

“Home: Seeing and Sharing our Blessings and Struggles”
Matthew 5:1-12

How are you feeling? What are you feeling right now? How many of you checked in with yourself this morning when you woke up? Do you ever check in with yourself asking: What am I feeling right now?

Often times, our emotional intelligence is limited, even when it relates to our own feelings. We think of a limited range of emotions. One tool that I have seen to be helpful to expand our range and our awareness is the Mood Meter developed by Marc Brackett:



Here is a video about the Mood Meter for educators. It will give you an idea of how this could be a helpful tool: <https://youtu.be/sqJzJboG8go>

Another helpful insight about feelings and empathy comes from psychologist Hillary McBride who emphasizes the importance of feeling our feelings so that we are able to connect more deeply to ourselves and to others. She notes, “Although our feelings are personal (in that they are about us), there is a direct link between emotional regulation and conversations about social justice. Because of how our brains are wired, we are meant to feel emotions in our bodies in response to the emotions of others. But when we cannot feel our feelings, or haven’t been allowed to, we can be confused about how to respond to the emotional expression of others. We may try to make someone else’s feelings go away or dismiss them to avoid having to feel the emotions that get stirred in us when they invite us to see the hurt they have experienced.”

Why is it hard to feel our feelings?

McBride answers it this way: “We were discouraged from feeling through shame, punishment, rejection, isolation, or the sense that our feelings would overwhelm the

person we were hoping would help us. When we did feel, it was unbearable. We didn't know how to feel, how to soothe ourselves, or how to get through to the other side. Or we had to do it alone, but it was overwhelming and terrifying. We learned that feeling wasn't allowed for our particular identity or context...we failed to learn that emotions rise and then eventually fall, and that we will be on the other side of the feeling at some point."

All of this is to say that empathy is not that easy for us! Since we have trouble feeling our own feelings, it is hard to have empathy for others, while staying grounded and not getting overwhelmed by the pain and suffering of others.

In his Beatitudes, Jesus gives us an incredible gift of how to have empathy and self-agency as well. Jesus had already started his public ministry. Just before his sermon on the mount and the giving of the Beatitudes which we will read shortly, he had touched the sick and saw the many afflictions of his people. Jesus was not afraid of empathy because he was grounded in his own spirit and in the Spirit of God. He knew the truth about feelings. They were created by God to help us navigate life. So when the crowd came to him, he connected to their experiences of pain, but he also reminded them that they have within them the power of God which lifts up those who are suffering through the power of love. Jesus was not afraid to touch the lepers, the sick, and to lift up those who are often neglected and overlooked in society. He saw them as the ones who were most receptive to the good news he was bringing. These were the ones who were longing for God's healing. The powerful were the ones who were cut off from that source of divine love in their lives. Let's listen to Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

And now we will watch a video explaining the radical nature of these sayings:

[The Beatitudes Meaning in the Bible | Watch an Explainer Video \(bibleproject.com\)](https://www.bibleproject.com/beatitudes-meaning)

The beatitudes are not passive blessings of the people who are suffering. They are about Jesus entering fully into these struggles with people but also seeing the potential in each of these situations for people to bring healing to the world. Those who are downcast, poor in spirit, are the ones who know how to long for the kingdom of God. They are the ones who can help others to find the light in the midst of darkness. They are not afraid of feelings and our human struggles.

Those who mourn know the importance of comfort and of comforting others. Those who are overlooked by society know how important it is to see others. Those who are longing for justice are the ones who know the importance of advocating for others. Those who are compassionate know how to receive compassion. Those who know that they need God's grace know that God's grace comes to us even when we are a mixed bag of light and shadow. Those who are willing to enter into conflict zones to bring peace, know that God is being born in our midst when we bring peace to a difficult situation.

The beatitudes were not passive blessings at all! Through them Jesus was speaking out of the depth of his empathy and was inviting his followers to see the importance of the work of God in and through these difficult emotions and sufferings we experience in life. What we normally like to shut out and avoid, God enters wholeheartedly and transforms. By entering into the suffering of others, Jesus brought healing to them. The same is true of us when we can enter into the suffering and blessings of others.

In his book *How to Know a Person*, David Brooks writes, "To recover from painful traumas, people need to live through experiences that contradict what happened to them earlier in their lives. Someone who has been abused has to experience intimacy that is safe. Someone who has been abandoned has to experience others who stayed. This is the kind of knowledge and learning that is held at the cellular level. The rational brain is incapable of talking the emotional body out of its own reality, so the body has to experience a different reality firsthand. Empathetic people are able to provide that kind of physical presence."

Seeing and sharing the blessings and struggles of one another at that deep level, as Jesus did for the crowd, we can bring a depth of belonging to ourselves and to the people of our lives that is healing. Developing our Emotional Intelligence and capacity to behold the experiences of others while seeing the potential for ourselves and for the other can lead us from a passive or defensive posture in life to those who become the salt of the earth and the light of the world as Jesus has called us to be.

One of the prayers I love is called *The Welcoming Prayer*. This is about dealing with our own afflictive feelings as they rise up within. One way that I think we can also use this prayer is by practicing it with others in their times of distress where we empathize but also invite the power of God to become evident for us in the experience.

THE WELCOMING PRAYER

The Welcoming Prayer is a method of actively letting go of thoughts and feelings that support the false-self system. Developed by Mary Mrozowski, one of the founders of Contemplative Outreach, the Welcoming Prayer invites God to dismantle the emotional programs of the false-self system and to heal the emotional wounds we've stored in the body. The method of the Welcoming Prayer includes noticing the feelings, emotions, thoughts and sensations in your body, welcoming them, and then letting them go. Practicing the Welcoming Prayer offers one the opportunity to make choices free of the false-self system — responding instead of reacting to the present moment. The purpose of the Welcoming Prayer is to deepen one's relationship with God by consenting to God's healing presence and action in the ordinary activities of daily life.

Instructions

When you have a difficult emotional experience in daily life, take a moment to be still and silent and follow these steps.

1. **Focus**, feel and sink into the feelings, emotions, thoughts, sensations and commentaries in your body.
2. **Welcome** God in the feelings, emotions, thoughts, commentaries or sensations in your body by saying, "Welcome."
3. **Let go** by repeating the following sentences:
 - "I let go of the desire for security, affection, control."
 - "I let go of the desire to change this feeling/sensation."

THE WELCOMING PRAYER BY FATHER THOMAS KEATING

Welcome, welcome, welcome.
 I welcome everything that comes to me today
 because I know it's for my healing.
 I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons,
 situations, and conditions.
 I let go of my desire for power and control.
 I let go of my desire for affection, esteem,
 approval and pleasure.
 I let go of my desire for survival and security.
 I let go of my desire to change any situation,
 condition, person or myself.
 I open to the love and presence of God and
 God's action within. Amen.