

# The Pomegranate Tree by Hannah (Schorr) Hammond

*“How good is life for you when people insult you and persecute and spread evil lies against you on account of me. Celebrate and shout for joy, because your reward is great in the skies, for this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.” (Matthew 5:11-12 Bible Project Translation)*

All nine Beatitudes paint a picture of *the good life* that’s in store for people who are becoming more like Jesus. Each one challenges and rearranges our preconceived notions of what and who is important in God’s Kingdom. This final Beatitude continues the trend, confronting, once again, our perceptions of suffering. Persecution, oppression, hostility, and any suffering we may encounter on account of Jesus is not something to be avoided, but received, mysteriously and redemptively, as a catalyst of transformation and healing.

We see this demonstrated in the upside-down life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He welcomed the powerless, comforted the grieving, and lived in proximity to the unimportant. He hungered for right-relationships by setting wide tables, loving generously and with purity of heart. He came to a violent world to make peace, not by the sword, but through the power of sacrificial love. He did on earth what is right and good in the Kingdom. He perfectly lived the *good life* of the Beatitudes, and still, his life was marked by persecution, suffering, and ultimately, death. But these afflictions are momentary. Jesus’ death makes way for resurrection life; his wounds call forth humanity’s healing. Blessings abound in suffering.

Jesus says in Matthew 16:24-35 (NIV) that whoever wants to follow him “must deny themselves and take up their cross.” The Message

translation of these same verses puts it this way: “Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self.” Jesus’ invitation to the good life is not a race to the top, but a slow journey of growing downward in humility and sacrificial love, allowing the hardships of life to transform us into the likeness of Christ.

Pomegranates are plentiful in the Holy Land. When I moved to East Jerusalem, I would buy them at the market, take them home, and spend far too much time struggling with the bitter outer peel to get to the sweet seeds inside. I chose the pomegranate to represent this Beatitude because in a small way, they remind me that the bitterness of persecution, suffering, and even death does not get the final word in God’s kingdom. There is a sweetness that will always be greater—of Christ’s presence, who suffers with us and for us, and the hope of a Kingdom well on its way—and that’s cause for celebration!

## **The Pomegranate Tree**

Christ, our wounded healer,  
expand in us a capacity  
for the kind of love

that suffers,  
that builds endurance  
for the bitter,

trusting it will form in us  
the everlasting  
sweetness of your Kingdom.

