Article

Character Strengths Beatitudes: A Secular Application of Ancient Wisdom to Appreciate Strengths for Spiritual Happiness and Spiritual Growth

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Abstract: A beatitude is a blessing. It is a form of appreciation that can be directed toward others or oneself. Theologically speaking, some frame the original beatitudes from The Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew as pertaining to "spiritual happiness", and recent scholars have offered a compelling argument that they are a call to flourishing. The focus here involves the creation and description of 24 blessings, or beatitudes, using the lens of one of the foundational and most researched areas in the sciences of flourishing, well-being, and positive psychology, which is the science of character strengths. Recent research has framed the 24 universal character strengths as spiritual strengths, hence particularly aligned for secular and nonsecular contexts of spiritual blessings. Each of the 24 character strengths was created into a blessing using the structure of the original beatitudes—with an opening description of the personal quality or attribute that is blessed and a follow-up outcome or core benefit that arises from the expression of that quality. In this way, these character strength beatitudes or character strength blessings offer an opportunity to appreciate the best positive qualities of others. These blessings are framed as primarily a mechanism of appreciating the character strengths of others, resting theoretically in both the grounding path and the sanctification path, the two types of integration of character strengths and spirituality that researchers have proposed. They are discussed, secondarily, as applied to the individual, for self-understanding, insight, and growth. These two purposes are relevant to the deepening of the spiritual journey, providing support as individuals pursue meaning in life and/or the sacred as they go deeper within themselves, up and beyond themselves, and sideways and interconnected to others. Practical applications, based in science, are discussed and point to avenues by which these character strengths beatitudes might both foster the appreciating of others' strengths and support one's own spiritual happiness, spiritual coping, and spiritual growth.

Keywords: beatitudes; blessings; character strengths; VIA classification; spiritual happiness; spiritual coping; spiritual journey; grounding path; sanctification path

"I was pirouette and flourish,
I was filigree and flame.
How could I count my blessings
when I didn't know their names?"
-Rita Dove

1. Introduction

A beatitude can be understood as a blessing—something beneficial that one is grateful for—or "spiritual happiness" (Rohr and Feister 1996). The originally recorded beatitudes are the shared set of eight blessings in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew, which have captured the interest and analysis of countless scholars and laypeople over the centuries. One example is, "Blessed are the meek: for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). Recent theological work by Pennington (2017) argues that the beatitudes are most accurately framed as being about flourishing (from the Greek word, *makorios*) and wholeness (from the Greek word, *teleios*) and notes the technical translation of beatitude as

macarism, which is a statement that ascribes flourishing to a person. Therefore, he notes, the translation of the aforementioned beatitude would be, "Flourishing are the humble because they will inherit the world" (p. xv). Multiple contemporary additions to the lists of beatitudes have been offered by secular and nonsecular authors, theologians, and religious leaders over the years, including six modern-day beatitudes offered by Pope Francis. That version veers from the original beatitude structure by offering a blessing statement alone without an effect or result that follows, for example, Pope Francis noted: "Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others" (see Wooden 2016).

Regardless of the translation approach, variation in structure, or creative additions, beatitudes offer a striking way to highlight typically unseen blessings and offer juxtaposition, surprise, and wisdom. They point to ways in which humans can be a certain kind of person, in other words, to occupy "a way of being in the world that will result in one's flourishing" (Pennington 2017, p. 40).

It is noteworthy that blessings and beatitudes (terms which will be used interchangeably throughout this article) can be a psychological lens and application that is spiritual, religious, or nonspiritual. Gratitude, spiritual happiness, and "feeling blessed" are not beholden to any religion or spirituality. They are part of the human condition. In addition to gratitude and spirituality, scientists have uncovered, highlighted, and studied many other parts of the human condition—at least 22 additional strengths of character, which met rigorous criteria constituting a character strength. Each strength nests under one of six overarching virtues. Collectively, this is known and studied as the VIA Classification of character strengths and virtues (Peterson and Seligman 2004). The virtues—wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence—are common threads across the major world religions and ancient philosophies (Dahlsgaard et al. 2005). The character strengths were found in people across the globe, following survey work of people across 75 countries (McGrath 2015) and interviews with large groups of people in remote cultures such as the Maasai in Kenya and Inuit people in Northern Greenland (Biswas-Diener 2006). Character strengths such as love, kindness, and social intelligence are understood to be expressions of the virtue of humanity, while bravery, honesty, perseverance, and zest as expressions of the virtue of courage, to name a few. As a whole, the 24 character strengths may provide a framework for spiritual happiness or, as some researchers have proposed, a decoding of the human spirit (Niemiec et al. 2020). Other researchers have supported this notion and discuss the connection between the VIA Classification and nondual spirituality (Littman-Ovadia and David 2020). Research on this VIA Classification and its central, psychometrically valid, free measurement tool, the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA Survey), has steadily increased over the last fifteen years and over 800 studies have been published (VIA Institute 2021), offering substantive grounding for this initiative with beatitudes.

The focus of this paper is theoretical, with a primary emphasis on how the character strengths beatitudes can serve as a mechanism of appreciation of others' strengths to thereby boost the well-being of others and contribute to improving the world. Secondarily, the focus of the character strengths blessings is on improving the individual's understanding and valuing of their own strengths, which aligns with Peterson and Seligman's (2004) clear emphasis that the 24 strengths are intrinsically valued, even without beneficial outcomes. These two purposes support the individual's personal spiritual journey. To be clear, this explores a more individualistic or dyadic approach (appreciating the character strengths of others and oneself), which is a deviation from the original communal context of the beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew.

This paper offers an integration of a set of constructs with a strong scientific backbone (character strengths) and an approach from ancient wisdom (beatitudes). The rationale, development, integrated constructs (character strengths beatitudes), and initial practical strategies are shared, followed by ideas for future directions in research.

2. Rationale for Integrating Character Strengths and Beatitudes

A comprehensive definition of character strengths is that they are positive personality qualities that reflect personal identity, produce positive outcomes for oneself and others, and contribute to the collective good (Niemiec 2018). To the latter point on goodness or morality, the 24 character strengths have been hypothesized to all be morally valued (e.g., Peterson and Seligman 2004) and recent empirical investigation has supported this using a German sample. While the most morally valued strengths were judgment, honesty, kindness, fairness, and hope, every strength was found to be positively morally valued, even when there were no set consequences of the strength used (Stahlmann and Ruch 2020). These 24 character strengths have been found to be ubiquitous/universal, from East to West, North to South, and existing and valued in the most remote parts of the planet (Biswas-Diener 2006; McGrath 2015; Peterson and Seligman 2004). Said another way, this framework of character strengths, and the viewpoint that these 24 strengths are capacities that can be grown and nurtured, is finding resonance across the spectrum of humanity (Niemiec 2018; Niemiec and Pearce 2021; Peterson and Seligman 2004). One of the central findings in the character strengths literature is the importance of appreciating the character strengths in others; research has shown that dyads who recognize and appreciate the character strengths of their partner have higher relationship satisfaction, commitment to one another, and psychological needs met (Kashdan et al. 2018). Similarly, multiple studies have demonstrated that the identification of character strengths in others brings benefits across various contexts, including education (Quinlan et al. 2019), work/organizations (Ghielen et al. 2017), coaching (van Zyl et al. 2020), families (Waters 2020), disability (Niemiec et al. 2017), psychotherapy (Rashid and Seligman 2018), university (Bu and Duan 2018), and parenting (Waters and Sun 2016).

Couple these research findings with the construct of a beatitude, which can be considered a mechanism of appreciation (although there are other ways to view beatitudes). Such a mechanism can be used to notice what is best in another human being—friend, family member, enemy, those one does not know, those to whom one is biased against, and so on. Integrating character strengths with beatitudes offers a reminder that humans have a basic goodness or strength within them that can be noticed, valued, encouraged, and developed.

The integration of character strengths and beatitudes is an outgrowth of the emerging science integrating character strengths and spirituality (Littman-Ovadia and David 2020; Niemiec et al. 2020). For spirituality, the most consistent scientific definition is applied here—the search for, or communion with, the sacred (Pargament et al. 2013), a definition reflected in approximately two-thirds of scientific studies of spirituality (Kapuscinski and Masters 2010). This integration of character strengths and spirituality reflects numerous connections and mutual synergies of these areas that have been largely siloed from one another. In addition, the integration of these phenomena has been highlighted as an area in the science and practice of character that is "ripe for development" (Niemiec and Pearce 2021). More specifically, the character strengths beatitudes offer a compelling example of both the grounding path and sanctification path (Niemiec et al. 2020). The grounding path posits and explores how character strengths give grounding, balance, and accentuation to spirituality, while the sanctification path explores how spirituality can enhance and bring the sacred or transcendent to strengths of character.

The scientific underpinning for the 24 character strengths is important to further support the rationale for integration. Peterson and Seligman (2004) detailed what is known, from a research perspective, about each strength in the original VIA Classification publication. Updates have appeared in part in different places such as Niemiec (2018). Randomized controlled studies have repeatedly shown the benefits of expanding the personal application of character strengths (e.g., Gander et al. 2013; Seligman et al. 2005). Recent research provides insights into the functions of these character strengths (Gander et al. 2021; Niemiec 2020). Table 1 offers two scientific links from Gander and colleagues (2021) for each of the 24 character strengths, demonstrating important benefits and versatility for each. Note that this is a very small sampling of benefits for each strength and is offered for

the reader to gain a general understanding of the wide-ranging benefits offered by each strength.

Table 1. Character strengths of the VIA Classification and functions/benefits of each.

Virtue Categories of the VIA Classification (Peterson and Seligman 2004)	Character Strengths in the VIA Classification (Peterson and Seligman 2004)	Important Functions of Each Strength (Limited to Two) from Gander et al. (2021)
Wisdom	Creativity	Accomplishment, mastery
	Curiosity	Wisdom, optimism
	Judgment	Understanding, self-efficacy
	Love of Learning	Accomplishment, engagement
	Perspective	Self-efficacy, humanity
Courage	Bravery	Positive thinking, courage
	Perseverance	Accomplishment, engagement
	Honesty	Humanity, understanding
	Zest	Mastery, health
Humanity	Love	Humanity, pleasure
	Kindness	Understanding, humanity
	Social Intelligence	Humanity, understanding
Justice	Teamwork	Justice, humanity
	Fairness	Humanity, understanding
	Leadership	Self-efficacy, meaning
Temperance	Forgiveness	Understanding, self-efficacy
	Humility	Positive thinking, self-efficacy
	Prudence	Temperance, positive thinking
	Self-Regulation	Courage, accomplishment
Transcendence	Appreciation of Beauty/Excellence	Pleasure, independence
	Gratitude	Humanity, optimism
	Hope	Optimism, mastery
	Humor	Pleasure, humanity
	Spirituality	Transcendence, engagement

The integration of the substantive science of character strengths along with the time-tested use of beatitudes or blessings offers a unique opportunity to help individuals view others through a lens of potential, appreciate strengths, build well-being, and foster personal spiritual growth.

3. Development Process

The character strengths beatitudes emerged from the author consuming large volumes of scientific and lay perspectives on character strengths, spirituality, and virtue over two decades (for example, note more than one thousand references in (Niemiec 2018; Niemiec et al. 2020; Peterson and Seligman 2004; VIA Institute 2021)). This led to the construction and refinement of the beatitudes over a period of four years. During this process, ten criteria were adhered to in order to maximize fidelity, substance, and applicability.

(1) Structure: Each blessing follows the two-part structure of the most common framing of the original beatitudes as documented in the Gospel of Matthew—a condition or behavior, followed by a result. The first part of each character strength beatitude, the condition, is a proclamation of the character strength as a blessing and is intended to reflect

a reality that one is blessed for having a particular strength. The second part, the result, reveals the potential positive outcome of strong and balanced use of that particular strength, also known as optimal strengths use or the golden mean (Niemiec 2019). Said another way, this result describes the importance of this character strength for the world; it is a central benefit of using the strength as opposed to a detailed process for using it. This structure is intentional for the user to connect the character strength with promoting goodness in the world, for finding deeper roots on their spiritual journey, and for deepening their understanding of the value of any of the 24 strengths.

(2) Brevity: Each blessing is relatively brief for the intention of easy memorization, simplicity, and application. Rather than a complex, multilayered description, the priority was to be clear with as few words as possible. Therefore, the second part of each is under 10 words.

(3) Content: The blessing needs to point to the essence of what each character strength is about (Niemiec 2018). While no beatitude can expect to capture the full multi-dimensionality of a particular strength, it can point people in a positive direction in answering some questions: What is core/central to this strength? Why is the person blessed for this strength? How might the use of this strength be of benefit to others or contribute to human goodness? This criterion, which focused on arriving at the heart of the matter (the essence or core of each character strength), was given the greatest attention among all the criteria.

(4) External focal point: The focus of each blessing should be on benefiting others and/or the world, as opposed to solely building one's own well-being. This offers an application that goes beyond the Hippocratic Oath in that each blessing is intended to not only "do no harm" but to foster goodness. Each beatitude is thereby framed in a way to explain how a person with that character strength is good for the world, the community, or ourselves.

(5) Depth: Each blessing should hold potential to engender further thought and deeper emotion, doing more than merely describe the strength. For many, reflection will reveal new layers, insights, and contextual uses.

(6) Meaning: Each blessing should pass the "so what?" test. Upon reflection, most people should not be left with an indifferent feeling of "so, what?" or "who cares?" The science of meaning should be engendered, which involves the beatitude tapping into one or more elements in the tripartite, scientific conceptualization of meaning (George and Park 2016; Martela and Steger 2016)—coherence (sense-making; life makes sense), significance (mattering; life is worth it), or purpose (life has a mission)—for the individual.

(7) Practicality: Each blessing should show potential, directly or indirectly, to practical, concrete use in their own life. A person can read it and see some importance/relevance/practicality for taking action or some useful insight into character strengths appreciation.

(8) Uniqueness (non-resemblance). Each blessing should be unique and not imitate or resemble existing beatitudes offered by spiritual thinkers over the decades. During the creation process, the author reviewed the literature, spiritual and theological books, and the Internet to ensure that none of the character strengths beatitudes appearing in this paper existed, and there was no previous, collective attempt to characterize the VIA Classification or multiple strengths or virtues in this way. To be sure, several character strengths have been focused on individually by scholars, clergy, and laypeople; this can be quickly discovered through Internet searches that frame in quotes, "Blessed are the ___" (where the blank is the character strength). Those character strengths most frequently turned into a beatitude, per online searches, were creativity, kindness (including its dimensions of caring, generosity, niceness, and compassion), self-control/discipline/patience, and gratitude, and, most often, these appear in nonsecular outlets. At the time of this writing, each of the 24 character strengths beatitudes proposed in this paper is unique.

(9) Positive feedback: It is important that feedback from others be positive about verbiage and the use/potential use, and if not favorable, edited accordingly. The author turned to six individuals for preliminary feedback, five of whom were well-versed profes-

sionals in the field of character strengths. This was *not* a scientific survey or empirical study, but an approach to gather comments, improvements, and ascertain preliminary levels of resonance or disconnect with each beatitude. Each person rated each beatitude from 1 to 7 (where 7 is strong and 1 is weak) in regard to how "good/solid" they considered the potential of the beatitude for bringing insights/benefits for themselves/others. Each was asked to provide suggestions for improvements for those beatitudes they rated lower. This initial feedback—numerical and comments—was used to improve each beatitude. All beatitudes were revised again (some multiple times), with special attention to those beatitudes that did not receive consensus ratings of 6 or higher.

(10) Spiritual journey: As explained, the primary purpose of these beatitudes is the appreciation of others' strengths of character. An important secondary purpose is to deepen one's understanding and valuing of one's character strengths (i.e., one's highest, signature strengths or other strengths). Each of these two purposes is important in one's personal, spiritual journey. The appreciation of one's own and others' spiritual qualities in the form of character strengths is an important part of that journey. As Mayseless and Russo-Netzer (2017) discuss, the multiple directions of this process as deep within oneself, up and beyond oneself, and sideways and interconnected to others, each beatitude should show potential for supporting one or more of these avenues. In other words, does the beatitude draw the person to connect more deeply within themselves, with something greater outside themselves, or with people in their life?

4. The Character Strengths Beatitudes

A character strength beatitude is a way of being that is authentic to the person and offers them an avenue to foster goodness. The beatitude framing sets up an opportunity for appreciation of the strength in the person, and character strengths appreciation in others has revealed a number of well-being benefits (Kashdan et al. 2018). Implied in these character strengths beatitudes is an appreciation for the balanced or optimal (i.e., good and positive) use of the character strength. This is in contrast to situations/contexts in which a person is overusing, underusing, or misusing a character strength (Niemiec 2019), which are not phenomena that would represent blessings to appreciate. The exploration of character strengths overuse and underuse goes beyond the scope of this paper and interested readers are encouraged to review articles in this context (e.g., Grant and Schwartz 2011; Freidlin et al. 2017; Niemiec 2019).

There are two additional considerations for the reader to understand as they reflect on these character strengths blessings. One is that intercorrelation matrices from large sample sizes have shown that all 24 character strengths relate to one another, some to a higher degree than others (McGrath 2013); this shared variance can account for some beatitudes having some resemblance. For example, curiosity and creativity, two strengths that correlate highly, have some parallels, although distinctions can be found in that the essence of the creativity beatitude is on newness/originality, while the essence of the curiosity beatitude is on exploration/discovery. The other consideration is the virtue categories by which the character strengths nest under (Peterson and Seligman 2004). These overarching categories carry some unifying features for the strengths they contain. For example, love and kindness are under the virtue of humanity, which are strengths that involve tending and befriending others. Due to this shared feature, the respective beatitudes would reflect that virtue; this might cause some beatitudes to bear a bit more resemblance to one character strength (often those within a shared virtue) over another. The reader can return to Table 1 to see the virtue categories that each of the 24 character strengths fall under.

Table 2 offers the character strengths beatitudes, one suggested blessing per character strength. The focal point of each is to reflect the core element of the strength and also to be other-oriented, hence directed toward others and the world. These are designed to deepen the appreciation of the inner qualities of others and the potential each character strength has to positively impact one's relationships, community, and the world. The reader can

also keep in mind the secondary purpose of enhancing one's personal strength awareness, self-appreciation, and balanced strengths use.

Table 2. Character strengths beatitudes/blessings, using the VIA Classification of character strengths.

Character Strength	Character Strength Beatitude/Blessing
Creativity	Blessed are the creative: for they spark fresh choices and new growth.
Curiosity	Blessed are the curious: for they offer the gift of exploration.
Judgment	Blessed are the critical thinkers: for they help us understand and find truth.
Love of Learning	Blessed are those who love to learn: for they advance the world's knowledge.
Perspective	Blessed are the wise: for they provide humanity clarity within chaos.
Bravery	Blessed are the brave: for they demonstrate ways to greet adversity.
Perseverance	Blessed are the perseverant: for they model how to bounce back.
Honesty	Blessed are the honest: for they offer the gift of transparency.
Zest	Blessed are the zestful: for they inspire energy and enthusiasm.
Love	Blessed are the loving: for they give humanity its greatest gift.
Kindness	Blessed are the kind: for they are leaders in spreading goodness.
Social Intelligence	Blessed are the socially intelligent: for they help others feel connected and valued.
Teamwork	Blessed are the good teammates: for they are the anchor of the group's success.
Fairness	Blessed are the fair: for they include those who are cast aside.
Leadership	Blessed are the leaders: for they inspire the best strengths in others.
Forgiveness	Blessed are the forgiving: for they offer freedom to others.
Humility	Blessed are the humble: for their path enables others to flourish.
Prudence	Blessed are the prudent: for they promote well-being amidst risks.
Self-Regulation	Blessed are the disciplined: for they offer control within disarray.
Apprec of Beauty/Excellence	Blessed are those who appreciate beauty: for they reveal the savoring of "little things".
Gratitude	Blessed are the grateful: for they give abundance back to us.
Hope	Blessed are the hopeful: for they use the future to inspire our present moment.
Humor	Blessed are the humorous: for they lighten the load and brighten the journey.
Spirituality	Blessed are the spiritual: for they reveal that each moment is sacred.

Appendix A offers a set of beatitudes for the higher-order level of the VIA Classification, the six virtues, and uses a unifying metaphor of light. This offers another lens to demonstrate the integration of virtues/character strengths and beatitudes.

5. Practical Applications

These beatitudes offer a unique opportunity for building awareness and appreciation—both the level of self-appreciation for one's inherent positive traits but also an appreciation for the realization of the good qualities within other people. In addition to generating awareness and insights about oneself and others, how might someone apply or actively work with one or more of these blessings?

While intervention studies will be needed to test this, the proposed beatitudes or blessings offer a spiritual tool and might be applied in the form of practical strategies as cues or focal points for meditation, in similar ways as mantras (Wachholtz and Pargament 2005) and strength gathas (Niemiec 2014). There are a myriad of ways the character

strengths beatitudes could be applied in practice that build from existing research to support spiritual happiness and coping.

What follows are specific, practical interventions for supporting spiritual growth. They are applicable for secular or nonsecular contexts. Some involve appreciation and connection in one's relationships, while others function as an intrapersonal approach, which might set the stage for future interpersonal relating. These suggestions are encouraged to be viewed as an initial starting point for reflection, discussion, and action. In addition, these might spur new practices that are unique to the construct of beatitudes.

1. Enact the beatitude. In other words, bring the character strength into action. This is where any character strength is selected to be boosted. Behavioral activation is an important, proven well-being strategy (Mazzucchelli et al. 2010). Making a plan and actually putting the beatitude into behavioral action is important as research has repeatedly shown that while strengths awareness is beneficial, strengths action is of far greater benefit for outcomes such as well-being (Hone et al. 2015; Seligman et al. 2005).

2. Focus on cueing multiple signature strengths: The intervention referred to as "use your signature strengths in new ways" is a practice examined in numerous randomized-controlled studies and found to boost happiness, decrease depression, enhance flourishing, and increase strengths use (see meta-analysis by (Schutte and Malouff 2019)). Thus, an individual might select their top five signature strengths (e.g., those highest among the 24 on the VIA Survey, the core measure of the 24 character strengths) and write and post the corresponding beatitudes for each signature strength in the home or work environment. Considering the important role of environmental cues to impact behavior (Lindenberg 2012), this practice can serve as an external cue to remind oneself of one's best qualities.

3. Enliven appreciation for others. As the character strengths beatitudes are framed in an other-oriented way, individuals have a straightforward opportunity to recognize and appreciate the character strengths of others (Kashdan et al. 2018). For example, the blessed quality of perspective ("Blessed are the wise: for they provide humanity clarity within chaos") becomes clear, especially when one identifies and reflects on a wise and supportive person in one's life. Individuals can also see a person who is otherwise triggering or irritating in a balanced way, recognizing that they too have character strengths that are important contributions to the world. For example, a person viewed as rigid and controlling can be reframed through the lens of the self-regulation beatitude ("Blessed are the disciplined: for they offer control within disarray") and the individual is then seen in a completely different way. Families might appreciate one another in a deeper way by expanding the "character strengths genogram" activity (Niemiec 2018) to include one or two beatitudes for each family member, discussing how they see these blessings in one another, and then posting this collage in a central location in the home.

4. Deepen prayer, ritual, or meditation practice. This means to deliberately bring character strengths into one's spirituality practice, which is known as the grounding path (Niemiec et al. 2020). This has been demonstrated with substantial success in the mindfulness context, in which the deliberate integration of character strengths into meditation and mindful living experiences, referred to as "strong mindfulness" (Niemiec 2014; Niemiec et al. 2012), has revealed significant well-being benefits, surpassing the most popular, mindfulness-based program in the world (Monzani et al. 2021; Pang and Ruch 2019). One way to operationalize this is to choose one beatitude and recite it, quietly or aloud, prior to an evening prayer, mindfulness practice, or contemplation session. One might conclude the practice by reciting the beatitude again. Perhaps a prayer of thanksgiving utilizes, "Blessed are the grateful: for they give abundance back to us", while a meditation on love infuses, "Blessed are the loving: for they give humanity its greatest gift."

5.　Make your religious expression more authentic. Another practice involves choosing one aspect of regular religious expression (e.g., attending weekly services, partaking in a ritual, engaging in community, exploring sacred readings) and using two or more beatitudes to make the expression stronger. For example, if one is struggling with engaging in one's spiritual community, turn to the beatitude on social intelligence, "Blessed are the socially intelligent: for they help others feel connected and valued." If a particular religious ritual has become dull or mindlessly habitual, one might turn to zest by observing an inspiring and energetic person conduct the ritual, discussing with that person ways they tap into their zest with the ritual, and reminding oneself that the strength of zest resides within oneself and affirm this by reciting or contemplating the zest beatitude, "Blessed are the zestful: for they inspire energy and enthusiasm".

6.　Use skepticism to find truth and untruth. Using curiosity ("Blessed are the curious: for they spark insights and discoveries") to question, explore, and challenge spiritual ideas, beliefs, and practices can be a healthy practice. A practice can involve choosing one of the beatitudes that represents a signature strength and then reflecting on the following questions: When is the message of this beatitude particularly true? When is it not true? How might it reflect part of a universal truth? When does it fall short? What might others say, if asked for feedback, in terms of when this beatitude is more strong or less strong for oneself?

7.　Embody the beatitude: Another practice involves choosing a beatitude to reflect on and sit with. Individuals then spend time feeling these character strengths in the body. For example, if the forgiveness beatitude is chosen ("Blessed are the forgiving: for they offer freedom to others"), the individual would embody the felt sense of forgiving others and the experience of feeling blessed for having that strength. It has been hypothesized that since all 24 character strengths constructs reside inside oneself, there can be a "felt sense" for each of them (Niemiec 2018).

8.　Finder greater depths: The meaning or relevance associated with each beatitude is not always immediately clear and straightforward. Upon reflecting, new insights may emerge. For example, with the judgment/critical thinking beatitude ("Blessed are the critical thinkers: for they help us understand and find truth"), one may come to understand that someone with this strength is good at not taking sides, and instead, listening and seeing the details and opinions of different viewpoints, which opens the door to more balanced truth. Or, taking a closer look at the fairness beatitude ("Blessed are the fair: for they include those who are cast aside"), one sees not only the emphasis on inclusiveness, which is often associated with fairness, but one also begins to see the many possible levels meant by "cast aside," such as those who are bullied, discriminated against, isolated, neglected, unfortunate, troublemaking, disagreeable, underprivileged, or suffering from physical or mental turmoil, illness, and/or disability.

9.　Explore through writing: Writing as a self-exploration tool can take many forms from self-monitoring and writing down one's strength behaviors throughout the day to brainstorming how one might use a character strength beatitude on a particular day to reflective journaling about one's insights and impressions about a beatitude. Hames and Joiner (2012) found self-esteem and mood benefits from writing about positive self-statements. Some individuals will write about a few or all the character strengths beatitudes, exploring how each applies to their own life. For example, one might journal about the hope beatitude ("Blessed are the hopeful: for they use the future to inspire our present moment") and how this describes oneself, in addition to journaling about the contextual uses of hope, and ways hope can be noticed and appreciated in others.

10.　Put it all together: One might use the main character strengths model, the process of working with strengths referred to as Aware-Explore-Apply (AEA) (Niemiec 2014, 2018), which has shown to bring benefits such as thriving, personal growth, self-efficacy, strengths use, work performance, and decreases in negative emotions

(Bu and Duan 2018; Dubreuil et al. 2016; van Woerkom and Meyers 2019). This model can be applied to one or more of the beatitudes by building awareness of the meaning of the words, exploring the deeper or multiple levels of how the beatitude is expressed in one's own life, and making a plan of action. For example, someone might wish to target the humility beatitude ("Blessed are the humble: for their path enables others to flourish"). First (for aware), they might bring the beatitude into their consciousness—sitting with the words, feeling the words, connecting with them. Next (for explore), they might reflect on how they have used humility in their daily life, how their path has supported the well-being of others, and how they have used humility to connect with others. Finally (for apply), they might set a concrete goal (and take action) by reciting the humility beatitude with themselves in mind, reciting it with a humble person in mind, and thinking of one humble act they can do that day to support someone.

In summary, a practical approach to working with the character strengths beatitudes will be one that generates awareness, insight, behavior change, and appreciation of others. A character strengths model that summarizes much of the aforementioned, potential application of character strengths is captured with the acronym ROAD-MAP. Applied to these beatitudes, this refers to reflecting on the beatitude, observing the beatitude in others, appreciating it in others, discussing it in dyads or groups, monitoring its presence in oneself, asking others for which beatitudes best apply to oneself, and planning action steps with one or more beatitude (Niemiec 2018). Like any road map, these practices are an imperfect yet potentially helpful, starting point to advance forward on one's journey.

6. Conclusions and Future Directions

While the science and practice of spirituality and the science and practice of character strengths have many parallel roots and fruits, it is only recently they have been deliberately integrated (Niemiec et al. 2020). The character strengths beatitudes offered here are a potentially robust extension of this integration. As a starting point, these beatitudes represent 24 blessings within the individual that can be noticed, valued, and appreciated. This points to a number of research and practice opportunities.

Research might examine the verbiage chosen for each character strength blessing and attain ratings and evaluation from scholars, clergy, non-clergy, and/or various practitioners. This might further refine each beatitude and create further distinctiveness of each one. Related, a formal qualitative study could be conducted on the relevance, value, accuracy, and personal meaning of the 24 character strengths beatitudes.

A direct implication of this integration with character science is an opening of possibilities for testing these beatitudes as character strengths interventions, singularly (one or two beatitudes at a time) or collectively (subjects' signature strengths or the larger system of 24). The specific practical applications suggested here offer a starting point for research examination. While mantras and meditations on positive qualities are commonplace, the use of the structure pertaining to the original beatitudes has not been tested empirically. It is possible that using this "beatitude structure" for a robust area (i.e., character strengths) lends to unique practices, theorizing, and dynamics not discussed in this paper.

The focus in this paper has been on the positive and appreciative potential of these 24 blessings. Follow up studies might examine this as a system that can be balanced or unbalanced, with strengths/blessings that are overused and underused, based on situational and relational demands. The original beatitudes emerged from a context of communal appreciation. Future investigation of these character strengths beatitudes might shift the exploration from an individualistic approach (appreciating the blessings of others and oneself) to a form of communal affirmation and appreciation.

Practically speaking, it is presumed these character strengths beatitudes will be of interest to practitioners and educators in secular and nonsecular domains who aspire to boost others' well-being, support their coping, and enhance their spiritual growth.

Appendix A. The VIA Classification's Virtues as Beatitudes of Light

When we or someone we know is struggling, we might offer the metaphor of using strengths to shine a light of insight and hope into the pain and turmoil. This set of beatitudes, across the six universal human virtues of the VIA Classification, builds on this idea. It offers another example of the integration of the VIA Classification with the time-tested structure of the beatitudes.

Table 1. Virtue beatitudes/blessings.

Virtue	Beatitude/Blessing (Using the Metaphor of Light)
Wisdom	Blessed are the wise: for they teach about the light needed in the world.
Courage	Blessed are the courageous: for they shine light into darkness.
Humanity	Blessed are those displaying humanity: for they hold our hand in the darkness.
Justice	Blessed are the just: for they fight for the light to continue to shine.
Temperance	Blessed are the temperate: for they manage the brightness and intensity of the light.
Transcendence	Blessed are those showing transcendence: for they become the light within the darkness.

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