

ARCHIVES BEATITUDES

INNER VIEWS

BEATITUDES

Beatitudes act like instant parables. They help us experience our relationship to God with the clarity of Jesus' consciousness. Parables are meant to soften the defenses of our thoughts and ideas so that we can experience the immediacy and intimacy of God's love. They do this by describing common, ordinary events as revelations of extraordinary love.

Jesus taught in parables. The newness of his message called for a new form of communication. Jesus' parables loosen the grip of the assumptions by which we habitually live, the unnoticed framework of our thinking within which we interpret our life. Parables interpret us and expose the gaps in our logic toward divine reality. They start with ordinary life and then shock our imagination into seeing our life as it has been revolutionized by unconditional Love. They are trying to bring us into the inner reality of our relationship with God. Jesus is teaching us to live with his consciousness.

For instance, Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven, God's unconditional love breaking into our lives, is like a merchant in search of a fine pearl. When he finds one of great value he sells all that he has so that he can purchase the pearl. So far this makes sense – until we realize that we are the pearl. And God is the merchant. Now we are faced with the incredible reality of God's love for us. Who would have guessed?

The Beatitudes are mini parables. To be “blessed is something we would willingly accept. But who wants to be “poor in spirit,” or “mourning,” or “persecuted”? What sense does being “gentle,” “merciful,” and a “peacemaker” make in a society that glorifies aggression, vengeance, and “looking out for number one?”

The Beatitudes question our way of getting along in this world. They mean to trip us and slow us down so that we begin to look deep inside. They are doorways to our spirit. As long as we stay in the external world, outside the door, we will be searching for God, trying to get God's attention. But when the Beatitudes lead us to the inner door we'll find that God has been inside all along. This is the way Jesus experiences reality.

For Jesus Spiritual living does not bring about improvement or perfection. It brings about a maturity, a humanity, and a wisdom, a unconditional wholeness in the sense of being able to be aware of the whole and love the whole as God does. When the Beatitudes describe us as “Blessed” this is what they are talking about. Notice “Blessed” is our present description, not something we will become by doing the right thing. You can see how the Beatitudes are already changing the way we perceive ourselves in relationship to God.

To be “Blessed” means that in knowing ourselves we simultaneously know God. When we see the truth about ourselves, we see that we are God's children: “To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). Wisdom lies in knowing God and knowing oneself. From self knowledge we rise to knowledge of God.

We begin to know ourselves by going within. We pay attention to the activity of our mind-body organism. In this way we become intimate with ourselves and understand our bodily messages, our personality, our motivation, and the many “tapes” our mind plays over and over.

We grow in intimacy with our inner self. We begin to see how our mind and our memories shape our view of the world and the way we get along in it. As we do this we can gradually shift awareness from what we see about ourselves to ourselves as the one who is seeing. We realize that we are more than the thoughts, emotions and memories coursing through our awareness. This is a parabolic shift in consciousness.

We also realize we are capable of this transcendence because we are rooted in a larger transcendence. We are grounded in God. We come to know that who we are is who God is creating us to be. Our lives are held in existence by God. This is what Jesus means when he says, “God is Love.”

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Inner Views: Beatitudes continued

Waking up, seeing, hearing, living, and finding our true self entrails more than self-knowledge and knowledge of God. St. John begins his Gospel by connecting the Word with God, with creation, and with the spiritual illumination of people. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....All things came into being through (the Word)... what has come into being in the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people.” (John 1:1-4) In other words all things are sustained by divine life. When the divine lives in the human world, it becomes a light for the mind, a way of seeing with new clarity. The light in the human mind allows people to see that Divine life is everywhere. When we wake up to the fact that we are children of God, always sustained by divine life, we also notice that everything else is also sustained by divine life. We are not separate, isolated individuals (what Jesus called living in “Gehenna” or hell) but brothers and sisters of Divine Love. In particular, we are brothers and sisters of one another, the embodiment of Jesus’ commandment to love God and our brothers and sisters as we love our own true self. If we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, we will discover ourselves as God’s love for one another. This is the meaning of Jesus’ message and his life, death and resurrection.

The Beatitudes point inward to the intimacy of God here and now. However most of our beliefs about what will allow us to survive, or what can help us solve our problems or what will make us happy, or even what will fulfill our desire to make a difference in the world all seem to point us away from here. We are always going somewhere, internally or externally – to the store, the movies, the park, the office, the restaurant, the television, the Internet, the newspaper, the latest spiritual teacher to be featured on TV, to our partners, our children, our friends, our parents, our worries, our concerns, our fears, our hopes. And on and on. We are in motion, going after, seeking out, restless, never satisfied, never at peace.

This seems to be the central dilemma of the spiritual life – that it is easier to desire what is over there than to appreciate what is right here. In fact, what is here seems to be so fundamentally inferior, less than, or inadequate compared to what is apparently over there, that it hardly seems worth the effort to look here. Why not just go over there!

Why, indeed! But Jesus tells us “Blessed are you.” When he says you are “blessed” he doesn’t mean you will be blessed. Or that you will be blessed if you do this or that. No. you are Blessed, right here, right now! You are a divine child of God. Jesus wants to awaken us to our spiritual reality. All true spirituality begins here. The Beatitudes are doorways that open us to the reality of being blessed. We have find our spirit by looking within, right here, right now. And through our spirit we find the God who is the source of our existence and our continued development. This is all happening right here and now. We don’t have to go anywhere, or get anything else to be blessed. Many consider this the essential realization in spiritual development, the key to becoming awake, seeing, hearing, living, and being found. It is not something that we choose to do but something we learn by paying attention to what is here right now.

But Jesus is not content to leave us with merely knowing that we are blessed. As we grow in awareness of the immediacy and intimacy of Gods’ love we will increasingly come to know ourselves as “Beloved.” Beloved are the poor in spirit. Beloved are those who mourn. Beloved are we.

Blessedness is our given state. Beloved ness is our awakening to God’s love throbbing within every stratum of our spirit. We can either approach ourselves with love, kindness, and compassion, or rejection, separation, fear or control. We can criticize ourselves, judge, reject, attack ourselves, push, pull, and do violence to our self. Or we can let go and trust the power of God’s love.

The point of being blessed is that our true spiritual nature is full of love, peace, strength, beauty, joy, compassion, wisdom and intelligence. These are not something we need to work at, learn, imitate or seek. They arise spontaneously as expressions of our spirit. They are God’s love being lived in our life.

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Inner Views: Beatitudes: Part 3

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Blessedness does not require you to change yourself in any way in order to find yourself! Blessedness says “stop comparing yourself to something or someone that you imagine to be better or truer or more spiritual.” The transformation from blessed to beloved is a natural, spontaneous process that occurs only when you stop being so busy trying to change yourself. This transformation happens because God is loving you into existence. God’s love grows you.

This makes sense when we pay attention to the process of growth. Everything in you is connected to everything else in you and this is why trying to change some part of your personality falls short. You are trying to change part of your self but that part is a facet of your whole being. Opening the door of blessedness does not bring about improvement or perfection. It brings about maturity, humanity, and wisdom. - wholeness in the sense of being able to be aware of the whole and love the whole which is already here, already now. After all when we say God loves us unconditionally we are talking about wholeness. Since our love is an expression of God’s love we need to let go of our conditions to let God’s love flow freely.

If this “letting go” was as easy as it sounds we would have let go by now. We have a list of traditional words that point to this reality: detachment, mortification, repentance, surrender, as well as the twelve step metaphor of hitting bottom. Jesus tells us “You have to give up your self to save your self.”

The basic attitude here is the willingness to let go of what we believe will make us become whatever it is we think we should be. We have all kinds of ideas about who we are, how things should be, and what will make our life happy, peaceful and satisfying. If we want to grow in our ability to love and relate with God’s unconditional love we have to allow our ideas, beliefs and hopes to die. Transformation means we will no longer be the person we think we are. Our hopes about the person we can become are just recycled versions of who we think we are.

A butterfly larva can only imagine itself being a bigger larva. Transformation into a butterfly is beyond the possibilities of its imagination. Improvement for a larva means working at crawling faster. It could never imagine itself flying.

We approach ourselves with fixed ideas of who we can be. We will direct our change only according to the way we are. We look to our future as improvements on the blueprint we already use. The only way we allow God to transform us is to be open and allow things to happen, allow the butterfly of our spirit to emerge out of the larva of our ego.

So we need an attitude of allowing things to emerge, to change, to transform without anticipating how this should happen. We need to be open so that we can let something that we are neither directing, nor controlling emerge out of the larva of our present self. This is the beginning of being taught to be unconditional in our lives. In this sense we are imitating God’s unconditional love so that God’s loving can emerge through our lives. This is Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom of God.

This is why the Beatitudes, at first glance, don’t easily fit into the way we want to think about ourselves. They develop us according to the logic of our spirit, which never follows a straight line. Our mind wants a clear and straight path. It wants to set goals, strategize ways of reaching those goals, and then set off in pursuit of a better self. But our spirit is more like a maze. It has dead end alleys, traffic circles that seem to route us past the same destinations over and over. Our inner path is like a supermarket when they change all the aisles. You thought you knew where to go and now you have to walk around the whole store to find what you’re looking for. However, in doing this you become familiar with those parts of yourself that you’ve never valued and often rejected. We are being taught to trust and love, to find joy in the life being given us. This is the way Jesus came to know the Father. This is how we come to know we are Beloved.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. – PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

“Blessed are you pure of heart for you shall see God”

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Our soul is our unique, personal presence and openness to divine Essence, to God as the Source of our existence. As Jesus said, “Blessed are you pure of heart for you shall see God” (Mt. 5:8)

In our openness to the divine Essence (God) as our Source, our soul develops through a series of transitions. In the first months of our life we are so completely open to God that we have no sense of our unique and personal self. We live in a blissful state of openness and receptivity to divine energy as it creates us at every moment. We experience this as a unity and bonding with our mother.

However, this divine energy also triggers the development of our unique sense of self. This development means that we begin to identify our self as separate from our divine Source. At first we identify with our body and begin to recognize a sense of separation from our mother. We realize that when she is gone from us we remain, she is more than an extension of our self. And with this comes the first hint of separation anxiety which creates a struggle without our self. We want to remain in the blissful state of unbounded connection through her but we also want to be our separate self. We experience this separation most fully as we develop the use of words and images of our body as separate. We begin to say “no: and “mine.” We live with the soul’s elation of becoming our unique self and at the same time with the loss of paradise. This is the beginning of one of the great dilemmas of our existence. We are caught between two seemingly different worlds.

However, this is also the beginning of the soul’s development into her true nature. At this moment the soul begins to express and develop herself through identifying with the thoughts, ideas, memories and expectations she has about herself. This is the beginning of ego development. It is a necessary step in recognizing our uniqueness. And if we continue on the path, without becoming fixated on our ego, this will lead us letting go of our identity with our ego (mind and memories) and reconnecting to our soul’s openness and receptivity to divine essence. But this time we will no longer be absorbed into divine Essence. Instead we will be able to relate to it, we will bring our unique self with its ability to incarnate divine Love in our concrete living.

To do this the soul must engage in a two fold process. After we develop our sense of self through identity with our ego we must begin to free our self from the rigidity and fixations of our ego’s structures in a way that retains the skills and insights we’ve learned but also leaves us open to the greater reality in which we exist. This is a reality that cannot be adequately contained in words and ideas. We are by the essence of our soul a basic creative openness to reality in all of its breadth and complexity as an expression of divine Essence. This involves freeing the soul from the constricting fixations and rigidities of her issues, conflicts, conditioning, and ego structures.

The other side of the soul’s becoming involves identifying with her essential development. This is a reconnection with our essential ground (God) in a way that uses our cognitive achievements to recognize the ground (divine loving) which is our true nature. In this part of our spiritual awakening we consciously (now that we have developed our consciousness) realize that our true nature is a non-conceptual awareness. We are an expression of the divine Presence and creative dynamism of creation. As Anthony DeMello says, we reach God by understanding that there is

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no distance between our self and God. We develop the nondual quality of our soul's basic openness.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. PATHWAYS / STILLPOINT

INNER VIEWS: Beatitudes - Poor in Spirit part 1

BLESSED ARE YOU POOR IN SPIRIT, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS YOURS

We are created to be loved and loving. We exist only in relationship. We are loved into existence or we would not exist. And we all want to be acknowledged for the beauty of who we are. We want somebody to "get us" for who we are, to delight in the beauty of our spirit

The word "spirit" refers to our life-force, the basic energy of our being. In the very first book of the Bible (Genesis) God molds the clay of the earth into a human shape and then breaths God's breath into that clay so that it becomes a living human being, alive with God's breath. We live because the very life force of God is coursing through our bodies. This life force is manifested in our desire to be loved and to be loving. Our purpose is to participate in the love that creates us at every moment.

Because of our divine origin we all have a "spiritual" life. This life force is the well spring of our meaning and of our will to live, the source of our deepest desires, value and dreams. We all crave a profound and intense involvement with life, and thrill at the sight of beauty, grace, and the rapture of being alive. And since we exist in relationship to God and one another we become conscious of our beauty only when it is acknowledged.

All too often we look for the things we most genuinely need outside of ourselves. We live in a consumer culture that teaches us that "spirit" is just another commodity, something we can help our self to by buying the right book or inhaling a "spiritual" fragrance. Our beautiful self lies veiled by all the words and concepts that our mind uses to create our ego. Our ego is merely us thinking about who we are, and then identifying with our ideas. This makes us an object in our own mind and separates us from the beauty of who we are.

We get distracted by externals and we look to being talented and successful, loved and admired, or powerful and in control, but these disguise the beauty of who we truly are. Jesus, however, clearly tells us that we must look within. He calls the inner realm of spiritual aliveness "the Kingdom of heaven ." For Jesus spirituality is not something special or extraordinary. It is a supernatural energy source that is natural to us. Spiritual energy is the intimate presence of God loving us unconditionally. Our beauty is our unique expression of this reality.

We know this intuitively. Although we find it almost impossible to put into words, we know that being loved for our gifts and talents, for what we do, or what pleases others, isn't enough. Compliments create a quick flash of warmth; praise fills us for a moment but evaporates in the heat of criticism. Affirmations lift us up but quickly lose their buoyancy. We want somebody to see through all this, to see our beauty.

We want somebody to see that part of us that cannot be put into words, reduced to a description, or defined by any mixture of qualities. Our beauty is far more than any of these, far more than anything our ego can mimic. And when somebody responds to our beauty we are reconnected to our real self.

Now here's the paradox of our spiritual path. The spiritual life is about learning to see the beauty that is both personal to us and shared with all of creation. The spiritual path leads us beyond our ego to the

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beauty of spirit, our whole self. And it is fraught with unexpected twists. It leads to our beauty through the eye opening wisdom of humility. And who would ever think that the first step toward humility is accepting the “poverty of our spirit.” Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. – PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS: Beatitudes - Poor in Spirit part 2

The “blessedness” of this Beatitude is the fullness of life that is found in humility. Blessed are those who acknowledge the poverty of their spirit, who know that all the things we strive for don’t satisfy a hunger for something we can’t grasp for our self. We are poor in spirit when we know that our only true richness / satisfaction is God and the Kingdom of God’s.

To be humble has nothing to do with disparagement. And self-loathing is just a form of ego inflation. We are good because God created us, not because of something we did for God. Jesus gives us “poor in spirit” as a doorway to our spirit because it keeps us alert to our need for and connection with God.

The Aramaic word used for “poor” creates an image of God as the foundation that we devoutly clutch, as if losing it would leave us impoverished. Blessedness is the simple yet profound joy of being that fills our consciousness when we make room by letting go of everything else. When it comes to our relationship to God love is not something we do but something to which we surrender.

Since the love to which we surrender is unconditional blessedness includes all aspects of our body, mind, and spirit. Blessedness is about being completely human, not arriving at some transcendent state in which the difficulties of being human are not present. All spiritual work is giving up the idealized self and arriving where you already are: not some place special or new, but here, where you already are. Blessedness transforms into Beloved ness not when we conquer our humanness in all its complexity and suffering, but when we learn to inhabit the basic imperfection of our human condition as the place where God is most intimately present.

Because we are humans and not ideal beings, we often lose our way in the maze of our inner world. When we take our life as it is, not as some idealized version of who we are or where we should be in our development, God enters. Being in the here and now, our poverty leaves room to receive our Beloved connection to the Divine.

Our ego longs for the simplicity of a black and white world and for the absence of everything that makes up our humanity. Our ego wants no fear of death. It wants to be clear and composed all the time. To be incredibly kind; to be wise in every situation; to be honored but never to get a swelled head; to be unconditionally loving.

Our blessed self also longs for ease. However, it knows we can experience freedom from the fear of death only by accepting the fear of death. It knows we cannot always be composed and clear, and it does not demand that of us: it knows that our beauty includes the flaws in our humanness. And pride? And the desire to be adored? These too must be held up to the light of consciousness; otherwise they will go on their merry way, underground, causing quiet but persistent mayhem! Humility is simply accepting ourselves for who we are and being willing to see ourselves for all of who we are. It is a respect for ourselves as we are, and a reluctance to force ourselves into the** abstract expectations of our ego. Humility is the never-ending adventure of coming to know all the facets of our self, seeing ourselves clearly, and learning to be at home with all of this. It is able to do this because we are Blessed.

When we pay attention to our whole self we know ourselves as limited, flawed, paradoxical and imperfect as well as gifted with divinity. We are uncertain, yet long for certainty, limited and wounded yet we crave wholeness. The paradox created by our human and divine nature is what drives us to seek salvation because it leaves us with a haunting sense of incompleteness, of being somehow unfinished. Our only hope is to resist rejecting our self by attempting to deny this paradox. To be complete we need to be humble. To be humble we need to know ourselves as Blessed.

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INNER VIEWS

BLESSED ARE YOU WHO ARE MOURNING, YOU WILL BE COMFORTED

Blessedness is the fullness of Life that is found in those things that our hearts instinctively constrict against, that seems to be beyond the capacity of our heart to bear. Poverty, persecution, mourning are not experiences that we would invite into the intimacy of our inner being

Grief is like our inner being touching a hot stove. We instinctually recoil at losing what we hold dear. As the mind stiffens against its grief, the natural spaciousness of the heart constricts. And yet there is a poignant beauty in this experience – like the flaming beauty of Autumn as it ushers in the bitterness of Winter. There's a bittersweet fittingness because it attunes us to the sacredness of our bonds of love. And the pain of grief keeps us alert to the continued reality of our communion with those we love

Who wants to hear: “Blessed are you who feel the grief and loneliness, the devastation of mourning?” But mourning is a prayerful state in which grief explodes our self-sufficiency and exposes the vulnerability of loving fragile beings. In this state our grief can blossom into compassion as it strips away our illusion of independence and control and leaves our hearts throbbing with God's love. There seems to be little consolation in this. It is not something any of us would choose. It simply is.

“Blessed” means that the comfort promised in this beatitude is already our reality. We are already God's; already divine even in our grieving. Both divine and grieving are our truth. As divine children we are alive eternally. Our nature is to be loved and loving. “Blessed” recognizes this as our truth.

Our Blessedness transforms us into “Beloved” when grief loses its monopoly on our hearts and we awaken to our divine capacity to hold both the loss and cherish the love that bursts all our barriers. The blessed mourning in this beatitude is a sacrament. Its aching emptiness points to the sacredness of what we have lost. At the same time it also points to the expectations we have imposed upon our self.

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BLESSED ARE YOU WHO ARE MOURNING, YOU WILL BE COMFORTED: Part 2

The sacramental dimension of grief is the poignancy that comes alive in our hearts in the presence of loss. No life is without its broken empty spaces. There is some corner of our heart

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that remains faithful to all that we have loved. Even years after a loss, the sight or scent of something associated with the departed can still quicken the heart. As we grow older the ruins of loss multiply and basins of grief become more familiar to our inner landscape.

Most think of grief as a debilitating sadness but it is simpler and more common than that. No life is without the abandoned wreckage of denied hopes. Every path we have chosen leaves multiple paths forsaken. Everyone grieves. Everyone seems to have some unbalanced tally sheet with life, some unfinished business.

We no longer know, because we have become accustomed to it, that we grieve the loss of our inner awareness of God's intimacy. We experience as a dissatisfaction in our life, an emptiness and desire for something we can't put our finger on. We yearn for something but we're just not sure what it is. This leaves a hole in our center that makes us cling all the more desperately to what we have. Grief is the rope burns left behind when what we have held to most dearly and hoped in most fervently is pulled out beyond our grasp.

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BLESSED ARE YOU WHO ARE MOURNING, YOU WILL BE COMFORTED: Part 3

Grief will often turn our gaze inward. However when we begin to focus on our inner life we usually don't encounter warmth, gentleness and compassion. Instead we are met by a harsh critic. When we pay attention to our inner experience we will meet judgments and fears about what we are encountering, upset or disturbance over what may have caused it, and a desire to change by denying it to our selves.

What we're seeing here is the activity of the superego. The superego is a specialized part of our ego structure that has the job of making sure we live up to the standards we learned as children so that we could get along with our families and communities. It does this by various means, including judging, criticizing, advising, and warning, encouraging, threatening, and punishing ourselves in reaction to our thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Very early in life we learn to internalize these attitudes, which means we inflict them upon our self. It's a way of coercing our self into compliance with the values and rules of the people with whom we live. This is a basic strategy for survival.

However this inner pressure on our self can soon become debilitating and ever more so when we are made vulnerable by the loss of someone or something dear to us. We have to learn how to effectively counter these pressures. We begin as soon as we become aware of the dynamic of our superego. This gives a little distance and space from its onslaughts. And this is the beginning of learning the necessity of forgiveness and compassion. We wonder, looking into the warped mirror of our superego, why what is reflected back seems so distorted, so unacceptable, so

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unwhole, and unlovable. It seems to feel our grief. And it will continue until we find forgiveness for the imperfection and messiness of being human.

We cannot talk ourselves out of grief – no rational argument can stand up to it. At best our mind can distract us for the moment but the seeds of grief are planted in the shadows that hide our human limitations, our inability to live up to the abstract demands of our self-imposed expectations. When the vulnerability of our grief allows the exaggerated expectations and demands of who we must be to flood us emotionally we need to look beyond our self for healing.

Forgiveness belongs to the divine. It is God's act: something other, something that is not ours; and unless our faith and support from others helps us acknowledge this we will remain engulfed in our grief. Its otherness is in its very name; "forgiven" is "given-b-fore". It is not ours to grasp but ours to receive; we cannot create it for our self. The healing takes time and forgiveness results from the healing. We do not do it to our self, forgiveness happens to us as we learn to let go and stop rubbing salt into our wounds. Slowly, subtly, almost imperceptibly, there is a shift in our perspective that allows us to relate to our self and to others with fewer demands and judgments.

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INNER VIEWS BLESSED ARE YOU, THE GENTLE THE EARTH IS YOUR INHERITANCE

"No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son reveals the Father. And here is how I know the Father – by being Gentle & Humble of Heart" Jesus wants to share his consciousness with us – his way of knowing and relating to God

The Beatitudes are Christ's consciousness of living in a world bigger than the one our ego creates for our survival. This is the world of our spirit and to live there our spirit needs to be opened, stretched, surrendered to God's world. Only God is big enough to hold all of our contradictions, to love all of our limitations and difficulties, and heal all our wounded lives. All of us, every part, with nothing left out, is held in existence by God's love. This is what it means to be "Blessed."

We are "Blessed" because we are being loved into existence at this moment. But Jesus wants this blessedness to transform us into his state of consciousness, of being Beloved. He wants us to learn to love God and one another as God loves us. Love is the only way we can know God. Our mind simply isn't big enough. Thoughts and ideas just reduce God to our ego. There's no way you can love God until you accept God for who God is, unconditional love.

This Beatitude uses gentleness as the door way into God's world of unconditional love. Jesus invites us into this world: *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble of heart..."*

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Notice that Jesus isn't asking us, "who labor and are heavily burdened" to do more. No's he's saying "Stop working so hard, set your burden down. Learn from me, I am gentle and humble of heart." Gentleness is the ability to find rest because we trust that God is holding us in existence and acting as the Wise Source of our living.

Here's the paradox. It's our laboring, our working so hard, our carrying around the burden of trying to be perfect, our attempts at imposing our will on our life, that stops our spirit from being itself and becoming the resource its meant to be in our life. The intrinsic nature of the spirit is to be pure clarity, transparency, luminosity, and awareness. The spirit is our capacity to see things as they are.

Jesus is the path of humble acceptance of God's love, rather than struggling to make ourselves lovable. This calls for humility because it means we have to accept our selfish, impatient, often recalcitrant humanness. And most importantly it means we accept that we cannot control every aspect of our lives. What a burden to think we could or should be able to control our lives. And what a relief it is to set this burden down.

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INNER VIEWS BLESSED ARE YOU, THE GENTLE THE EARTH IS YOUR INHERITANCE Part 2

Blessed, healthy in spirit, are those who have softened what is rigid within; they shall receive vitality and strength from the heavenly Father. As we learn to trust our Father's unconditional love we soften our rigid striving and learn to live from the real source of all power, divine life acting through our earthiness and our humanness. This softening is a form of surrender that leaves us vulnerable to the expansiveness of our Father's kingdom of heaven and earth.

We all long for peace of spirit, the Blessedness of inheriting this earthly existence as a place free from all the struggles and sadness, conflicts and criticisms, desire and longings, fear, anxiety and hostility that plagues so much of our life. We want to settle into our real self instead of fabricating our self or working at being our self. We're tired of reacting to one thing or the other. We want to act from the peacefulness of our spirit, instead of reacting too all these things that intrude in our lives. We love the possibility of being our self, of feeling real and simply being at home in our real self. We've had moments of this home coming but they have been so fleeting and mercurial that we're not sure that they were real.

These moments of being ourselves are a genuineness that comes from being open to the gentleness of our spirit. When we are being ourselves we feel intimate, close to our self, without any distance from our divine Source. Our heart is open, our mind is clear, our spirit is settled. There is no thickness, inner agitation, or fighting within our self. We experience an inner unity happening within us that feels peaceful, relaxed, contented and light hearted. Our spirit feels the blessing of satisfaction with all that is. This is the door that Jesus is opening to us in this Beatitude.

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Gently laying down our burden and trusting in God's love means allowing our selves to be vulnerable. To find true rest is to give up the burden of being something that we are not and cannot possibly be. To find true rest is to give up the burden of finding our value, self worth in what we have and have accomplished. To find true rest is to give up the judgments we inflict upon others and upon ourselves for failure in perfection. To find true rest is to accept the gift and reality of God as the only true center of our security and value. This is the gentle yoke. But we are so accustomed to carrying the burdens that we feel naked and exposed without them. We feel vulnerable.

Being our self means coming to terms with this vulnerability. Vulnerability is the door opening our spirit to God as the love that is our basic living energy. It is living in awareness before the mind reacts with its judgments. Here we come face to face with our fragility. Our ego was created as a way of protecting this inner delicacy and we are told to live with the vulnerability of letting go.

As human beings we are essentially vulnerable, our natural state is to be undefended. In fact the sense of security that our ego constructs by building defensive walls is delusional. When it comes to real danger we *are* vulnerable and our ego can create a false sense of security. But our vulnerability is also the quality of our humanness, our being created as the earthy- divine incarnation. It is a heart quality of openness and gentleness that is needed to love all of who we are and to live with it. We cannot truly recognize who we are without this gentleness and this humble humanness. We must be all of this if we want to be aware of and learn to love our whole self. This is how we come to experience the reality of God's love.

Vulnerability in the face of danger feels frightening, but in the absence of danger, vulnerability can simply feel natural, undefended, peaceful, our self. So we have a dilemma. We are scared, we want to protect ourselves, but at the same time we want to be real. How are we going to solve this paradox? How do we protect ourselves against danger and still be real?

We need to take care of our self. We get professional health care as we need it, we brush our teeth, we take reasonable precautions when we are walking in an unsafe neighborhood, we do not do drugs and so on. We use our intelligence to do what is necessary and we defend ourselves physically if that is called for. But inside we remain open, supple, and gentle. In this way we begin to appreciate vulnerability as a human quality that gives us openness to reality, to perception, to our spirit in all of its expressions.

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INNER VIEWS
 BLESSED ARE YOU, THE GENTLE
 THE EARTH IS YOUR INHERITANCE
 Part 4

We cannot be ourselves if we don't experience our vulnerability, because vulnerability is just the beginning of experiencing the gentleness and the exquisiteness of being genuine. In time, we learn that we can feel completely undefended without it feeling scary, without feeling that we need to defend ourselves, without the need for those inner walls.

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Living with our vulnerability will also allow us to share our unique personality and talents in a more effective way. When we live with the illusion of power and control we often strive to improve the situation through argument or persuasion. These may produce some momentary gain but they also violate others' spiritual space. They may create compliance but they will not support the spirit. Enduring results, which are achieved through freeing the spirit depend on our integrity, our ability to relate form our whole personality. In this wholeness is the acceptance of Love and with our integrity comes the passing on of creative possibilities

Because striving is based on inner doubt, it negates any influence we might have. Our doubt further inhibits others' ability to find their way, and prevents God from transforming the situation. To empower truth and engage the creative force of Love, we need the vulnerability that allows us to trust God's work in this situation.

Again, the paradox, we take up the gentle yoke by letting go. When we let go we live in the moment, not feeling the pressure to achieve something, not thinking about winning or losing or worrying about acting foolish, breaking away from the neurosis of restraint or defense, enjoying the beauty of the moment yet not holding onto it, letting go without thinking about the need to let go, feeling the happiness without hoping for the happiness to continue, having no ego or attachment to anything. We let our self be vulnerable to what is.

When we begin to let God be the center of our self-knowledge we come to an awareness, no longer of limitation, but of burgeoning potential. It is not just fantasy, creating self-images that we pretend to be and strain to imitate. Instead we begin to experience ourselves as God's gift. Or, as Jesus says in the Gospel, "*Father, what you have hidden from the wise and intelligent you have revealed to the infants.*"

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INNER VIEWS BLESSED ARE YOU MERCIFUL, FOR YOU WILL BE SHOWN MERCY. Part 1.

Mercy is God's love freely given. We can't grab it, nor do we merit it. It is our Father's joy to be merciful. Mercy is our Father sustaining us as "Beloved children." For those of us who are used to working for our keep, attaining our place in life, and trying to get what we deserve, this can be a humbling experience. At the same time, accepting God's mercy helps us let go of our accumulated self-expectations. It returns us to the true ground of our dignity, worth and meaning as manifestations of our Father's love.

Mercy is not mercy until it exists in the concrete situations of our lives. Our Gospels begin with a very concrete image of mercy that is meant to slip past our defenses and free our spirit. Mercy is an infant born in a manger.

In Jesus Christ, the infant God claims our hearts by becoming as fragile and dependent as we are. God becomes dependent on our good will. God knows what it means to need our love freely given just because he is in need.

Out of love for us God becomes us. From that moment on everything in human history takes on its true perspective against that background. The mightiest human efforts and achievements are put into perspective against the back drop of this child. A child born of humans, a son given by God. We are talking about the birth of a child. Not the revolutionary act of a conqueror, Not the breathtaking discovery

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of a scientist. Not the pious act of the devote. Because of this we must learn to reverence childlike powerlessness and dependence.

And here is the wonder and the mystery: this child is born for us, is given to us. This human child, this son of God belongs to us. We are his and he is ours - a new humanity is being created. God is softening us up. Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy. In a sense this breaks the general spiritual principal that spiritual gifts must first be given by God and received by us. and then in our giving what we have received they become ours. In the case of mercy, however, God prepares us to receive mercy by first being merciful ourselves. Our hearts need to soften before we'd be ready for the gift.

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INNER VIEWS

BLESSED ARE YOU MERCIFUL, FOR YOU WILL BE SHOWN MERCY. Part 2

Christ on the cross is the response of God to the scandal of human violence. God calls to our heart with deep tenderness knowing that we are exhausted trying to be our own god. God calls in the Word who lives with our poverty and powerlessness, sharing our vulnerability. God calls us with the Word who is all that we are and love for all that we are.

Jesus' role is far more than a teacher or a good example, or even a moral guide. It is more intimate. Jesus is God with us in every possible way, and his human existence incarnates God's love for us in all of our humanness. The cross also confronts us with the consequences of our wound. The cross of Christ confronts us with our power and our helplessness; our power to inflict violence and pain, and our helplessness to do anything about it.

Do we judge ourselves and others? Here is the one for whom judgment leads to death. Do we reject? Here is rejection of both the Son and the Father. Do we seek power? The violence we inflict on others is an extension of the violence we exact upon ourselves. Well, here is what power does to the loving one and here is where weakness triumphs. Do we continue the violence in our own lives? Jesus does not continue the violence; "Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Jesus' mercy leaves him vulnerable. He is not self-protective nor angry nor fearful. His power and authority lie in compassion, non-judgmental awareness and generosity. He invites a loving response so that we who are Blessed can lower our self-protective barriers and can give up our violence to find our self to be Beloved.

The haunting image of Jesus, so totally vulnerable on the cross, grooms the tenderness of our heart to respond to mercy. If we respond to the innocent man on the cross with great love we will find that our most sincere efforts at being in control, being secure and successful are useless in relieving his plight. In the light of his cross we find that we are even more helpless than he. And if we're lucky, if we're willing to accept the grace of this moment of powerlessness, we may find that Jesus' way through helplessness is our way through helplessness.

Powerlessness is full of grace. Helplessness is where God awaits us. Powerlessness and helplessness deflate our ego-mind of all its pretensions. When we are stripped of all the illusions of power we find that we continue to exist and our continued existence is what we share with all of our sisters and brothers.

The cross is the Father and Son's determination to meet us where we are, love us for who we are, and open us to healing and wholeness. Jesus accepted suffering because we cannot avoid suffering. By

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plunging into suffering and death Jesus exposes the ultimate illusion of separation from our Father. This is the pivotal revelation that every person is one who is of God, from God, and held close to God's heart through all adversity - forever. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. This is the mercy that is ours, the mercy that makes us Beloved.

God does not send suffering or helplessness into our lives. But the revelation of the Cross of Christ is that God is there in our suffering and helplessness. God is merciful, God never abandons us. Nothing can drive God away from our hearts.

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INNER VIEWS BLESSED ARE YOU MERCIFUL, FOR YOU WILL BE SHOWN MERCY. Part 3.

The cross of Christ reveals the stark reality of our condition, we are both perpetrators and victims. For we too suffer anguish, personal humiliations and fears; we are betrayed, undergo loss and loneliness. We are vulnerable to violence and this leaves us vulnerable to doing violence, even to the most innocent of all victims. We have the power to inflict violence yet we have little power to do anything about it.

Intimacy happens only when we are vulnerable. God's mercy is the recognition that our revulsion to our retaliation and violence can open our spirit in a way that nothing else can.

When we look back on the decisions we made and the actions we performed, we will be tempted to turn the violence on our self. We can also try to justify our self, although we'll feel the self deception darkening our spirit.

But if we give up judging ourselves or justifying ourselves and count our self among the "tax collectors and sinners," we will find that we have turned into the people whom Jesus seeks out, the people ready to hear about the mercy of God.

We can rest and be renewed by this mercy that softens our fierce and violent condemnations of our self and others. We who are Blessed with mercy will be the merciful Beloved.

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INNER VIEWS BLESSED ARE YOU WHO HUNGER AND THRIST FOR RIGHTNESS YOU WILL BE SATISFIED. Part 1

Righteousness means that we learn to ground our point of view in God's intimate presence and unconditional love. Matthew's Gospel (5:48) puts it this way: "You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is Perfect." This, however, does not convey its meaning very clearly. Ken Wilber teaches "It is not what a person says, but the level from which they say it that determines the truth of a spiritual statement." A spiritually mature person could use the word perfection and know they are talking about God's perfection abiding in us. An immature person will think of it as a moral achievement that they can

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attain by trying harder. A more accurate understanding of this statement would be “Live generously and graciously toward others, the way God is living toward you.”

Our beliefs and moral injunctions become narrow and rigid if taken too literally. They are meant to point us to the inner reality of God’s presence, loving us into existence and the Source of our loving actions toward each other. They bring us into a mystery we cannot possess but which we can only approach with awe, unknowing and only relate to with love. Our faith matures as we begin the transformation from an external approach to our beliefs and activities to an internal connection with the unconditionally loving presence of God as the Source of all that is good, satisfying, life giving, love giving and worthwhile in our lives.

We see this in Jesus’ encounter with the rich young man. “What good must I do” the young man asks. And Jesus immediately shifts the focus from “what” is good to “who” is good. “There is only One who is good.” Jesus tells him. It’s not about you being good but about letting God be your goodness. (Mt. 19:16-22). The young man isn’t ready for this and walks away. Jesus comments, “I assure you, only with difficulty will a rich man enter into the kingdom of God: it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle’s eyes...” And when his disciples protest because in their minds riches are a sign of righteousness Jesus drives his point home with these wonderfully compassionate words, “For man it is impossible; but for God all things are possible.” (Mt. 19: 23-26.)

Our goal is not personal or private perfection and wholeness, which is clearly impossible but has been held up to us as a necessity. Where the text finally points and leads is to the total mystery of divine union – and nothing less. Only those who have begun to experience God’s desire for them as well as God’s grace, forgiveness, love, union will live the prophetic call to righteousness appropriately. The call easily disintegrates into ego enhancement and ego ammunition instead of prophetic action.

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BLESSED ARE YOU WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTNESS YOU WILL BE SATISFIED Part 2

Happy are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. They shall be satisfied. Most Bibles to this day use righteousness to soften the justice to which we are called. Righteousness has a kind of "religious" feeling. But the word in Greek is clearly *justice*. To live a just life in this world is to live a life identified with God’s kingdom which brings all of us together as sisters and brothers. We are partners in this kingdom which means we have a creative and active role in providing realistic opportunities for all God’s children. The prophetic call is to give our flesh and blood to our Father’s plan for saving his beloved children.

This call is not about imposing our political or theological opinions any more than it is about denying the problems and looking the other way. It demands that we hold these seemingly opposites together long enough to see through them. This is contemplation. Righteousness is both a contemplative and prophetic, reflective and active calling.

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A prophet must be capable of spiritual depth – and that always includes a demanding capacity for self reflection as well as a love for honesty. This happens through relationships, community and prayer all of which open us to a world bigger than our own mind set.

Prophecy begins at home; we must play the prophet to ourselves before we can dare to be prophetic for anyone else. And we must be able to challenge both ends of the spectrum, to continually remind ourselves that the cup is neither half full nor half empty. It's both at the same time. Reality cannot be reduced to simple either / or formulas. Definition makes for accuracy but not necessarily reality. The blessedness of this prophetic door opens to wisdom which is always more than mere facts. It demands transformation of consciousness so that we move beyond the dualistic win/lose mind.

Religion has always said that an authentic God encounter is the quickest and truest path to such wisdom it is the ultimate securing that allows us to creatively deal with the essential impermanence and insecurity of everything else. It is the changing of Reference Point that puts God first and then self. Once this happens everything else falls into its proper perspective.

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BLESSED ARE YOU WHO HUNGER AND THRIST FOR RIGHTNESS YOU WILL BE SATISFIED Part 3

Wisdom is responding to reality as it is, meeting reality in its most simple, immediate, and contradictory form. This meeting happens when we let go of our judgments and expectations.

Without prayer prophetic activists end up as ideologues. We're trapped in our heads, our opinions, our righteous selves. Maybe we're doing the right thing, but from an egocentric place, not a place of unitive consciousness, the place where God is our Source. In other words, even if we're doing a good thing the agenda is ours instead of God's.

The second temptation of Jesus in the desert illustrates this vividly. Satan takes him up to the pinnacle of the temple, symbolizing the religious world, and tells him to play righteousness games with God. Throw yourself off and he'll catch you (Matthew 4:6). The devil can quote Scripture with the best of us. This temptation is the need to be right and to think of our self as saved, superior, the moral elite standing up for God and our religion, and quoting Scriptures for our own purpose.

More evil has come into the world this kind of righteous ignorance than by people who have intentionally sinned. Being convinced that I have the whole truth and have God committed to my side, my dogmas, and my right response (I am baptized, I made a personal decision for Jesus, I go to church), is living in the deadly desert of spiritual pride. The devil in this emptiness is the need to be right no matter what the truth is.

Pride separates. Love unites. Pride compares, judges, divides and rejects. Love unites, accepts, heals and welcomes the stranger in all of us. Pride is in the mind, which by its very nature compares and competes, judges and distinguishes. Love is our spiritual essence, which by its nature is unconditioned awareness and energy given freely for the well being of the other.

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The hidden trap is this, if you decide to be less prideful you have just increased your pride. But if you recognize your pride without judgment, if you can accept it and let it connect you to God's love and mercy, healing begins.

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BLESSED ARE YOU WHO HUNGER AND THRIST FOR RIGHTNESS YOU WILL BE SATISFIED Part 4

When God sees us in our pride God knows that we are becoming our own worst enemies, and we don't even know it. We are blinding ourselves to our need for God's love, God's healing, and God's presence. We are isolating ourselves by pushing one another away, as well as pushing ourselves away from our own reality. This leaves us feeling even more vulnerable and defensive. And so we climb up on a pedestal to gain the high ground while we close our eyes to our own faults. And God knows it's dangerous to stand on a pedestal with you eyes closed.

This is why love is the heart of our prophetic action. We need to reconnect, to turn back to God as our source. We need to trust Love instead of our ego and to accept our solidarity in humanness, sin, and redemption. We come to be thankful that God is God, and we are not.

Our Blessedness transforms to Beloved ness when we let God teach us to love unconditionally. We can't just learn on our own because unconditional love isn't native to our ego. Our ego is made to help us survive. And it doesn't recognize other possibilities. This is why Jesus tells us "You have to die to yourself to save yourself." Our ego is far too small for God, like a thimble trying to hold the ocean.

But when we are taught and learn to love unconditionally, to love God for who God is, without expectations, we'll experience the great gift, the gift that we've been wanting all along but couldn't recognize because our ego blinded us. We will be re-created as a vessel with room for all that exists, loving ecstatically and spontaneously. We will be a vessel without boundaries or shape, an openness to unconditional love and presence to God as God is.

We enter into this path of learning to love unconditionally, this apprenticeship to God, through prayer, through simply asking for the gift of love. The purpose of prayer is simply learning to be present to who God is. God is already giving us everything, already loving us unconditionally. This is the great surprise of the Beatitudes. They are the doors to our spirit. And when we open the door we find that God is already here. Prayer connects us to the living God, who is far more than any of our points of view. In prayer God will teach us to be open and honest, to see through our agendas and limited perspectives

In prayer we will meet a God unlike anything a god is supposed to be. He doesn't answer every desire even when we work hard at placating him. His only consistent quality is to love us intimately. The more we fail, the more our wound shows itself the more he reaches out to us. This is the ultimate liberation of blessed righteousness. It liberates us from our expectations so that we can participate in all of life, in the real world as it is.

From this vulnerable position life itself will always be our teacher. In this Reign of God there are no liberals or conservatives, males or females, Greeks, Jews, Gentile or Muslims. In God's Kingdom life and earth, success and failure, loyalty to what is and risk for what needs to be all embrace one another. We are being asked to live in the mystery that bears all of them. We are being removed far away from religions convention as a excuse for conservatism, fundamentalism, or political correctness of any kind. Real

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Christian orthodoxy accepts the paradox of holding together all those things that normally seem incompatible.

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BLESSED ARE YOU WHO HUNGER AND THRIST FOR RIGHTNESS
YOU WILL BE SATISFIED Part 5

When our ego is involved the most incompatible realities are other people. We find our prophetic and blessed self only through the way we live within the community of our brothers and sisters. Our nature is to belong. Being human requires more than one. We exist only in relation to others. Our life is created by others, our identity is discovered in the mirror of our relationship to others, even our name comes from others. Sharing our reflections with is a powerful and vital part of engaging our spirit in the flesh and blood of our lives.

Rather than asking why we need community it may be more important to ask how we need others. Spirituality's answer to that question is that human beings need each other precisely in relationships of mutuality. Mutuality is the awareness that life's most precious realities –love, wisdom, joy- are attained only in the giving of them and are given only in the openness to receive them. This is the heart and soul, body and blood of Jesus' message. We need one another. There is no gift without a giver and a receiver. Love thrives in giving and receiving.

In relationships of mutuality we give by getting and get by giving, recognizing that we truly gain only what we seek to give and that we are able to give only that which we have already received. Even our relationship with God becomes real only in relationship to one another. *“Love consists in this: it is not we who loved God, but God loved us and sent his Son to heal our sins,, if God loved us so much we should love one another. No one has ever seen God, but as long as we love one another God remains in us and his love comes to its perfection in us.”* (1 John 4:10, 11)

The spiritual aliveness, the healing and redemption that we are all looking for happens only in a community of love. This community of love is spiritual above all in its earthiness. This is not a place of angels and pure spirits, filled with sweetness and delight and heavenly bliss, but a very fragile place, a vulnerable place, a place of loss, a place where wounded and sinful people seek to receive and give the love that heals. Community is the realization that we are bound together by our woundedness and separated by power, prestige and the need to control.

Our need for mutuality arise from our very woundedness and imperfection: it originates in the fact that by ourselves we are never enough. The mystery in which we are all immersed is that loving is an experience of God (1 John 4:8). Love becomes a way of life because, in God, love and life are two dimensions of the same reality: *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8). The joy of life comes in loving.

God's basic building block for passing on his love is not the “saved” individual, or the rightly informed believer, dedication to ministry, or even accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior, but precisely the journey and bonding process that is vital to marriages, families, tribes, nations, peoples, and churches who are seeking to involve themselves in his love. The body of Christ, the spiritual family, is God's strategy. *“May they all be one... so that the world may believe it you who sent me...that they may be one as we are one, with me in them and you in me”* (John 7:21,23) As we share our different perspectives and experiences we discover a shared unity. We are in this together with our spouses, our friends and the God to whom we belong.

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