

Beatitudes for the Workplace

One of Jesus' best-known teachings is 'The Beatitudes,' ref. Matthew, 5: 3-11. Jesus gave nine, Good News-promises of how God helps us in difficult times.

Each Beatitude begins with, *Blessed*, which means, *happy or fortunate*. Next is a life issue, which relates to our experiences. Jesus encourages us with good news of the difference he makes in our lives.

Blessed are:

- the poor in spirit – when our spirits are broken
- they who mourn – grief touches every part of life
- the meek – when we feel powerless
- they who hunger for righteousness (*right relationship*) – what it means and how to nurture it
- the merciful – given and received
- the pure in heart – focusing our attention on God
- the peacemakers – peace in our lives and places of work
- the persecuted – when we feel bullied
- the ridiculed – opposition for practicing God's values

The Beatitudes apply to every part of life – including our work. We should expect workplace-relevance, because we spend most of our waking time and energies in the workplace. God's interest in our daily lives and work is a recurring theme in Scripture, evident in much of what Jesus taught, did, and modeled for us.

In nine installments, the Beatitudes will be explained in the context of our workplace experiences. Following is the first installment on brokenness of spirit.

Blessed are the poor in spirit...

Of all life experiences to begin with, Jesus' choice of this one says much about how serious it is for him and us. Few life experiences are more debilitating than brokenness of spirit. Some background information explains.

Jesus' ministry teaches us that God wants our work to be fulfilling. But, experience tells us that work can be dysfunctional, draining our energy, affecting our families, and breaking our and their spirits.

North American medical research reports, more than 60% of people experience stress-related health issues in their workplaces. A survey released in August reports how 'nasty' employees have a better chance of being promoted than 'nice' ones. Millions of people are unemployed, under-employed (not enough quality or quantity of work), or over-employed (too much work). Others are among the workplace-wounded, suffering from dehumanizing corporate policies.

In response, we may shout out, *“Hey, God, where are you?”*

Jesus understands our cries and their causes. He came into the world to experience life as we do, and do something about it. So, his workplace experiences are significant for us. Some of these include:

- rejection: his home town’s neighbours tried to throw him off a cliff because they didn’t like what he taught
- persecution: religious leaders harangued him because they didn’t like his ministry
- overloading: crowds so drained him, he had to escape for rest and prayer
- stress: hours before his crucifixion, he prayed, *Lord, spare me...but your will, not mine, be done*
- broken spirit: he cried from the cross, *My God, why have you forsaken me?*

Following are some ways he helps us when our spirits are broken.

1) Be open to the possibility that Jesus can make a difference in our lives. To have doubts, questions, anger or numbness is normal. Whatever faith we have – and we always have some - is enough. So, let us hang on to what we have and honor it.

2) Jesus empathizes with us. When our spirits are broken, Jesus knows what we’re going through. He has been there, done that, and knows what it feels like. Empathy is a strong bond. His being with us does not depend on our feelings. Even when we feel he’s not here, he is. Let us try to be accept this truth.

3) Prayer helps. Prayer does not need special language, posture or place. Prayer is being with God. God wants to be with us, and is infinitely more eager to hear from us than we are to hear from God.

When Jesus’ spirit was broken, he cried out, *My God, why have you forsaken me?* His prayer was responded to with such peace and hope, he was able in his next breath to say, *into your hands, I commend my spirit.*

Jesus encourages us to put our brokenness at God’s feet...and see what happens. Then, expect God to respond.

4) Jesus helps us is through his church communities. Here, we find people who respect our dignity, and are willing to stand with us, listen, care, and pray with. Some churches offer small group programs, as resources enable, to help with employment-related needs. Churches that don’t can recommend churches that do.

God’s communities offer us dignity, safety, and compassion. We can meet other people who, like us, have broken spirits; brokenness is a widespread problem! Meeting others helps us recognize: *I’m normal. What I’m experiencing is not normal,*

and others experience it, too. Standing with others gives us opportunities for healing we might not otherwise have.

5) Good News helps us. The following Bible passages address broken spirits:

Isaiah 43: 1-7 God - who created us - calls us by name, cares for us, and always stands with us. As we go with God, harmful experiences will not overcome us. God and we will prevail. Verse 4 explains God's motives, *...you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you.*

The Gospels Jesus was falsely accused, denied justice, deserted by his followers, and crucified. While dying, his spirit broke. God's Spirit blessed him. God resurrected him.

Conclusion:

Ironically, brokenness of spirit puts us on holy ground – a place of blessings with Jesus. When we hit bottom, we find Jesus there. He extends his hands to us in blessing. He guides us towards healing.

So, as painful as brokenness is, Jesus blesses us as he and we share our experiences, deepen our relationships, and grow in faith, which follows. Blessings continue as Jesus helps us find new life, hope and opportunities.

Brokenness – Empathy – Help - Resurrection

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

D. Browning
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