

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."  
Matthew 5:3

"For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,' declares the LORD. 'But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."  
Isaiah 66:2

## Rags to Riches

Beatitudes – Blessed are the poor in spirit – Matthew 5:3

We are a society that loves to hear inspirational, success stories.

It could be a down and out family getting an extreme home makeover or a bottom rung football team working its way to the top against all odds and gaining the victory both in sports and in life. No doubt, there are stories similar to these that flood your mind. These stories may highlight determination and endurance or they may encourage heart-felt emotions of compassion and camaraderie.

How does it make you feel to hear of a success story?

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Sometimes it may make us feel left out. Sometimes I wonder if I will ever win something. My brother-in-law won a 62 inch flat screen from a fast food game piece simply because he was thirsty and needed a drink. Some people have all the luck.

Our idea of poverty almost automatically focuses on money and material wealth. If someone is said to be poor, we think they have no money or are struggling financially. Yet, Jesus speaks of another kind of poverty. It is a poverty of the spirit which has far more eternal consequences than does material poverty.

Those who wish to enter the kingdom of heaven need to first become poor in spirit. Salvation is dependant on it.

You may think that is easier said than done. What are some of the reasons that someone does not want to be saved?

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It would be safe to say that the root is pride. We are all rich in pride. Pride stands in the way of spiritual poverty. What are some ways that you have shown pride recently?

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I say recently, because we are hard-pressed to get through a day or even an hour without some pride creeping in. This is why we need to be poor in spirit, but let's look at what it really means to be poor.

In the Greek mind there were levels of poverty. There were those who were poor and needed financial help from others to sustain living. They were capable of working for wages. Then there were those who were crippled, blind, or deaf. These were considered the poorest and needed to sit in a dark corner and beg. This poverty had a meaning of cowering

*"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."  
Psalm 34:18*

*"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise."  
Psalm 51:17*

or cringing like a beggar and is the same term used of Lazarus in Luke 16:20. They had no resources in themselves.

Now let's apply this to a spiritual setting. Jesus teaches that the poor in spirit are those who will inherit the kingdom of heaven. In other words, those who are absolutely incapable of anything and are totally dependant on God's grace will lay hold of heaven. Look at Isaiah 66:2, Psalm 34:18, and Psalm 51:17.

After reading these verses, how would you define poor in spirit?

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We must come to a point of realizing our complete and utter dependence on Christ for anything and everything. It is at this point that we are able to gain heaven. It really is a rags to riches story. Jesus explains that those who empty themselves and realize their dependence will have heaven, but it is not a future event, rather a present reality. Ephesians 2:6-7 explains that we have already been seated together in heavenly places and are receiving God's grace. The reign of Christ can take place now in our lives.

Today, the poor in spirit have Christ as their King.

But how do we get there?

There are some characteristics of those who are poor in spirit.

1. Dying daily – A person who is poor in spirit continues to humble himself and seeks to glorify God in his life. John the Baptist expresses this in John 3:30 when he says, "He must increase and I must decrease." The poor in spirit will give up anything to obtain Christ.
2. Exalting Christ – Those who are poor in spirit are lost in the wonder of Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:18 speaks of beholding His glory and then being transformed. A prayer of the psalmist was that he would be satisfied with being more like God (Psalm 17:15).
3. Embracing Contentment – Imagine if we were to demand of God to give us what we deserve. We would be given hell, literally. Therefore, anything else should be seen as a gift to be appreciated as He abundantly provides for His children. Ephesians 4:7 explains how grace was given to us. If we are being content, then we are not complaining.
4. Empowering Others – Those who are poor in spirit see the goodness in others as they realize we are all dependant and have need. As we realize our own dependence we are appreciative of the help of others. The church is then empowered to serve as one body (Romans 12:4-5).
5. Practicing Prayer – A beggar will always beg. The poor in spirit see their constant need and will continual be asking, seeking, and knocking (Matthew 7:7). Jesus is telling us to continue to ask, seek, and knock.

6. Worshipping God – Paul is a testimony to this in 1 Timothy 1:14 where he proclaims that God’s grace was exceeding abundant. A person who is poor in spirit will continual shout praise to God in gratitude for the exceeding abundance of His grace.

Remember that these are characteristics of someone who is poor in spirit. They are not practices or actions to act out in the hopes of laying claim to spiritual poverty.

I believe the testimony of Paul can serve as an example for the road to spiritual poverty. Paul had it all in regards to religion. In Galatians 1, he explains his background. He was a strict Jew who advanced beyond those around him. He was an overachiever in religion. He would have been labeled as charismatic and energetic. He was all about church and religion, but there was a change. He records this in verse fifteen and sixteen, “But when God was pleased to reveal His Son in me.” The continual understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ has the power to bring us to our knees and reveal our complete poverty.

I am reminded of the words of a hymn. “Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”

When was the last time you looked in His face and beheld Him as He is? I can almost guarantee you will walk away being poor in spirit, but remember “happy are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.”

Care to take a look?

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

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