering a "Whoa!" to you? Pray about it.

with a bag of salt water taffy. I admired it all the way home and set my heart on the chocolate one. My mother wisely put the bag in a jar on the bookcase. “After supper,” she promised. Meanwhile, my sister spied the jar and helped herself. After supper I found my anticipated treasure gone. Oh, the early-onset angst! My little self reprimanded my honesty, obedience, and lack of alertness. Why didn’t I remove that piece on the way home? Why did my sister have to take the very piece I wanted? Of course, the better me knew the bag of candy was for the whole family; I should generously offer the others first dibs.

You may be thinking: “Relax. You were just a little girl.” True, but I was a little girl who spent a lot of time mulling over “good, better, best,” *and* bad.

The pull of the capital sins is constant in life, but Jesus has given us a game plan for overriding these tendencies: the beatitudes.

*Incline my heart to your testimonies
rather than toward selfish gain.*

*Restrain my heart from giving attention to empty things;
let me live in your way. (Ps 119:36–37)*

And you

As an adult you will find you desire many things from life: good, better, best, *and* bad. How do you stir yourself toward the way of Christian discipleship? Which beatitude do you find most helpful?