

Choices for Life

The Beatitudes for Daily Living

KEVIN TRESTON





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13 Simonology, p 15 2019916187
123ducu, pp 16–17 1013374734
jxfzsy, p 18 1277215707 kieferpix, p
21 1250474132 Dilok Klaisataporn,
p 23 1472932742 DisobeyArt, p 25
1340028224 SvetaZi, p 27 1485048074
skynesher, p 29 697604128 borchee,
p 30 990872364 RapidEye, pp 32–33
1369220156 Bim, p 34 1411095692
brebca, p 36 869262278 PeopleImages,
pp 38–39 1144287295 fizkes, pp 40–41
503414276 izuboky, p 42 1472338890
coldsnowstorm, p 45 1598198559
NickyLloyd, p 47 1472636495 Standart,
pp 48–49 1217447971 RomoloTavani,
p 50 1210003501 markrhiggins, p 52
1453886271 Anawat_s, p 54 1464607228

Kiara Bloom, pp 56–57 157288658
ImagineGolf, p 59 1045964396
georgeclerk, p 60 1737082640 FatCamera,
pp 62–63 519622790 pixdeluxe, p 65
137004182 sharply_done, p 66 173634325
oonal, p 68 147649202 Spectral-Design,
pp 70–71 501763470 JanelleLugge, p 73
1296320229 D-Keine, p 74 437706818
Carkhe, pp 76–77 995097896 South_
agency, p 78 668817800 Charlie Blacker,
p 81 898597226 onebluelight, p 83
842684902 Ulrika, p 84 1339249862
gece33, endpapers 1162217973 draganab,
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BEATITUDES
A values charter
for the Christian
community and
everyone

Matthew 5:3-10

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

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

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

**Blessed are those who hunger and
thirst for righteousness,**
for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall receive mercy.

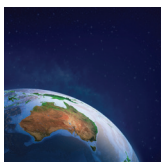
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they shall see God.

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

**Blessed are those who are persecuted
in the cause of righteousness,**
for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

CONTENTS

PREFACE



2

INTRODUCTION



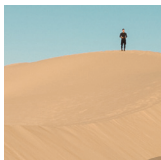
7

CHAPTER ONE



Universal and
Ecumenical

9



Reign of God

12



Connectivity
of Everything

14



Inclusive
Gender

19

CHAPTER ONE (cont.)



Discernment

20



Quantum Physics
and Modern Science

22



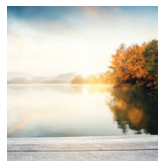
Imagination

24



Action for
the Beatitudes

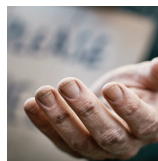
26



The Beatitudes
as Blessings

28

CHAPTER TWO



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

31

CHAPTER THREE



Blessed are the gentle,
for they shall inherit
the earth

37

CHAPTER FOUR



Blessed are those who
mourn, for they shall be
comforted

43

CHAPTER FIVE



Blessed are those who
hunger and thirst for
righteousness, for
they shall be filled

51

CHAPTER SIX



Blessed are the
merciful, for they
shall receive mercy

55

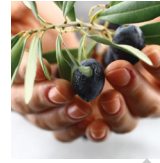
CHAPTER SEVEN



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

61

CHAPTER EIGHT



Blessed are the
peacemakers, for
they shall be called children
of God

67

CHAPTER NINE



Blessed are those who are
persecuted in the cause
of righteousness, for the
kingdom of Heaven is theirs

72

CHAPTER TEN



The Beatitude
Blessing of
Affirmation

79

POEMS FROM NOEL DAVIS



The Beatitudes of
Creation 1 and 2
Beatitudes of the
Carers of Creation

82

BIBLIOGRAPHY

86

PREFACE After sixty years of ministry in several countries, I reflect on the challenges of living the Christian faith in an increasingly secularised world, especially in Western-oriented countries. I sometimes wonder if those proclaiming the gospel have sometimes made the Christian story too complicated and irrelevant for daily happenings. For there is always a danger that the historical theological accumulation of doctrines and liturgical rituals could obscure the essential message of God's revelation in Jesus and the Spirit.

There is now, in our era, a profound shift in cultural consciousness that challenges the focus of evangelisation and the Christian Story itself. A global universalism, population explosion, growing divide between rich and poor, technological inventiveness, emergence of new dictatorships, individualism of ethical standards, and implications of quantum physics relating to the nature of reality and a return to an ecological appreciation of humanity's responsibility to care for creation, are all happenings that suggest a new paradigm of consciousness is emerging. Currently the church is moving through an interim or liminal era where many of the traditional ways of being church are questioned as a response to this new consciousness and erosion of communal ethics.

How might God's revelation in Jesus and the Spirit be known, celebrated and communicated within this new consciousness?



How might such a revelation be a source of creative energy for everyone as active members of the earth community? How might communal moral values be recovered and endorsed by society?

In recent years I have been more and more drawn to the Beatitudes as a basic charter or life orientation for living the Christian Way.

The first followers of Jesus designated his teachings as The Way. Within a short time, living The Way evolved into faith communities as ecclesia or 'church'. After a few centuries the church became institutionalised and was integrated into national governance. In 380 CE the Christian religion was declared the official religion of the Roman Empire. During the 21st era, the identity of The Christian Story is becoming less European in its character and more embedded in Africa and Asia.

The Beatitudes I have chosen in this book are those from Matthew's gospel Chapter 5:1-10, rather than those in the gospel of Luke (6:20-26).

The format of this book is as follows:

- Introduction
- One chapter for each of the eight Beatitudes
- Final Affirmation
- Complement
- Sources

This book is not a scriptural exegesis of the Beatitudes. Instead, I focus on the Beatitudes as an orientation for practical living.

The book is styled as a resource for the reader for reflecting on each Beatitude. Readers are encouraged to consider how each Beatitude challenges them and their communities toward personal spiritual transformations, which in turn motivate actions for a deeper commitment towards promoting 'life in abundance' (John 10:10).

Rather than read all the Beatitudes as one entity, I encourage readers to spend time on each Beatitude, allowing personal inner responses to emerge into one's consciousness and spirituality. Scripture scholars suggest that when preaching, Jesus would have spoken about each Beatitude on different occasions. The gospel author of Matthew has grouped the Beatitudes together as if Jesus had proclaimed them all in a single exposition.

We all need some deep spiritual source which is energised by the Spirit to lead us forward in the vagaries of life. I suggest the Beatitudes have been revealed to us as personal reference - spiritual anchors for living a holistic life and a shared communal moral code.

I am aware that my reflections emanate from my social and ethnic identity as an Australian of Anglo-Celtic heritage. Nevertheless, I do hope that all readers would, in their maturity, cultural heritage and personal life experiences, move beyond my cultural lens to locate these reflections within their own cultural ethnic paradigms. Thus every reader will bring their own lens to locate the Beatitudes within their own fields of consciousness.

I thank all those who have encouraged me in this composition.

I wish to offer special appreciation to the book, *The Plain Man Looks at the Beatitudes* (William Barclay, Fontana Books, 1963).

This book has been an invaluable resource and I have often drawn from its wisdoms in writing this book you are now about to read.

Thanks to Les Savage for his careful editing and suggestions for revisions of the text. Les has utilised his expertise to suggest necessary clarifications.

Thanks to Ryan Bryer for wise advice on technology.

It is a real privilege to include in the Supplement three poems by Noel Davis (d. 2021). His poems, 'Beatitudes of Creation', 'The Beatitudes of Creation (2)' and 'Beatitudes of the Carers of Creation' resonate with the recurring themes of creation in the book's reflections on the Beatitudes. (*The Heart Waking and Breaking into Dance*, Lifeflow Education, 2007 pp 36-39.) I first met Noel in 1956 when he was in one of my classes and have appreciated his friendship and his inspirational poems over the years.

I also want to especially thank Trish Delaney, Noel's wife, for her gracious approval for Noel's poems in this book. May Noel's giftedness to us through his poetry always enlighten us.

Finally, I would like to give a special thanks also to Kathryn for her ongoing support. Her patience with my hours of compositions is much appreciated.

Kevin Treston





INTRODUCTION The Beatitudes are not a series of Christian doctrines. They are faith expressions of how God wishes us to live harmoniously and communally in holistic ways within creation. The Beatitudes are saying to us, 'This is how God is encouraging you to live.' The Beatitudes as taught by Jesus are idealistic ways of living now, rather than statements about storing up grace for life hereafter in heaven.

The Beatitudes are not intended as a compendium of the dimensions of Christian life and dogmatic teachings. They offer a vision for life, not a catechism of beliefs.

Living the Beatitudes leads us into a glimpse of the very nature of God as Divine Cosmic Consciousness. They illuminate something about who God is when we explore their wisdoms. Our own mystical identity as created in 'the image and likeness of God' (Genesis 1:27) is expressed through faithfully living the Beatitudes.

Matthew's Gospel describes the setting for the teaching by Jesus that interprets the Torah. This is done by using accepted symbols of official authoritative teachings in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament). For example:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him (5:1).

We note the three explicit Hebrew Scripture symbols of:

1. going up to a mountain,
2. sitting down,
3. teaching to an assembled group.

These three Hebrew Scripture symbols are associated with significant teachings by a spiritual leader (see, for example, Moses in Exodus 19-20).

Let us now consider a selection of themes which offer a context for an appreciation of the Beatitudes.



CHAPTER ONE Universal and Ecumenical

Although the Beatitudes are a Christian text, it is suggested that they are ecumenical in their general application, which is for every single person to live a holistic, relational life within the energies of creation. The essential injunctions of the Beatitudes may be found in most formal religions and diverse traditions such as those of Indigenous peoples, The Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, Taoism, Confucianism and Judaism. The spiritual essence of each tradition generally resonates with the genre of the Beatitudes.

These religions and historical traditions are expressed in a wide diversity of ethnic, mythical and language forms according to the ethnicity and cultural pluralism of these traditions for believers and non-believers alike. The assumption that the Beatitudes are relevant for everybody, regardless of their religious or philosophical heritage, seems a valid position to hold.

A contrary view would limit the Beatitudes to committed Christians only (see for example, William Barclay, *The Plain Man looks at the Beatitudes*, pp 121-124). Barclay insists that Jesus was addressing the disciples (Matthew 5:1), not the general populace, hence the Beatitudes are reserved for committed followers of Jesus only.

A further complication of who might be nourished by the Beatitudes is the rapid rise of 'nones', especially in Western countries. 'Nones' is a designation for those who profess an interest or even commitment to some form of spirituality, but choose not to be members of specific religions. Recent research on Nones illustrates their growing popularity - especially with a younger generation. Might Nones be receptive to the spirit of the Beatitudes? Recent research in The Netherlands showed that 50 per cent of the population indicate no affiliation with any religion. Perhaps, however, many of these do have spiritual leanings.

There are other complex questions, such as what are core inner motivations which impel a person to observe the spirit of the Beatitudes? For example: Are the motivations driven by religious faith commitments such as fidelity to Jesus, or by more secular but commendable virtue motivations? Related to this question is the associated query as to whether our culture shapes our religious beliefs or if our religious beliefs and practices transform our cultural environment?

Readers will make their own choices about such questions as: 'Are the Beatitudes relevant for everyone or are they for Christian disciples only?' 'Do the Beatitudes offer an appealing response to the core question, "What does it mean to live - given the fact that one day we will die?"'



Recent research in The Netherlands showed that 50 per cent of the population indicate no affiliation with any religion. Perhaps, however, many of these do have spiritual leanings.

SAMPLE