

As I walked up the sidewalk to the door out here on Stone, I couldn't believe my ears. And that is saying something here at Triune! A group of men were standing and sitting out along the railing and one of them, looking me up and down and thinking he was using a pickup line, said, "You're too blessed to be stressed!" Of course I called them out, him especially for using what he thought of as a pick up line on his pastor. "What does that even mean?," I wondered to myself. Instead of just complimenting me, this bumper sticker was thrown out there. I've got to say I've never heard this line used in this way before. Sometimes I think we say things because we've been taught them, and we don't even think about what we're saying. Other times we say things because it makes us feel better or maybe we say them because we think we're supposed to?! Or maybe we shouldn't really say anything at all. Today is the last sermon in our summer Bumper Sticker Theology series. Next week we'll begin a series in Exodus. But today we're taking a deeper dive into the bumper sticker "**Too blessed to be stressed,**" which, like many other bumper stickers we've pondered this summer, is not found in the Bible.

This week I attended a workshop on public speaking hosted by Greater Good Greenville. Because no matter what anyone says, we all have something new to learn. The executive speech coach teaching the sold-out workshop shared something that left me pondering. She told us to stand up straight. Yes, good posture, which I don't have. I hear her. But then she stated that most Americans walk around bent over; heads down. She then asked us why that is. I was thinking, yea, because I could trip and fall. But

the answer was because the weight of the world is one everyone's shoulders. People are carrying heavy burdens these days. Folks are taking care of their children or their children's children or grandchildren. And/or folks are taking care of their parents or grandparents. People are literally carrying their stress and slumping over. The reality is- we all get stressed. Yet, many Christians, especially, use this line- "too blessed to be stressed" as if to say that people of faith cannot endure stress, or anxiety, or be vulnerable. In other words, the assumption made by such a phrase is, "Count your blessings. Focus on what is good in your life and stop being dragged down by the bad." The truth is that sometimes "we're too stressed to experience being blessed."

It is without any doubt that the Lord's blessings are bountifully abundant and new every day. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Yet, there are times **when our patterns of life become so absorbed by worldliness that we may become "too stressed to be blessed."** And there are people who often use phrases like, "Too blessed to be stressed" to demonstrate that if you are stressed, you aren't blessed. This is not true at all and can develop into the idea that the good things in life are a result of some divine favor and the bad things in life are a result of divine punishment. No. False.

Herein lies the challenge of this bumper sticker. It is sometimes used to downplay or shift focus from one's feelings of stress by instead considering all that one has to be grateful for, and what's wrong with that? I get it. But living paycheck to paycheck or going through a divorce or losing a loved one or not knowing where the next meal is coming from or where one is going

to lay their head tonight is overwhelming. Friends, it is ok to not be ok sometimes. You can still have strong faith in God, recognizing your blessings, AND still be stressed. “Your joys and struggles don’t determine how blessed or cursed you are. You can be ‘blessed’ with wealth and still be cursed. You may feel ‘blessed’ by your level of comfort, but blessing doesn’t come from being comfortable. The Beatitudes lead us to a different understanding of what it means to be blessed” ([link](#)). According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus’ first words to his commissioned disciples- the first words’ of Jesus’ inaugural Sermon on the Mount are words of blessing. Before turning to God’s word for us this day, let us first pray. **PRAY.** Today I’m reading from the Gospel of Matthew from The Message” a paraphrase of the Bible in contemporary English. **READ Matthew 5:1-12.**

Some people believe that “faith—expressed through positive thoughts, positive declarations, and donations to the church—draws health, wealth, and happiness into believers' lives” ([link](#)). That’s called prosperity gospel. Jesus did not share that idea. The blessed in the Beatitudes are not the wealthy, “not those whose pantries are abundantly filled, not those who brag about their achievements, not those who lord power over others, not those who have a comfortable, cushy life. Consider the people whom Jesus calls blessed. The beatitudes show a God who shows blessing and favor in places where we might least expect God to be. The world refuses to bless the poor, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on. But God’s kingdom is not the way of the world. In fact, God’s kingdom is often found leveling the world order” ([link](#)). God is in the business of reversing just about everything the world values and worships. Think about

it. “Jesus doesn’t turn a blind eye to the poor, the incarcerated, the colonized, the ostracized, and the demonized. He doesn’t leave the sick to die, nor abandon the dead to their graves, and he never, ever tells anyone to just ‘grin and bear’ their pain because heaven’s reprieve will fix things by and by” (Debie Thomas, [journeywithjesus.net](http://journeywithjesus.net)).

Again, the beatitudes do not offer up worldly comfort; they address the opposite of who the world says is ‘blessed.’ In the beatitudes, Jesus “describes a world that is turned upside-down- an economy of blessing that sounds crazy to those who refuse to feel so deeply- a reordering of priority and privilege that the church has found awkward- even offensive- for centuries. For we live in a world where the loudest, strongest, wealthiest, and most privileged people prey on the ‘less fortunate.’ We live in a world where greed and selfishness pay big time, while meekness, mercy, and mournfulness earn little more than contempt. We live in a world where securing our own ease and comfort is our ‘right’- the rest of creation be damned. But Jesus in his wisdom recognizes this disparity and addresses it here in the beatitudes: ‘Blessed are they...for they will be.’ The language is prophetic and hope-filled. It bridges the present and the future- the already and not yet- the kingdom that is and the kingdom that is coming. The blessing is here; God’s favor is now” (Thomas).

Don’t you hear that we will be blessed even when we are stressed? “What the beatitudes offer is both God’s blessing now and a promise of future redemption. God’s kingdom is breaking into our reality. There is no time for people to rest on their comforts. God’s people are to be about being a

people of blessing. Jesus teaches his disciples how to see with new eyes, how to see blessing where God sees it, even when the world refuses to see it. Jesus teaches his disciples how to love what the world finds unlovable. Jesus teaches us how to seek redemption in the places with people the world has considered beyond salvation. It is because of Jesus, not of our own strength, that we can live this way”([link](#)). What would it be like if we all sought this kind of blessedness? How would this affect how we engaged with one another and with God?

I’m often humbled by a friend and colleague of mine in his early forties who lost his wife of almost twenty years to COVID two years ago, leaving behind him and their three teenaged children. My friend is very vulnerable in his preaching and on social media about how he is doing. This week he posted on Facebook saying, “Today I had two meetings with fantastic colleagues who sincerely asked me how I was doing. I can't remember what I said, but I heard myself. My voice cracked. I tried to slow my pace of speaking to deepen the tone of my voice. I was trying to sound ok, but I heard my voice tell a far different story than what I was actually saying. Why can't I just say that everyday is difficult? Why can't I admit grief sneaks up on me at any time and every day because grief doesn't play fair? In the moment the question is raised, I think I'm checking to see if I could actually be okay, but I never am. When asked in the future, I think I'll say "it's okay not to be okay" and see if this intro helps me honestly share how I am. My beloved loved that quote so much she had it tattooed as a reminder. She's still helping me to grow” (Jerrod Lowry). It’s okay not to be okay. My friend

doesn't deny his stress or grief, while also acknowledging his blessings. His faith and his community are seeing him through. Even on his hardest days, my friend tries to remember that we are Easter people and that there's hope in the Resurrection- tries to remember that tomorrow is a new day, and that God's mercies are new every morning.

The Beatitudes, should be renamed "The Great Reversal," as they describe a genuinely counter-cultural way of living in this world. Jesus offers a promise of who is really blessed, thus also revealing essential truths about the nature of God. "What Jesus bears witness to in the beatitudes is God's unwavering proximity to pain, suffering, sorrow, and loss. God is nearest to those who are lowly, oppressed, unwanted, and broken" (Thomas). Jesus isn't offering platitudes like some of these bumper stickers. This isn't a case for our consumerist culture's #I am so blessed. No, the beatitudes are meant to wake us up and offer us hope but not hope that keeps us down. No, they inspire a hope that motivates and inspires us to get up and keep going, knowing that Jesus is with us- never forsaking us. I love what Owen Robertson said as he reflected on Facebook about his art and this summer roadtrip series. "I think the idea that the blessings of GOD far outnumber and outweigh life's stressors. But I can't deny that I still feel stress — sometimes it threatens to overwhelm me. So I finally decided it was time to add Jesus into the mix. I couldn't think of anyone who was arguably more "blessed by GOD" than Jesus. But he was also so stressed that he sweated blood. I can't explain what keeps me hanging on any more than you can explain what helps you. Maybe it's a commitment to the way of Jesus —

and that way does not give in to despair. It's a crazy car ride that we find ourselves on. I find great comfort in believing that GOD is along for the ride. That he wouldn't miss it. And neither would I" (8/29/23).

God is there in our brokenness and continues to give us blessings abound. As we walk or ride with Jesus, "we will grow more in his likeness. We will be blessed. But this means Jesus helps us to see with new eyes: not seeking after the comforts of this world in order that we might say that we are too blessed to be stressed, nor seeing others as too stressed to be blessed.

What if we instead saw the needs of our neighbors as situations of blessing where we might see God as we ease one another's burdens"([link](#))? What if the bumper sticker is changed to "See the blessed within the stressed?

"Blessed are you, and you, and you and you. So now go. Become what you are, give away what you seek, bless what God blesses, and turn this world on its head for the One who blesses you is near" (Thomas). Amen.