The Beatitudes

Much is made of Jesus's list of blessings.

Matthew 5 (New International Version (NIV)

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and He said: 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 be shown 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 because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

In a law oriented theology these have been interpreted as prescriptive....In order to enter the kingdom of heaven you better be poor in spirit, meek, mournful, hungry for righteousness, merciful, a peacemaker. etc. It is a "do this or else" interpretation, prescribing what you must do, instead of descriptive.....If you are poor in spirit these are the blessings that will come to you. Not....become poor in spirit in order to dwell in the kingdom of God, but rather, if you are poor in spirit you will understand the blessings of that poverty. Not....choose to be poor in spirit, but if you are poor in spirit you will discover great joy....making them the "be happy attitudes".

Zen Buddhism is known for a particular set of beliefs that they teach will lead to happiness:

- 1 Life is difficult. We are all walking wounded. No one escapes this world without suffering.
- 2 Suffering is the result of unmet desires/wishes/wants/expectations.
- 3 Change your desire/wishes/wants/expectations and you change your level of suffering.

It is not what happens to you...it is what you think about what happens to you. It is what you think about before events and your sense of entitlement that determines how the event will affect you.

An example.....A woman was swimming at the rec center and some kids started playing water basketball and the game spilled over into the lap lane. She became very frustrated, telling them to be more mindful of her swimming laps, expecting them to change the way they were playing their game to accommodate her. Finally, in anger, she joined me in my lane. I do not consistently swim in a straight line and knew I would be continually bumping into her so left the lane to her and went into the lane where the kids were playing. The kids kept playing, I kept swimming. No problem. Nothing changed except my attitude, my sense of entitlement to a lane free of kids playing. If I don't have the belief I am entitled to a swimming lane without distractions then the kids playing did not disappoint, frustrate, anger me or erode in one iota my sense of contentment, well being....happiness. The kids didn't change. The world did not change to accommodate my sense of entitlement. I changed....and was happier for it.

It is when we feel entitled to things occurring the way we want them to occur that we set ourselves up for unhappiness. The more we expect life to unfold in a certain way the more we set ourselves up for unhappiness. I was going into City Market one lovely mountain afternoon and a woman came out complaining loudly, bitterly, to the man with her that her dinner party was ruined. "They had no baby bok choi! What am I going to do now? Dinner will not be the same. Imagine no baby bok choi. What am I going to do?" Being the buttinski that I am I stopped her and said, "Seriously? Your day is ruined because the store didn't have baby bok choi? Get a grip!"

If she had gone to the store, saying, "Baby bok choi would be nice, but if they don't have it, something else can be used and dinner will still be delicious. Besides, people come to dinner parties to enjoy the company not to indulge in fancy cooking."then....she would have exited happy. It was her expectations that brought her down. The greater our expectations the greater our unhappiness. If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it then change the way you think about it.

The poor in foreign countries are often romanticized as there is sometimes a cheerfulness, a joy, present in their lives, out of proportion to their living conditions. A friend returned from Africa, a safari, during which she had spent a day touring a remote, primitive village. She said "that despite the poverty the people were happier.....probably happier then she was in her "fancy schmancy hotel." Why is that?

Easy! The villagers have no expectations they will have running water so walking 3 miles to and from the well is part of life so they accept it without complaining.

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

Cassava for breakfast, lunch and dinner keeps hunger at bay so they are grateful they have cassava.

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

They have no expectations that their children will all survive to adulthood so they bury their dead with deep grief, but then life goes on. They feel no sense of entitlement that an ambulance is going to take them to a hospital and fix their broken leg.

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

One family runs out of cassava so their neighbor gives them some, knowing that in any given year the tables could be reversed and they will be the one needing to borrow cassava.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

The sun comes up, the cassava is dug, they eat. The family in the next hut lives the same. The villagers sit and talk into the darkness. Life is good. They are happy.

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

On the other hand, my friend went to her hotel and expected hot water, clean sheets, soft mattress, bath towels, mirror, flush toilet and who knows what else. She went to a restaurant and she expected fresh salad, iced drinks, rock free rice, tender meat, sweet dessert, attentive service and a glass of wine or two. If she does not get what she expects she will be unhappy, disappointed. After all she paid an arm and a leg to stay in this bush hotel and she expects things to be right. Her happiness is dependent on 50, maybe 100, things going right. If they don't she will not recommend the safari tour group as they did not meet her expectations and left her unhappy.

Paul and I recently went on a 10 day Mediterranean cruise on the lovely Norwegian Jade. 2500 people whose wants and needs are addressed by 1000 staff. Cruises are particularly noted for the excellence, abundance and unlimited variety of their food. When disembarking in Izmir, Turkey to visit Ephesus a man, his wife and daughter were also leaving. The difference is that we were just carrying cameras and they had all their luggage. I asked him why and he angrily said the food was so bad he could not stand it so they were immediately returning to Rome. I was astounded!!! What in his psyche created the expectation that this lovely ship was not meeting? Exactly what did he feel he was entitled to receive in return for whatever he paid? Whatever it was he expected he was entitled to receive, its absence made him bitter and angry.

So.....Who was happier on this cruise? Those of us who basked in gratitude for all and everything that went into making this vacation memorable? Or this bitter man stomping angrily away? Who finds it easier to be happy? The ones with few expectations outside of a life lived in simplicity or the ones who are dependent on thousands of things going right every day for them to be happy. They feel entitled to a dishwasher that runs, lights that turn on, cars that have gas, ad nauseum ora little cassava, the sun comes up, the sun goes down, life is good.

This whole question of entitlement has become very confusing! The same woman who went to Africa and remarked on the corresponding happiness and simplicity of the villagers asked me how the community dinner was going. When I told her she asked, I kid you not, "Aren't you afraid the people who come to the dinner will feel entitled to free food?" I was astounded. She went on, "How do you know the people who come are deserving of the food and not just lazy?" I practically spluttered in my coffee!

One, there is no such thing as the deserving poor in the kingdom of God. There are poor people and rich people. The rich people, in every single major religion, are called upon by their holy books to take care of the poor, to give alms, to treat the poor with kindness, mercy, to create a just society that benefits all and does not exploit the poor. There is no mention in any holy scripture of a "deserving" poor. Jesus did not say, "Feed the widows and orphans if you find them deserving." He said, "Feed the widows and orphans." The concept of "deserving poor" is a political question, not a moral, theological or ethical question.

Two, no one in the United States has more entitlement issues then the wealthy! Examples:

Whose housing is subsidized? Those who pay rent or those who get a tax deduction on their mortgage? Who gets subsidized vacations? Those who work as grocery checkers or those whose company provides them with conferences at vacation resorts? Who pays every dime of their phone expense? A waitress or those whose workplace gives them a phone and uses their phone expense as a corporate tax deduction? Even the income of those who live off stock dividends is taxed at a different, read lower, rate than those who get paid by the hour!

The well-to-do strata of Americans howl grievously when their tax deductions are challenged as they believe they are the worker bees of industry who keep the country's economy humming while everyone else can be classified as drones....fit only to serve the queen. Their belief is that those who make less deserve to make less. "They are not as hard working, they are not as smart. It is a good thing they have the wealthy to take care of them." What is not acknowledged is that those who are extraordinarily

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successful financially have tended to be those who won the womb lottery. The womb lottery winners are those born to white, educated parents who are married to each other. Now what percentage of the population can say that? If you want to win even more in the womb lottery you will be male and tall. If your parents have any sense at all they will not name you Latoya or Jesus.

The United States has a bias towards white people, so that is always a good place to start. Educated people tend to plan their pregnancies, have insurance and obtain the best prenatal care and deliveries. The children tend to be highly stimulated from birth so their natural genetic bent towards a high IQ is amplified. Any disability is competently handled by qualified professionals. Successful parents tend to live in school districts where the finest of everything is the norm. The children are provided with music, athletics, travel, museums, to keep their little brains humming along, leaving the less advantaged children in the dust. Having done nothing to earn or deserve the incredible start they got in life the womb lottery winner, when they are grown, have the audacity to proclaim their success, and therefore all they are entitled to, is due to their own hard work! (Think the Sam Walton clan!) They become drunk on entitlements while the poor become stoned on poverty!

The poor are ground down by poor schools, poor health care, poor neighborhoods, (When Colorado springs ran into budget deficits they turned off the street lights. However, if your neighborhood could afford to pay extra the lights were turned back on for you.) poor diet (corn syrup and therefore unhealthy food is heavily subsidized making nutritionally bankrupt foods very cheap and affordable.....think Conagra stockholders who are getting rich while the poor become diabetic. Carrots, pears, broccoli are not subsidized making them more expensive for the poor penny counter in the checkout line.) The poor, seeing no light at the end of the tunnel, become helpless and hopeless, and emotionally less able to lift themselves or their children out of a life of poverty. They have lost all sense of entitlement. At the same time the more those with greater incomes have, the more they feel entitled to. Hence, drunk on entitlement, stoned on poverty.

Even though education is the great equalizer in the United States school districts in high income areas are loathe to allow a penny to pass out of their district to a less well endowed district. They know all too well the value of the best education possible and will fight tooth and claw to ensure their children get it. Their children are entitled to the best education money can buy! The exhausted, helpless, hopeless parents of poor children who are barely making ends meet do not have the resources, the knowledge or the inclination to fight for their children's future. They have no sense of entitlement at all.

Eliminating entitlements mean all are equal. All are entitled to health care. All are

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entitled to healthy, affordable food. All are entitled to the best education money can buy. Your child's education/health care/living conditions, even if you do not have the energy to fight for it/them, is as important as my child's education/health care/living conditions.

Back to the Beatitudes....the be happy attitudes. It takes very little for a poor person to be happy. Enough money in their pocket for a Happy Meal, shared between three children.a half tank of gas......a pack of cigarettes.....short term goals for small pockets of change. Ahh......a slice of heaven in a Big Mac.

A rich man cannot pass through the eye of a needle and enter the kingdom of God, not because he can't give up his wealth, but he can't change his mind set about his entitlements....all of the things he takes for granted that are important to making him happy, without which he feels as if he is in an unhappy state of deprivation. The veil between the poor and God, between happiness and unhappiness, is so much thinner as there is so little in between, no expectation that tomorrow will be somehow different/better, no sense of entitlement to things that are not available to them.

And woe to those who preach the gospel of rampant injustice brought on by the unbridled sense of entitlement of those more well off. "For in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

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 be shown 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 because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

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This Is Why Poor People's Bad Decisions Make Perfect Sense

Posted: 11/22/2013 5:18 pm



There's no way to structure this coherently. They are random observations that might help explain the mental processes. But often, I think that we look at the academic problems of poverty and have no idea of the *why*. We know the what and the how, and we can see systemic problems, but it's rare to have a poor person actually explain it on their own behalf. So this is me doing that, sort of.

Rest is a luxury for the rich. I get up at 6AM, go to school (I have a full course load, but I only have to go to two in-person classes) then work, then I get the kids, then I pick up my husband, then I have half an hour to change and go to Job 2. I get home from that at around 12:30AM, then I have the rest of my classes and work to tend to. I'm in bed by 3. This isn't every day, I have two days off a week from each of my obligations. I use that time to clean the house and soothe Mr. Martini and see the kids for longer than an hour and catch up on schoolwork. Those nights I'm in bed by midnight, but if I go to bed too early I won't be able to stay up the other nights because I'll fuck my pattern up, and I drive an hour home from Job 2 so I can't afford to be sleepy. I never get a day off from work unless I am fairly sick. It doesn't leave you much room to think about what you are doing, only to attend to the next thing and the next. Planning isn't in the mix.

When I got pregnant the first time, I was living in a weekly motel. I had a minifridge with no freezer and a microwave. I was on WIC. I ate peanut butter from the jar and frozen burritos because they were 12/\$2. Had I had a stove, I couldn't have made beef

burritos that cheaply. And I needed the meat, I was pregnant. I might not have had any prenatal care, but I am intelligent enough to eat protein and iron whilst knocked up.

I know how to cook. I had to take Home Ec to graduate high school. Most people on my level didn't. Broccoli is intimidating. You have to have a working stove, and pots, and spices, and you'll have to do the dishes no matter how tired you are or they'll attract bugs. It is a huge new skill for a lot of people. That's not great, but it's true. And if you fuck it up, you could make your family sick. We have learned not to try too hard to be middle-class. It never works out well and always makes you feel worse for having tried and failed yet again. Better not to try. It makes more sense to get food that you know will be palatable and cheap and that keeps well. Junk food is a pleasure that we are allowed to have; why would we give that up? We have very few of them.

The closest Planned Parenthood to me is three hours. That's a lot of money in gas. Lots of women can't afford that, and even if you live near one you probably don't want to be seen coming in and out in a lot of areas. We're aware that we are not "having kids," we're "breeding." We have kids for much the same reasons that I imagine rich people do. Urge to propagate and all. Nobody likes poor people procreating, but they judge abortion even harder.

Convenience food is just that. And we are not allowed many conveniences. Especially since the Patriot Act passed, it's hard to get a bank account. But without one, you spend a lot of time figuring out where to cash a check and get money orders to pay bills. Most motels now have a no-credit-card-no-room policy. I wandered around SF for five hours in the rain once with nearly a thousand dollars on me and could not rent a room even if I gave them a \$500 cash deposit and surrendered my cell phone to the desk to hold as surety.

Nobody gives enough thought to depression. You have to understand that we know that we will never not feel tired. We will never feel hopeful. We will never get a vacation. Ever. We know that the very act of being poor guarantees that we will never not be poor. It doesn't give us much reason to improve ourselves. We don't apply for jobs because we know we can't afford to look nice enough to hold them. I would make a super legal secretary, but I've been turned down more than once because I "don't fit the image of the firm," which is a nice way of saying "gtfo, pov." I am good enough to cook the food, hidden away in the kitchen, but my boss won't make me a server because I don't "fit the corporate image." I am not beautiful. I have missing teeth and skin that looks like it will when you live on B12 and coffee and nicotine and no sleep. Beauty is a thing you get when you can afford it, and that's how you get the job that you need in order to be beautiful. There isn't much point trying.

Cooking attracts roaches. Nobody realizes that. I've spent a lot of hours impaling roach bodies and leaving them out on toothpick pikes to discourage others from entering. It doesn't work, but is amusing.

"Free" only exists for rich people. It's great that there's a bowl of condoms at my school, but most poor people will never set foot on a college campus. We don't belong there. There's a clinic? Great! There's still a copay. We're not going. Besides, all they'll tell you at the clinic is that you need to see a specialist, which seriously? Might as well be located

on Mars for how accessible it is. "Low-cost" and "sliding scale" sounds like "money you have to spend" to me, and they can't actually help you anyway.

I smoke. It's expensive. It's also the best option. You see, I am always, always exhausted. It's a stimulant. When I am too tired to walk one more step, I can smoke and go for another hour. When I am enraged and beaten down and incapable of accomplishing one more thing, I can smoke and I feel a little better, just for a minute. It is the only relaxation I am allowed. It is not a good decision, but it is the only one that I have access to. It is the only thing I have found that keeps me from collapsing or exploding.

I make a lot of poor financial decisions. None of them matter, in the long term. I will never not be poor, so what does it matter if I don't pay a thing and a half this week instead of just one thing? It's not like the sacrifice will result in improved circumstances; the thing holding me back isn't that I blow five bucks at Wendy's. It's that now that I have proven that I am a Poor Person that is all that I am or ever will be. It is not worth it to me to live a bleak life devoid of small pleasures so that one day I can make a single large purchase. I will never have large pleasures to hold on to. There's a certain pull to live what bits of life you can while there's money in your pocket, because no matter how responsible you are you will be broke in three days anyway. When you never have enough money it ceases to have meaning. I imagine having a lot of it is the same thing.

Poverty is bleak and cuts off your long-term brain. It's why you see people with four different baby daddies instead of one. You grab a bit of connection wherever you can to survive. You have no idea how strong the pull to feel worthwhile is. It's more basic than food. You go to these people who make you feel lovely for an hour that one time, and that's all you get. You're probably not compatible with them for anything long-term, but right this minute they can make you feel powerful and valuable. It does not matter what will happen in a month. Whatever happens in a month is probably going to be just about as indifferent as whatever happened today or last week. None of it matters. We don't plan long-term because if we do we'll just get our hearts broken. It's best not to hope. You just take what you can get as you spot it.

I am not asking for sympathy. I am just trying to explain, on a human level, how it is that people make what look from the outside like awful decisions. This is what our lives are like, and here are our defense mechanisms, and here is why we think differently. It's certainly self-defeating, but it's safer. That's all. I hope it helps make sense of it.

Additions have been made to the update below to reflect the responses received.

UPDATE: The response to this piece is overwhelming. I have had a lot of people ask to use my work. Please do. Share it with the world if you found value in it. Please link back if you can. If you are teaching, I am happy to discuss this with or clarify for you, and you can freely use this piece in your classes. Please do let me know where you teach. You can reach me on Twitter, @killermartinis. I set up an email at killermartinisbook@ gmail as well.

This piece has gone fully viral. People have been asking me to write, and how they can help. After enough people tried to send me paypal money, I set up a gofundme. Find it

here. It promptly went insane. I have raised my typical yearly income as of this update. I have no idea what to say except thank you. I am going to speak with some money people who will make sure that I can't fuck this up, and I will use it to do good things with.

I've also set up a blog, which I hope you will find here.

Understand that I wrote this as an example of the thought process that we struggle with. Most of us are clinically depressed, and we do not get therapy and medication and support. We get told to get over it. And we find ways to cope. I am not saying that people live without hope entirely; that is not human nature. But these are the thoughts that are never too far away, that creep up on us every chance they get, that prey on our better judgement when we are tired and stressed and weakened. We maintain a constant vigil against these thoughts, because we are afraid that if we speak them aloud or even articulate them in our heads they will become unmanageably real.

Thank you for reading. I am glad people find value in it. Because I am getting tired of people not reading this and then commenting anyway, I am making a few things clear: not all of this piece is about me. That is why I said that they were observations. And this piece is not all of me: that is why I said that they were random observations rather than complete ones. If you really have to urge me to abort or keep my knees closed or wonder whether I can fax you my citizenship documents or if I really in fact have been poor because I know multisyllabic words, I would like to ask that you read the comments and see whether anyone has made your point in the particular fashion you intend to. It is not that I mind trolls so much, it's that they're getting repetitive and if you have to say nothing I hope you can at least do it in an entertaining fashion.

If, however, you simply are curious about something and actually want to have a conversation, I do not mind repeating myself because those conversations are valuable and not actually repetitive. They tend to be very specific to the asker, and I am happy to shed any light I can. I do not mind honest questions. They are why I wrote this piece.

Thank you all, so much. I don't know what life will look like next week, and for once that's a good thing. And I have you to thank.

Robert Reich Become a fan

Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy, University of California at Berkeley; Author, *Beyond Outrage*

America's "We" Problem

America has a serious "We" problem -- as in "Why should we pay for them?"

The question is popping up all over the place. It underlies the debate over extending unemployment benefits to the long-term unemployed and providing food stamps to the poor.

It's found in the resistance of some young and healthy people to being required to buy health insurance in order to help pay for people with preexisting health problems.

It can be heard among the residents of upscale neighborhoods who don't want their tax dollars going to the inhabitants of poorer neighborhoods nearby.

The pronouns "we" and "they" are the most important of all political words. They demarcate who's within the sphere of mutual responsibility, and who's not. Someone within that sphere who's needy is one of "us" -- an extension of our family, friends, community, tribe -- and deserving of help. But needy people outside that sphere are "them," presumed undeserving unless proved otherwise.

The central political question faced by any nation or group is where the borders of this sphere of mutual responsibility are drawn.

Why in recent years have so many middle-class and wealthy Americans pulled the borders in closer?

The middle-class and wealthy citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, for example, are trying to secede from the school district they now share with poorer residents of town, and set up their own district funded by property taxes from their higher-valued homes.

Similar efforts are underway in Memphis, Atlanta, and Dallas. Over the past two years, two wealthy suburbs of Birmingham, Alabama, have left the countywide school system in order to set up their own.

Elsewhere, upscale school districts are voting down state plans to raise their taxes in order to provide more money to poor districts, as they did recently in Colorado.

"Why should we pay for them?" is also reverberating in wealthy places like Oakland County, Michigan, that border devastatingly poor places like Detroit.

"Now, all of a sudden, they're having problems and they want to give part of the responsibility to the suburbs?" says L. Brooks Paterson, the Oakland County executive. "They're not gonna talk me into being the good guy. 'Pick up your share?' Ha ha."

But had the official boundary been drawn differently so that it encompassed both Oakland County and Detroit -- say, to create a Greater Detroit region -- the two places would form a "we" whose problems Oakland's more affluent citizens would have some responsibility to address.

What's going on?

One obvious explanation involves race. Detroit is mostly black; Oakland County, mostly white. The secessionist school districts in the South are almost entirely white; the neighborhoods they're leaving behind, mostly black.

But racism has been with us from the start. Although some southern school districts are seceding in the wake of the ending of court-ordered desegregation, race alone can't explain the broader national pattern. According to Census Bureau numbers, two-thirds

of Americans below the poverty line at any given point identify themselves as white.

Another culprit is the increasing economic stress felt by most middle-class Americans. Median household incomes are dropping and over three-quarters of Americans report they're living paycheck to paycheck.

It's easier to be generous and expansive about the sphere of "we" when incomes are rising and future prospects seem even better, as during the first three decades after World War II when America declared war on poverty and expanded civil rights. But since the late 1970s, as most paychecks have flattened or declined, adjusted for inflation, many in the stressed middle no longer want to pay for "them."

Yet this doesn't explain why so many wealthy America's are also exiting. They've never been richer. Surely they can afford a larger "we." But most of today's rich adamantly refuse to pay anything close to the tax rate America's wealthy accepted forty years ago.

Perhaps it's because, as inequality has widened and class divisions have hardened, America's wealthy no longer have any idea how the other half lives.

Being rich in today's America means not having to come across anyone who isn't. Exclusive prep schools, elite colleges, private jets, gated communities, tony resorts, symphony halls and opera houses, and vacation homes in the Hamptons and other exclusive vacation sites all insulate them from the rabble.

America's wealthy increasingly inhabit a different country from the one "they" inhabit, and America's less fortunate seem as foreign as do the needy inhabitants of another country.

The first step in widening the sphere of "we" is to break down the barriers -- not just of race, but also, increasingly, of class, and of geographical segregation by income -- that are pushing "we Americans" further and further apart.