

#Blessed

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If you are currently eating something, I'm going to need you to put that down.

No, really. Set the peanut butter cup aside. It'll keep for just one second.

When we lived in Guatemala, I bought each week's fruits and veggies at an open-air market, a place to which said produce had traveled by truck over dirt roads and was now sharing a space with flies, both live and dead iguanas (I jest not), and all manner of flora and fauna.

Now. The fruits, especially, were the most delicious things we had ever tasted. In fact, when we moved back to the States and my son ate a banana purchased at the local grocery, he promptly spat it out and declared, "This doesn't even taste like a banana!" He was not wrong.

The only price we had to pay for delicious, perfectly-ripened produce was a little one. Microscopic, in fact. Just a teeny tiny thing called a parasite.

We were diligent about bleaching and washing and sanitizing our food and water, but those little boogers were tenacious, so getting sick now and then was simply a part of life we all dealt with. In fact, once a year we had to de-worm our kids with meds, a liquid which I'd naively assumed was reserved for canines. Silly, silly gringa. Whenever we felt the....um....effects of parasites, we would simply drop off a....um....sample at the local laboratory building, get our self-diagnosis confirmed, and then stop off at the pharmacy to choose from an assortment of tinctures and pills. No prescription required. We'd feel better in mere days.

The only problem arose when I kept getting re-infected, over and over again, and not getting better. At one point, I even had to fly back to the States for testing, and I still have what will be lifelong health struggles related to that time. But, during the height of my illness and discouragement over it, I opened my email one morning to find a note in my inbox which basically read this:

` "Dear Jessica, I am so sorry to hear that you have been sick. I wanted to let you know that, if you had more of the Holy Spirit in your life, this would not be happening. Sincerely, *&!?\$"

Ahhhh, sooooo...what my intestines were lacking was a filling of the Spirit. If only I had known, I could have requested that at the pharmacy.

I laugh about that email now, but at the time I was a bit, shall we say, TICKED OFF. And hurt. And bewildered.

And the thing is, I feel much the same way today about the conversations happening in our country. I was recently informed that, because someone's bank accounts were overflowing this year, it was clear evidence that the blessing of God must be upon the USA.

I was additionally informed that we are all #blessed because employment rates are looking pretty good these days. In another conversation, I overheard someone declare that, since they were getting more cash money in their pockets this year, the Lord had favored our land.

This is how twisted our thinking has become. If we have the Spirit, we won't have health problems, like I did. Really? Because I'm pretty sure the Apostle Paul was told his thorn in the flesh wasn't going anywhere. And we all know what a slack-off Christian he was.

I'm also no financial planner, but I'm fairly positive Jesus's 401K was not returning good dividends. And we all know how far from the Father he was.

I do know every time Jesus mentioned money, it had more to do with ways to share it and how to worry less about it than ways to hoard it and how to obsess over it.

The problem is not with saving, investing, being health-conscious. The problem begins when we apply our own lens to what Jesus said, and we all do it. I'm doing it even now. But when we carry our conclusion to its logical end, what does it mean?

In my case, it meant that sickness was a result of lacking faith. Does that mean that every sweet mother who died too soon from breast cancer, every tiny baby who never took a breath, every child gunned down by violent hands was any less precious, any less valuable, any more a sinner than anyone else? Who sinned in these cases?

In the case of the economy, the argument means that abundance equals blessing. Does that mean that every family toiling in those fields of Guatemala to bring their offerings to market each week is less loved by the Divine? That because they struggle and have to feed their babies coffee instead of milk; that because they will never even own a home with running water; that because "saving for college" is a phrase they will never, ever utter...are they less loved, less #blessed? What wrongs did they do that exempted them from prosperity?

If one more person utters the phrase "God is good, all the time," to me after they find a great parking space or get a new shirt, or find a great deal at the store, I will first politely key their car, in Jesus's name, and then I'll remember this truth: It's hard to believe that God is good all the time. I can and must choose to. Every day. Especially on the hard days. I have to believe that the divine does not have a Dark Side. Perhaps you are trying to as well. But God's goodness has exactly zero to do with prosperity and lack of trouble in this life. In fact, the most faith-

abundant people I know generally are the ones with little money and the most struggles. That is where faith shines the greatest, when it comes from those with the least.

You can go ahead and pick your snack back up now. And if your 401K is overflowing, great. If your health is stellar, amazing. These are things to be thankful for, to never take for granted, to celebrate, but they are never things by which to measure our faith. That is something I'd rather leave up to Jesus, whose ways of teaching and living flipped the world's system on its backs.

So have a #blessed day. And I may not have enough of the Spirit, but I do know one thing: Stay away from those veggies.