

**Preamble:** This essay was edited in July 2015 to reflect a change my belief about the nature of God. I keep the word “God” where I am quoting others but in many places where I used the word “God” in 2008, I have either deleted it or replaced with the word “Love.” When “Love” is substituted for “God” it is not meant to be reification or personification (i.e. noun) but **rather a process (i.e. verb) that happens between people who are living the Beatitudes.** I also don’t intend “Love” to be interpreted as an emotion or romantic state. I mean “Love” as a way of being and relating with one another captured by Jesus’ beatitudes and St. Paul’s description of “agape” in his letter to the Corinthians (13). On occasion, it feels appropriate to use the phrase “God/Love” to stay true to a quotation but also place a verb or process (Love) beside the noun (God). I sometimes use the Jewish letters for God--JHWH--to acknowledge some source of unity and oneness of air, water, and earth. (I acknowledge that there are centuries of scholarly dialogues on the meanings/nature of JHWH).

Interestingly, my shift away from God as an independent transcendent being who lives “in the heavens” (i.e. a Greek god) is consistent with the Christian scriptures where God is equated with Love and the people following Jesus’ teachings are often referred to as Christ’s “body.” However, to let go a Greek conception of god is a significant departure from European philosophy and Christian dogma. When St. John declared that the “logos became flesh” he was turning most religions on their heads. Jesus and his disciples were both religious and political revolutionaries.

I am not sure I need an independent God to manage my fear anymore. I no longer need a mystical explanation for what has happened, is happening, and might happen in my world. Certainly, I am still afraid at times and wish there was a simple answer to what troubles me and others. I am learning to rest in the simple truths of these Beatitudes.

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## **Jesus’ Beatitudes: A Blueprint for Anarchists**

D. John Lee, Ph.D.  
Licensed Psychologist  
New Mexico State University  
DJohnLee@nmsu.edu

*“Even when they call us mad, when they call us subversives (anarchists—Lee) and communists and all the epithets they put on us, we know we only preach the subversive witness of the Beatitudes, which have turned everything upside down.”* Oscar Romero

What did Romero mean when he said the Beatitudes had a “*subversive witness?*” What did he mean when he said the Beatitudes “*have turned everything upside down?*” This paper will hopefully make sense of what Romero meant, but more importantly it is another attempt to make sense of what Jesus meant by his nine “blessed” statements.

There are many types of Christians. Any commonality might be in their acknowledgement that Jesus’ (or the Lord’s) prayer has some degree of prescriptive wisdom. The phrase “thy kingdom come” implies that there is a “kingdom or reign of God” (inclusive phrasings) that Jesus prayed would be-come real in peoples’ lives. The actual nature of God’s kingdom or reign is, of course, a point of disagreement, contention, and even war among Christians. Christians have been building their own kingdoms since Constantinople. This “Christian kingdom-building” had made discerning what Jesus

meant by the “kingdom of God or heaven” very difficult. The position of this paper is that Jesus’ Beatitudes outline a blueprint for what the “kingdom of God/Love” looks like both personally and socially. The Beatitudes describe a process of personal transformation and social activism. Embedded in the “blessed” statements I have found a roadmap to confront my personal idols and social illusions. The latter two processes are often separated but I think they are essentially the same. Social activism without personal transformation often leads to power trips or “rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.” And, individual therapy without social activism is often nothing more than narcissistic mind-games or “navel gazing.” I know social activists who need to be empowered by doing some of their own individual work. And, I know some psychotherapists who need to move beyond their intra-psychic reflections to engage in transforming the systems that sustain their clients’ conditions. As Mark Kane and I said over 15 years ago:

*“We work towards individual, cultural, and global change simultaneously since one without the other two is illusory and at best temporary.” (Lee & Kane, 1992).*

There are many types of anarchists. Any commonalities are usually at the level of one’s social analysis or critique. The repeated failure of state institutions to maintain justice and the timelessness of predatory economic systems has convinced some of us that the “polis” (or political) is inherently opposed to the “kingdom or reign of Love.” Hierarchical modes of organizing within governments and even religious communities often lead to author-itarian structures that leave little room for other author-ities. I believe Jesus’ Beatitudes support an anarchist posture (that is outlined in my Extended Reflections below.) The Beatitudes, when read psycho-socio-politically, challenge the structures responsible for suffering, injustice, and war. The Beatitudes are subversive both personally and socially. They deconstruct individual and institutional idols. Jesus’ nine “blessed” statements simultaneously describe and prescribe a life that continuously moves towards others in love. The Beatitudes provide an anarchist blueprint for those who hold “love” as the final author-ity in directing our relationships with one another.

### ***Blessed are...***

#### **What does it mean to be “blessed?”**

One way to translate “blessed” is “may good words be spoken.” To “bless” someone is to “say good words about them.” To receive someone’s “blessing” is to receive their “good words” or “favor” as in the case of receiving an inheritance. A parental blessing is the bestowing of an inheritance to one’s children. The story of Isaac, Esau, and Jacob is helpful in understanding the nature of a “blessing” in Hebrew culture. In a state of ravenous hunger, Esau, the oldest son of Isaac, gave up his “birthright” to his younger brother Jacob for a pot of stew. Esau gave up his right as the oldest son to ask for his father’s blessing. By virtue of being the second son, Jacob could not ask his father for a blessing. When Jacob bought Esau’s birthright, he did not automatically receive his father’s blessing. He had simply purchased the right to go before his father and ask for the first-born blessing. Jacob still needed to actually hear and receive the blessing of his father. Thus, he had to disguise himself as Esau and go before their father Isaac and

receive the “good words” reserved for the first-born son. Isaac’s spoken blessing was considered binding. Isaac could not take back his words of blessing after he found out that Jacob had deceived him. The blessing, once spoken out loud, was a final act. The blessing was a creative act that brought into being a new state of affairs. Whoever received the father’s first-born blessing received the deed to the family’s position and possessions. In essence, the recipient of the father’s blessing became the father.

When Jesus delivers his sermon on the mount and begins with a series of “Blessed are” statements, he is--in Jewish culture--offering the blessing, the good words, or the creative acts of God. A blessing is a spoken creative word just like the Creator spoke the world into being through the Word. It is reasonable to translate the first two words of these statements as follows:

*“Good words are spoken about people who...”*

*“God’s creative words are spoken about people who...”*

*“God’s creative energy and presence is with those people who...”*

*“The inheritance of God is given to those people who...”*

Jesus’ “blessed” statements may have been considered an act of heresy within his religious culture. Jesus was taking the position of the Jewish God in describing who would receive God’s blessings, good words, or creative actions. The people Jesus identifies as recipients of God’s inheritance are not the people one would expect. Jesus names the poor not the rich, the meek not the proud, the persecuted not the powerful--and not the religious leaders or governing officials who believed that they were already blessed by God. Jesus delivers God’s blessings to the bottom of society, not the top. The kingdom Jesus delivers is an upside-down one. To most people, choosing to give Love author-ity in their lives is both dangerous and foolish.

One can easily argue that Jesus believed “God” to be immanent and not a transcendent being that European (specifically Greek and Roman) Christianity has made Jesus’ God out to be. From Jesus’ theology, the first two words of the Beatitudes can be translated as:

*“Creative acts of love are shown by people who...”*

*“Love’s presence and energy are with people who...”*

Jesus’ blessings can be thought of as a series of promises we can expect to experience when we live in authentic relationship with one another. Please note that a “blessing” is a gift given, not a title earned or feeling received. It is easy to think of Jesus’ blessings as directives of how to “be” rather than as descriptions of what happens to those who are “being” poor in spirit, pure of heart, peacemakers, etc. If you are tempted to ask the questions, “How do I become poor in spirit? meek? merciful?, etc.?” then you may also be tempted to do the right things more for yourself than anyone else, but that’s okay too. Lining up good works with a pure heart takes time.

As recorded by Jesus’ disciple, Matthew, in what we have labeled his fifth chapter, versus 3-12 (KJV), here is what we call the Beatitudes:

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

*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

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

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

*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain 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 they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*

*Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."*

I am not a Biblical scholar nor am I a poet, but I do enjoy playing with words and the meanings that they denote and connote. My reflections on Jesus' Beatitudes (an abbreviated version was published in 2006 by *Radical Grace*) proceeds in three parts: (1) the blessing as recorded in the King James Version of Matthew's Gospel (5:3-12), (2) an Aramaic translation by Neil Douglas-Klotz (1990), and then (3) I play with some English metaphors in an attempt to capture some of the meaning of what Jesus may have intended when he spoke over 2,000 years ago.

***Blessed are the poor in spirit;  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (King James Version (KJV))***

*Tuned to the Source are those who live by breathing Unity; their "I can!" is included in God's. (Aramaic translation by Neil Douglas-Klotz (NDK))*

Blessed are the poor in breath; for they will find a home breathing with others... in Love.  
(D.J. Lee)

Good creative words are spoken to those who consciously breathe,  
 who are aware that they need to breathe in order to live,  
 who are aware that every breath they take depends on others,  
 who are aware that breathing with others is necessary to live,  
 who are in relationship with others in Love;  
 ... for they are breathing with JHWH,  
 for they are singing in tune with others,  
 for they are assured that Love is with them in every breath they take,  
 for they are primed and prepared to live their life in Love,  
 for they are breathing heaven on earth.

***Blessed are they that mourn;  
for they shall be comforted. (KJV)***

*Blessed are those in emotional turmoil; they shall be united inside by love. (NDK)*

Blessed are they whose souls cry; for they will find hope in being with others... in Love.  
(D.J. Lee)

Good creative words are spoken to those who wrestle with who they are,  
who are reminded daily of their own sin, idolatry, and oppression,  
who weep over the sin and injustice of their world,  
who feel the anger and hurt of those who are oppressed,  
who grieve the death of children due to hunger, greed, and war;  
... for they will be comforted,  
for they will not be alone,  
for they will sense the presence of others,  
for they will know the peace that passes all understanding,  
for they will be reminded of Love,  
for they will experience the peace of Love.

***Blessed are the meek;  
for they shall inherit the earth. (KJV)***

*Healthy are those who have softened what is rigid within; they shall receive physical vigor and strength from the universe. (NDK)*

Blessed are the gentle; for they will be empowered by others... in Love.  
(D.J. Lee)

Good creative words are spoken to those who know that they are made from the dust of the earth,  
who know that they are water and dirt,  
who know that they are mud,  
who know that they are not gods,  
who have confronted their own idols,  
who have seen through their illusions of power  
who have been humbled by humiliation;  
... for they will inherit the earth,  
for they will own the earth,  
for they will breathe with JHWH life into the earth,  
for they will be part of earth becoming heaven,  
for they will be empowered by spiriting of Love,  
for they will fly on the wings of eagles.

***Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness;  
for they shall be filled. (KJV)***

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for physical justice; they shall be surrounded by what is needed to sustain their bodies. (NDK)*

Blessed are those who yearn for justice; for they will be sustained by others... in Love.  
(D.J. Lee)

Good creative words are spoken to those who seek righteousness,  
 who strive to make all things “right”  
 who feed the hungry,  
 who give drinks to the thirsty,  
 who invite the homeless into their homes,  
 who clothe the poor,  
 who look after the sick,  
 who visit those in jail,  
 who long to see heaven on earth;  
 ... for they will be filled,  
 for they will be fed,  
 for they will drink cool water,  
 for they will be invited out of the cold into a warm home,  
 for they will be clothed,  
 for they will be cared for when they are sick,  
 for they will be visited in jail,  
 for they will taste heaven on earth.

***Blessed are the merciful;  
for they shall obtain mercy. (KJV)***

*Blessed are those, who from their inner wombs, birth mercy; they shall feel its warm arms embrace them. (NDK)*

Blessed are those who show mercy to others; for they will receive mercy from others...  
in Love. (D.J. Lee)

Good creative words are spoken to those who have mercy towards those who are acting unjustly,  
 who are patient with those who are oppressing the poor,  
 who resist judging those who judge them,  
 who suffer long with those who are oppressed,  
 who feel in their loins the birth pains of creation,  
 who ask for forgiveness,  
 who forgive those who sin against them;

... for they will be shown mercy,  
 for they will sense mercy,  
 for they will feel the warmth of compassion,  
 for they will experience forgiveness,  
 for they will learn to love their enemies,  
 for they will rejoice in the newborn creation.

***Blessed are the pure in heart;  
 for they shall see God. (KJV)***

*Aligned with the One are those whose lives radiate from a core of love; they shall see God everywhere. (NDK).*

Blessed are those that keep their hearts clear; for they will see themselves and others clearly... in Love. (D.J. Lee)

Good creative words are spoken to those who are honest with themselves and others,  
 whose hearts are clear and clean,  
 who are doing their own work,  
 who confess their mistakes before others,  
 who acknowledge their tendency to play god,  
 who admit their desire to seek revenge,  
 who admit they want to kill those who have killed their loved ones,  
 who ask for forgiveness from those they have wronged,  
 who forgive those who have wronged them,  
 who reconcile with those who hurt them and they have hurt,  
 who own their ability-to-respond to poverty, injustice and war;  
 ... for they will see Love,  
 for they will hear, smell, taste, feel, and touch Love,  
 for they will be in the pre-sense of Love,  
 for they will see Love in themselves,  
 for they will see Love in their enemies,  
 for they will see Love in creation.

***Blessed are the peacemakers;  
 for they shall be called the children of God. (KJV)***

*Blessed are those who plant peace each season; they shall be named the children of God. (NDK)*

Blessed are those who make peace; for they are living in the family of Love. (D.J. Lee)

Good creative words are spoken to those who make peace,  
 who kneel in the garden planting seeds of shalom,  
 who cultivate relationships of respect, trust, and understanding,

who sit down in the middle of injustice and war,  
 who seek to reconcile those who call each other enemies,  
 who look diligently for ways to bring healing to the oppressed,  
 who bring reconciling justice to those who seek revenge,  
 who stand up to those responsible for poverty, injustice, and war,  
 who speak humbling words to those who think they are god;  
 ... for they will be called children of Love,  
 for they will be named by Love,  
 for they will be held in the arms of Love,  
 for they will be cared for and protected by Love,  
 for they bear the image of Love,  
 for they are used by Love to bring peace on earth.

***Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake;  
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (KJV)***

*Blessings to those who are dislocated for the cause of justice; their new home is the  
 province of the universe. (NDK)*

Blessed are those who are persecuted because they seek justice; for they are learning to  
 be... in Love. (D.J. Lee)

Good creative words are spoken to those who are persecuted because they have  
 compassion and seek justice,

who are criticized for feeding the hungry,  
 who are questioned for giving drinks to the thirsty,  
 who risk losing their homes while caring for the homeless,  
 who are scorned because they are clothing the poor,  
 who are exposed to illness because they look after the sick,  
 who are in danger because they are visiting prisoners,  
 who are threatened because they are being neighbors,  
 who lose their reputation because they befriend the "other",  
 who are despised for reaching out to our outcasts,  
 who are victimized because they suffer with our victims,  
 who are attacked because they non-violently confront injustice,  
 who are killed because they sit, stand, or march in the face of evil;  
 ... for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,  
 for they are breathing with JHWH  
 for they are singing in tune with Love,  
 for they are living in Love's home,  
 for they are dancing in Love,  
 for they are being used by Love to create heaven on earth.

***Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. (KJV)***

*Blessings when you are conspired against, scandalized, and accused falsely of corruption for my sake... (NDK)*

Blessed are you when others attack you, and plot against you, and say all kinds of false and evil things against you, for my sake. (D.J. Lee)

Good creative words are spoken to you when,  
 people insult you because you Love,  
 people laugh at you because you have faith in Love,  
 people berate you because you pray for your enemies,  
 people twist your words when you try to speak truthfully,  
 people mistreat you when you make yourself vulnerable,  
 people falsely accuse you of evil when you are being compassionate.

***Rejoice and be exceedingly glad;  
 for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (KJV)***

*Then, do everything extreme, including letting your ego disappear, for this is the secret of claiming your expanded home in the universe. For so they shamed those before you; all who are enraptured, saying inspired things—who produce on the outside what the spirit has given them within.(NDK).*

Rejoice, be glad, let go of yourself, dance with abandon, and shout with joy.  
 Great is your reward on earth as it is in heaven; remember that you are not alone.  
 There were others, like Jesus and the prophets before you, who were persecuted just like you for learning to breathe with others... in Love.

## **Extended Reflections 2015**

This section contains some extended reflections on Jesus' Beatitudes. I am more expansive this time and try to explain some of my "word bytes" listed above. Also, I have added three more modes or types of reflections. First, I try to demonstrate why the poor and marginalized have the best chance of being the recipients of Love's blessings. Second, I attempt to describe the shadow of each group being blessed. And third, I offer a description of what the blessing received may look like, or what life may be when you choose to dance in the "kingdom of heaven" or within the "reign of Love."

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

**What does it mean to be "poor in spirit?"**

The poor in spirit know that they are created. They know they are not gods.

To be poor in spirit is to be “out of breath.” The poor in spirit know how to consciously breathe. They know that *inhaling* is choosing to breathe Love into our being; inhaling is Love abiding in us. And, *exhaling* is us choosing to abide in Love. The poor in spirit consciously breathe.

People who are poor know poverty; they know what it means to live without. The poor do not have the material possessions to distract them from what is really important (read “the truth of their existence”). The poor do not have the positions or power to convince themselves and others that they are important (read “gods”). It is really difficult for the rich to be “poor in spirit.” The rich have a lot of possessions that define (read “own”) them. Possessions often possess. Rarely are the rich in need. Rarely do the rich think they need anything, anyone, or god. The materially poor have a good chance of being “poor in spirit.” But, I know some poor people who have inflated egos and are proud of being poor. Their poverty is not of spirit but another game of self-righteousness, believing they are better than others (or even “gods”) because they have little or no possessions.

Sometimes I am these people.

**What does it mean to live in the “kingdom of heaven?”**

To live in the “kingdom of heaven” means you are doing your best not to live in anyone else’s kingdom. When you consciously breathe, you are conscious of who you are in Love, who and what you give author-ity to, and what authors and finishes your faith. When you are poor in spirit, your life, your breath depends on Love, no one or nothing else. It is tempting to believe that your life depends on order, on laws, on institutions who say they are committed to making your life orderly, safe, and peaceful. We naturally give power to other people believing that they will look out for our safety and well-being. It was a sad day when we realized that our parents or caregivers were limited, that they were not all-powerful gods capable of protecting us, meeting all our needs, and fulfilling our souls. Many of us turned our trust and faith to our teachers, our coaches, our pastors, our therapists to help us navigate and author our lives. And, almost all of us were taught to believe in benevolent institutions that were designed and built on truth and justice: the church, the government, the police, and the military were supposed to maintain order and protect us from harm. Some of us, however, were betrayed by our parents, mentors, and the institutions that promised to be there for us when we needed them most. We lost faith in the author-ities of our world and had to start trusting someone or something else.

To live under the “reign of Love” is to believe that Love, and Love alone, can sustain me. If I put my faith in anyone or anything else, I am living under their reign: e.g. the reign of the church, the reign of tradition or community, the reign of words (e.g. theology, psychology, sociology, etc.), the reign of self, the reign of science, the reign of food, the reign of money, the reign of the presidency, the reign of the United Nations, etc. But, since I am so firmly conditioned to believe in these other “kingdoms,” the challenge for those of us who believe in the “reign of Love” is to *re-condition ourselves and learn to live with one another maximizing our faith in Love and minimizing our faith in our own constructions and institutions*. This challenge is my definition of a *non-violent anarchist*.

***Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.***

**What does it mean to “mourn?”**

People who mourn know the “hole in their souls.” They know how far we are from living in relationship with one another.

People who mourn know the shadow of creation. The Hebrew story of creation is a tragedy. We start out in a garden living naked before JHWH and others. But, we quickly learn moral dualities to judge, shame and blame one another (i.e. eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil), cover our inadequacies, and hide from our creator. By the time we recognize that we need to eat of the tree of life, we have been banished from the garden having to learn how to live with the clothes that JHWH provided us.

People who mourn know death. Death is not just physical... our minds, hearts, and souls can die too. People who mourn know the loss when someone they love dies. But, they also know the loss associated with disease, communal disintegration, and the obliteration of our eco-systems. Mourning is our soul’s cry for life and justice. People who mourn wrestle with who they have become individually and who we have become globally; they know suffering and have grieved the hunger or death of a child.

The materially poor have a good chance of “mourning” for they live the closest to violence and the unjust distribution of food and resources. It is really difficult for the rich to “mourn.” The rich usually have enough power to protect them from the ravages of predatory capitalism. They are the predators, the benefactors of the system. But, I know some rich people who have sold their possessions, given up their privileges and learned what it means to be poor in spirit and mourn.

I know some people who only mourn their losses. They are keenly aware of what they don’t have and fearful of what they may lose. These folk grieve but their cries are out of self-pity: they whimper “poor me.” They are centered on self and not others; they do not “suffer with” or have compassion for others.

Sometimes I am these people.

**What does it mean to be “comforted?”**

Comfort in the midst of despair is an assurance that the world will change. Being comforted does not mean being made comfortable. It is possible to be very uncomfortable and be comforted at the same time. Being comforted is believing that our world is ultimately part of a good universe. There is comfort in hope, faith, and love. There is comfort in the pre-sence of others in Love.

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

**What does it mean to be “meek?”**

People who are meek are those who live close to the earth.

People who are meek know themselves; they know their shadows and have recognized their false dichotomies, moralities, and mis-taken identities. Meek people have in some way, shape, or form been confronted with their own idols and illusions: they are visibly different or dis-abled, they are addicted, they have lost a loved one, they have destroyed a marriage, or they have failed miserably. The meek have had their dreams crushed to the point that they had to significantly evaluate their beliefs and values, especially about self-righteousness and meritocracy. You are meek when your ego has been stripped of its illusions of self-sufficiency, merit-based identities, and

communal securities. The meek have deconstructed themselves to the point where they understand how gender, class, sexual orientation, culture, and race had oppressed themselves and others. They stand-under our social constructions and know that no one can claim innocence. The meek have been softened.

The materially poor have a good chance of being “meek” because they do not have the title, positions, prestige, possessions, and power to define them. The poor are often shamed for “not-being...(fill in the blank)”, and thus have the chance to learn how to “be-in-Love.” It is really difficult for the rich to be “meek.” Power, prestige, and possessions can easily seduce us into believing that we are more important than our partnerships with others.

I know some people who pretend to be meek when they are silently judging others as being loud and arrogant. Sometimes the shy and unassuming are not anxious about asserting themselves. Rather, they are laughing under their breath believing that their silence is a sign of maturity and superiority. Sometimes I am these people. Being smug is not being meek.

**What does it mean to “inherit the earth?”**

To “inherit the earth” literally means that “all things belong” to the meek. Quite consistent with Jesus’ “upside-down kindom”, those people who legally or formally own nothing, actually own everything. Letting go of possessions or not allowing anything to possess you actually leads to caring for everything and everyone. Inheriting the earth means caring for the earth. Creation was deemed “good.”

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

**What does it mean to “hunger and thirst for righteousness?”**

People who hunger and thirst after righteousness know why people are hungry and thirsty.

People who hunger and thirst for righteousness yearn for right relationships characterized by love. Relationships defined by peace, justice, and love, not by gender, class, and race. They long for a just or “right” world where food and water are shared and distributed to those in need rather than hoarded by the rich and privileged.

The materially poor have a good chance of knowing what it means to hunger and thirst after righteousness. The poor are often hungry and thirsty. Some poor know why they are hungry and thirsty. They know that the distribution of food and water has very little to do with how hard one has worked. Systems of merit exist in the world but so do systems of power and privilege. The poor know that the rich, the well-fed and nourished share little and hold onto their money, power, possessions, advantages, and privileges. The rich rarely seek justice because righteousness necessarily means a re-distribution of their wealth.

I know some people who work for righteousness but it is for them-selves; i.e. the self-righteous. The self-righteous sincerely believe that they are “good”; that they are right and all others are wrong. The self-righteous are proud of their self-control and discipline. They believe they are morally pure and better than other people. Self-surrender is seen as a weakness rather than a necessity. The self-righteous do not know their shadow or the power of evil. I know people who work for justice who believe that they have THE (only) way and means of bringing peace to our world.

Sometimes I am these people.

**What does it mean to be “filled?”**

To be “filled” is to be “full.” To be filled is to be made whole. To be full-filled is to have your desires met, your dreams come true, and your yearnings answered. Our hunger and thirst for righteousness will someday be met with all of creation being made whole. All people and creatures will have food and water. All of creation will live in harmony with one another in Love.

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

**What does it mean to be “merciful?”**

People who are merciful know mercy.

The merci-full have learned to be full of mercy. Showing mercy is deciding to not take revenge when you have been wronged. To offer mercy shows that you have learned that taking revenge does not stop violence or heal relationships. To decide to “let go” of a debt is to realize that getting what you are owed does not mean you get what you deserve. The merciful have learned to offer mercy because they have been shown mercy. People who are merciful have thought, felt, or done something in their lives that deserves capital punishment within most constructions of justice. They have participated in the genocide of entire cultures, the killing of babies, children, and women through disease and starvation or outright torture. And, even if they have not directly participated in genocide, they have in most cases benefited from such violence, oppression, and public murder. And finally, if they have not benefited from imperialism, they have almost certainly wished or wanted to kill their oppressor. The merciful have wronged others and mourned their separation from themselves and others. They have confessed their sins before those they have offended. They have received mercy and know the consequences for being received and forgiven. They know that they are released from their shame, guilt, and compulsions. The merciful forgive because they have been forgiven.

The materially poor have a good chance of being merciful. Some poor have been shown mercy and have learned to offer mercy to those who wrong them. The poor are merciful as they watch the rich drive by without even acknowledging that the poor exist. Mercy is offered as the poor watch planes fly overhead taking away their food or dropping bombs on their homes. The rich rarely are merciful since they believe that they deserve their privileged positions; they believe that their hard work and good works have made them wealthy and powerful. The rich are often blind to the systems of privilege that lie beneath their wealth. The rich rarely see or hear the cries of those on which they stand.

I know people who appear to be merciful but they are only parading their self-righteousness. They pretend to forgive those who they think have wronged them while under their breath they are condemning the other to hell, imagining how they might get revenge on their enemies.

Sometimes I am these people.

**What does it mean to obtain “mercy?”**

To receive “mercy” is to be let off the hook, to have a debt cancelled, to be let free from an obligation, or to be forgiven. When confronting oppression, you meet all kinds of people who are blindly following their orders to sustain and maintain a system

that preys on others and our environment. Offering mercy to these folk is easier when you have obtained mercy yourself. Once again, being mercy-full means that you have been given enough mercy to fill you and others up.

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

**What does it mean to be “pure in heart?”**

People who are pure in heart know the shadow of their hearts.

The pure in heart have learned that their hearts need to be “flushed” now and then. Purity of heart is not a state of being “morally pure or wholesome.” Purity of heart is a process of being honest and truth-full about our thoughts and feelings with oneself and others. Our consciousness was formed out of dualities: e.g. you and me, them and us, good and evil, etc. We learned very quickly what was and was not acceptable in the eyes of our caregivers. Despite their unconditional love, we believed that their love was dependent on our appearance, our abilities, our obedience and performance. Thus, our hearts split. Our hearts were broken. Our hearts have a side that is presented publicly. But, our hearts also have a side that is hidden: Freud called it our “unconscious”, Jung called it our “shadow”, Yoda called it our “dark side”, and some call it our “white side.” Feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that we deny or keep secret, that we cover up, that we hide from ourselves and one another. The side of ourselves that we only admit behind closed doors. The pure in heart have found a place within themselves and with others to be open, to allow their hearts to be known, to mourn, to fear, to be angry, to take off their masks and be vulnerable. The pure in heart have learned how to give in order that they may be received. They have learned how to let others accept them, to love them for you they are and who they are not. The pure in heart know how to mend their hearts. They have learned how to put themselves back together again; they know what it means to remember themselves.

The materially poor have a good chance of being pure in heart. When the distractions of wealth have been removed, one has the opportunity to uncover the riches of one’s heart in relationship with others. Time is for presence, not to be spent. Some rich will spend hours in therapy seeking purity of heart. But, gazing into a mirror is very different than allowing oneself to be mirrored. Reflection is not reconciliation.

I know people who will appear to be vulnerable when they are really just manipulating others to stroke their egos and self-righteousness. These people will share their feelings not as a gift to be received but as a point to be made. Sometimes I am these people. Insincerity is easy to detect. Sincerity flows from a pure heart.

**What does it mean to “see God?”**

The Hebrews believed that no one could look upon the face of God. Moses’ face glowed after he was in the presence of God and he covered his face when he came down off the mountain. I believe that I have been in the presence of God/Love looking at the faces of people who have just “spoken the truth in love” with one another. I believe that I have been in the presence of God/Love gazing at creation. I don’t think it is that unusual to actually see God/Love in ourselves, others, and creation. What is unusual is being willing to open our eyes, our hearts, our minds, and our souls to actually “see.”

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

**What does it mean to be a “peacemaker?”**

People who are peacemakers know war and peace.

Peacemakers are often motivated by first-hand experiences of war. People who seek peace have seen what a bomb can do to a city, a building, a person, a child. People who make peace have seen how war un-makes life; the destruction of eco-systems and infrastructures designed to sustain community. Peacemakers sow seeds of peace and justice. They will stand in front of a tank and be run over or shot. Most martyrs have been peacemakers. Peacemakers know that even in the presence of violence and war, peace has already been made. Peacemakers know that peace begins within them; they have done their own work around the war that rages on within our minds, hearts, and souls. Peacemakers have learned that peace is not the absence of war but the presence of mercy and grace. Peacemakers know that peace is made when all sides know that the “other” is a projection of our own shadows and fears. Reconciliation is an intra-personal and inter-personal process, not an event.

The materially poor have a good chance of being peacemakers. Peace is in everyone’s best interest, especially for the poor, for those who live without food, clean water, and shelter. The rich are rarely peacemakers because wealth is usually built upon war, injustice, and oppression. Peacemaking is inclusive. Participating in making peace is inviting all people to share in the fruits of the garden. Struggling for peace and justice means that we all can eat and drink righteousness. God/Love’s feast is for every-one.

I know people who appear to work for peace when what they really want is power. Sometimes I am these people. A revolution motivated by revenge, hatred, or greed only leads to a “changing of the guard.” The American Revolution improved the life of only a few. In 1776, power moved across the Atlantic Ocean; power shifted from London to Boston; from Oxford to Harvard. Power was not given to those who had none. A revolution motivated by mercy and love leads to a “changing of the heart”; the sharing of food, water, and shelter, the letting go of privilege, the giving up of power, and the will-full dismantling of systems of oppression.

**What does it mean to be “the children of God?”**

Christians will often refer to one another as a “brother or sister in Christ.” Being referred to, or identifying as, a member of God’s family should not be taken lightly. To a theist, the title “a child of God” is obvious: we are all children of God. But, in the context of Jesus’ Beatitudes, the reference implies that people who make peace are in some way bearing God/Love’s image. Peacemakers look like their parents—God/Love. That is, if you are involved in peacemaking you are reflecting the very nature or essence of God/Love. You might say that working towards shalom is what God/Love is all about.

*Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

**What does it mean to be “persecuted for righteousness sake?”**

People who are persecuted for righteousness sake know that doing what is right will usually result in threats to their own health and well-being.

People who respond to the needs of the poor, care for those who are sick, who forgive the offender, and stand up in the face of evil, know that there are costs to their compassion. Losing what you have, getting sick, being offended, and even being killed are very predictable consequences of suffering with those who are suffering. People who are persecuted for righteousness sake learn that there is no greater act of love than to give up their life for another.

People who are persecuted for righteousness sake do not seek revenge because they see themselves in the oppressor. They see their need for control, for predictability, for prestige, and for power. They see their fear. They see their anxiety. They see their anger. They see their shadow. They know that the persecutor is in some ways just like them. They know that all of creation can be warped in some way to protect rather than to serve us. They do not resist persecution but anticipate it and absorb it. Being persecuted for righteousness sake is accepting the consequences of confronting the oppressor.

The materially poor have a good chance of being persecuted for righteousness sake. Poor folk will often help other poor folk. A community of need will often respond to those in need. So, when poor people stand up against the oppressor they are often the first to be knocked down, arrested, or shot. The poor are familiar with what it means to be persecuted for doing what is right.

I know some people who believe they are persecuted because of their own self-righteousness. They regularly whine about how their moral codes are being offended and how their self-righteous lives are being threatened by the liberal left or conservative right wing agenda. Their “persecution” rarely involves actual threats on their lives or well-being. Being the brunt of jokes, comics, and pundits is far from being jailed, beaten, or killed. The self-righteous believe they are being persecuted when their moral superiority is challenged. Their “persecution” is interpreted as a compliment, because they think that being ridiculed is evidence that they are right-eous.

I also know some people who are doing the right things for the wrong reasons. It is another form of self-righteousness when people respond to the poor, care for the sick, and visit the prisoner in order to demonstrate one’s “holiness” or “obedience.” Compassion is to “suffer with” others, not to offer charity at little or no cost to oneself.

Sometimes I am these people.

### **What does it mean to live in the “kingdom of heaven?”**

To live in the “kingdom of heaven” means you are doing your best not to live in anyone else’s kindom. It is ironic that so many people who pray to their god each day “thy Kingdom come” do very little to make “their kingdom go.” To avoid the persecution of challenging the kingdoms of our world, we modify our understanding of God’s Kindom to fit our kingdoms. We deny the contradictions that the Reign of Love creates when we are called to be a neighbor and love our enemies. We make exceptions to who we can kill. We make exceptions of what we can covet. It is not nice or comfortable to be persecuted for righteousness sake. It is much easier and more comfortable to bow down to those kingdoms that offer us food, money, prestige, and power. Unfortunately, these kingdoms are built on systems of privilege that offer benefits to some at the expense of others. The Kindom or Reign of Love is built on mercy and truth, peace and justice, grace and love. We have a long way to go. Fortunately, we are not alone.

## Connecting the Dots: The Cycle of the Beatitudes

It is easy to think of the Beatitudes as independent blessings. But, it is conceivable that they are connected to one another or that they build on one another. This notion is not new. Jeff Manion (1999) and Jim Forest (1999) proposed that each Beatitude or “blessed” statement builds on one another like rungs on a ladder. Jim Forest (1999) continues: *“Each step (Beatitude) builds on the foundation of the previous step, each leads to the next, and each is indispensable. We can’t divide them up, retaining those we find appealing and leaving those we don’t care for to others, as if one could specialize: ‘I’ll take peacemaking, you can have purity of heart’”* (pg. 2). Forest suggests that the Beatitudes depict a linear process of “spiritual” growth. Do my interpretations of Jesus’ blessings that focus on personal transformation and social activism also connect with one another? I think so. (I also think the connections are cyclical or reciprocal rather than linear. More will be said about this proposal later).

### How does being poor in spirit lead to mourning?

When you admit that most of the time you breathe unconsciously or unaware of your relationship with others, you mourn your mistakes. When you realize that most people spend their lives trying to gain prestige, possessions, or power, you mourn how we all are oppressed and oppressing.

*When I feel the furthest from Love is when I realize that others cannot be avoided. When I don’t want to breathe anymore, I cannot resist Love breathing their spirit into my soul. I believe Love is choosing to abide in me when air fills my lungs. And, when I let go of my breath, I am letting my spirit abide in Love. I am learning that I don’t live by bread alone.*

### How does mourning lead to being meek?

When you are mourning your mistakes, you humble yourself before others. When you grieve global oppression and eco-destruction, you confess how we all are part of an interrelated system of greed and fear.

*My mourning expresses itself as rage. I raged when I found out how the British treated my Chinese ancestors in Canada. I raged when I was told the truth about the systematic genocide of the native peoples of the Americas. I raged as I watched Richard Richert’s documentary “Hungry for Profit” (1984) outlining how economic globalization by Europe and North America is raping creation and indigenous peoples. I wept when I took the walk of white privilege and had my belief in meritocracy dismantled. Almost everyday, I rage just like Job crying out to God with questions like, “Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?” (21:7).*

*I remember writing and performing my own confrontation with God (cf. Sousa de Carvalho, 1986). My heart was softened when I conceded that I was part of humanity. At best, I am one ninth of the community of truth; one speck in the universe spinning around what I believed to be God.*

### **How does being meek lead to hungering and thirsting after righteousness?**

When you recognize the “holes in your soul”, you long for them to be filled. When you acknowledge that you are part of global systemic problems, you want to be part of the solution. As Jim Forest wrote, being meek or “dying to self” is a “*daily struggle to overcome in oneself and in society all those things that keep us apart from God and one another*” (pg. 148).

*Much of my professional life, scholarship and clinical practice, has been devoted to trying to make things right. I am a “One” on the Enneagram (cf. Rohr & Ebert, 1990). I have a need for myself and the world to be perfect. My anger is both my blessing and my curse. I almost immediately perceive what is wrong (not right) with our world, myself, and others. Distinguishing culture from race has been my forte. Defining and exposing the idols of ethnocentrism and racism dominates my writing, consulting, and social action. Offering a safe place for healing wounds is also part of my vocation.*

### **How does seeking wholeness and justice lead to being merciful?**

Jim Forest wisely stated, “*One of the dangers of attempting to live a righteous life is that self-righteousness is always just a breath away. How easy it is to list the sins I haven’t committed, to catalogue the sins of others, to fill pages with my own good deeds.*” (pg. 78). When you try to make things “right” you learn that you must offer mercy to yourself and others. Confessing your shortcomings, forgiving yourself and others is essential to becoming whole. When you work towards social justice you find out how relationships are built first on humility, mercy, and forgiveness.

*God must have a sense of humor. I wonder if anyone has made an argument for the existence of God because of our ability to laugh and have fun. Agency is about purpose. Humor is about porpoise. It is ironic that the organization that I feel most wronged by is the one that has recently been the most encouraging to me. I have had to regularly forgive and offer mercy to those people who I came to loathe and despise. Mercy, mercy, mercy... I am learning that I do not need to prove anything to anyone.*

### **How does being merciful lead to purity of heart?**

When you offer mercy to others you are often made painfully aware of how you need mercy as well. When you accept your unacceptable feelings and thoughts you clean out your closet. When you make friends with your shadow you learn how to be a friend to yourself and others. When you admit your collusion with oppressive systems, your heart’s agenda is clear and nothing is hidden or cloaked with self-interest.

*On the stage that Jacob Moreno used, I did my own psychodrama work with my parents. I learned again that forgiveness is at the heart of most relationships. Last year in the inner city of Grand Rapids, I witnessed a group “sponsored by a church” purify our hearts in a process that was also described as “anti-church.” I trust that some of those folk have continued making peace with themselves and others.*

### **How does purity of heart lead to being a peacemaker?**

When you are able to see your heart clearly, you are better able to see the hearts of others to invite them *“to help repair broken bridges, pull down walls of division, and assist us in recovering a small degree of our lost communion with God and one another”* (Forest, pg. 108). Peacemaking involves making peace with one self that will naturally flow to others. Inner peace is an illusion if it is not actively involved in making outer peace. Individual therapy is futile if one is not also involved in social and global change. But social activism without doing one’s own individual work will reveal itself as pride when put to the test (e.g. persecution, competition, cooperation, etc.).

*It is painful to see how deeply conditioned my beliefs, thoughts, and feelings are by North American social constructions. My male-ness, educated-ness, middle-class-ness, Christian-ness, heterosexual-ness, able-ness, American-ness, Chinese-ness, and even Asian-ness sicken me when I see how oppressive these false identities can privilege me at the expense of others. Deconstructing my mis-taken communities appears to be leading me to an anarchist posture living within the Reign of Love. I am learning what it means to live as an anarchist. I am learning about who/what really has power and author-ity in this world.*

### **How does being a peacemaker lead to being persecuted?**

Any real or even perceived threat to the status quo or current power structures will necessarily be scrutinized, investigated, and eliminated if possible. It is very predictable, if not inevitable, that attempts at making peace will be met with resistance and various forms of persecution. Several stories could be told here to demonstrate the costs of peacemaking or the consequences of challenging those in power. First, there are attempts to “buy” you out so that you back down from actually presenting any serious threat to the status quo (e.g. grant you tenure or promise job security, publish your book, fund your speaking tour, give you a grant, etc.). Second, there are academic critiques and journalistic reviews of your activities and relationships to challenge your perspectives (e.g. spins and twists that minimize or discredit your words and practices). Third, there are people hired to infiltrate your community to get some “stuff” on you to assassinate your character and remove any credibility to your peacemaking (e.g. plagiarism, sexual improprieties, financial discrepancies or irregularities, personal indiscretions or hypocrisies, family skeletons, etc.). This list of intentional strategies to harass and beat down any serious threat to those in power could go on but it eventually ends with someone being hired to kill you. Conspiracy is not just found in fiction. Being afraid is common among those seeking peace and justice, but one learns to accept fear rather than becoming suspicious or paranoid.

*I have been racially profiled and attacked verbally several times throughout my life. I have been marginalized because of culture and race. I have been misquoted and I have had my arguments twisted by white supremacists. But, at this point in my journey, I am not sure if I have been “persecuted for righteousness sake.”*

### **How can being persecuted lead to rejoicing?**

When you actually witness a triumph of good over evil, when justice rolls down, and righteousness and peace kiss there is an exuberance that defies words. Dancing and singing are probably the only ways to express this experience.

*Sometimes, I am suspicious that this “God” idea is nothing more than a clever ruse by those in power to keep the powerless at bay waiting or praying for their “kingdom to come.” But, if this “God/Love” process is actually willing to live alternatively then it becomes a real threat rather than a pacifier. I know that through suffering there can be an inexplicable joy of being recreated. I hope that in persecution, I will eventually rejoice and be exceedingly glad as well.*

### **How does being persecuted lead to being poor in spirit?**

When you are beaten to the point where it is difficult to breathe, you realize that you need to breathe with others in Love.

This last question is to frame the Beatitudes as a cycle or spiral of growth rather than a linear process. Being “persecuted for righteousness sake” certainly foreshadows Jesus’ crucifixion, but not all paths towards Love ends with martyrdom. It has been my experience that we do not achieve or climb a ladder of spiritual maturity but continuously cycle through the processes described within Jesus’ Beatitudes. That is, the Beatitudes can be framed as a cyclical process of personal transformation and social activism:

*“When you are out of breath (**poor in spirit**), stripped of your own self-sufficiency, completely dependent on Love...*

*you weep (**mourn**) over how far away we are from living in relationship with one another...*

*you humble yourself before others (**meek**)...*

*feeling the birth pains of creation, yearning for wholeness (**hunger and thirst after righteousness**), and seeking justice...*

*you confess that you collude with the oppressor, needing to forgive (**mercy**) yourself as you forgive those who have wronged you...*

*you are honest with yourself and others (**pure in heart**), empowering...*

*you to **make peace** with your enemies, refusing to kill...*

*you are marginalized and **persecuted** to the point where...*

*you must breathe with others in Love, mourn, humble yourself, hunger & thirst for what is right, offer mercy, purify your heart, make peace, be persecuted, and breathe with others in Love...*

*and sometimes, you sense the pre-sence of Love and rejoice that the music you are dancing to has been declared “good.”*

Herein lays another attempt to make some sense of Jesus words. We are currently looking at ourselves and others through a distorted mirror but someday I believe we will have “faces” and see ourselves in Love clearly.

**Postscript:** There are parallels between Jesus’ Beatitudes and the “12 Step” program of Alcoholics Anonymous. These connections will be obvious to those folk who have actually taken the 12 Steps. This proposal is another conversation for another time and place.

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### Jesus' Beatitudes Revisited 2015 – D.J.Lee

Blessed are the poor in breath; for they will find a home breathing with others... in Love.

Blessed are they whose souls cry; for they will find hope in being with others... in Love.

Blessed are the gentle; for they will be empowered by others... in Love.

Blessed are those who yearn for justice; for they will be sustained by others... in Love.

Blessed are those who show mercy to others; for they will receive mercy from others...  
in Love.

Blessed are those that keep their hearts clear; for they will see themselves and others  
clearly... in Love.

Blessed are those who make peace; for they are living in the family of Love.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because they seek justice; for they are learning to  
be... in Love.

Blessed are you when others attack you, and plot against you, and say all kinds of false  
and evil things against you, for my sake.

Rejoice, be glad, let go of yourself, dance with abandon, and shout with joy.

Great is your reward on earth as it is in heaven; remember that you are not alone.

There were others, like Jesus and the prophets before you, who were persecuted just like  
you for learning to breathe with others... in Love.