



Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit

I Have a Problem

We've been taught all our lives to be independent, indispensable, and stubborn and super efficient. An inner voice says, "Prove it to them! You can do it. You don't need anybody's help. You can do it all by yourself."

At the very heart of our problem is pride. It is our single greatest detriment to coming to Christ, as well as spiritual growth and maturity.

Jesus confronted a group of Pharisees in His day with what is urgently needed in our day. Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God" (Luke 16:14-15). I have a strong suspicion that things haven't changed.

King Saul of Israel is a good example of this spiritual problem. He was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel. He had a problem with pride that he never dealt with and it became his downfall. Saul's son Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines in Geba and his father stole the show.

"Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. Then Saul blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, 'Let the Hebrews hear. All Israel heard the news that Saul had smitten the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become odious to the Philistines. The people were then summoned to Saul at Gilgal'" (1 Samuel 13:3-4).

It was nothing but cheap pride and vainglory at the expense of someone else's work. King Saul got the credit for his son's triumph. It is just one of many examples of the wicked pride of Saul. He was disobedient to the core. His life is a string of disobedience and lies to cover up his evil ways. He is disobedient and uses deception to cover up his evil heart.

"Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, 'I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands. And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the Lord all night. Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul; and it was told Samuel, saying, 'Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself, then turned and proceeded on down to Gilgal. Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, 'Blessed are you of the Lord! I have carried out the command of the Lord. But Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?' Saul said, 'They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and

them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed " (1 Samuel 15:10-15).

Saul stooped so low as to try to use worship as a scheme to cover his trickery. Finally God gave up on Saul. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from *being* king (v. 23). Saul rejected the Word of God and God rejected him (v. 26).

Note the principle that abides in this observation of a man's pride. 1 Samuel 16:7 states it clearly for us. The Lord said to Samuel, "But the Lord said to Samuel, Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart " (1 Samuel 16:7).

King Saul had a problem with pride and he did not want to face his problem.

What a contrast the poor in spirit are to the attitude of Saul. Jesus said the poor in spirit recognize their spiritual poverty and seek the blessings of God. In reality, the spiritually poor are spiritually enriched.

THE PAIN OF SPIRITUAL POVERTY

Recognize the problem

You can never deal with a problem until you recognize that the problem exists. As we have just observed, Saul wasn't willing to face up to the fact that he had a problem.

The worse kind of disease you can have is one that effects the nerve endings so you cannot feel pain. Our culture is a culture saturated with a preoccupation with self which emphasizes happiness, bliss, and all the comforts of life with no emotional pain.

Pain, in whatever form is the pressure that motivates us to look outside of ourselves for help. It provides motivation to get up and do something. God can use our emotional pain to make us aware of our spiritual poverty and encourage change.

Spiritual growth doesn't take place until there is change. We cannot stay the same and go with God. He won't allow it. We will find every excuse under the sun to prevent change from taking place in our lives. It is uncomfortable. We don't like it. We resist it. But our spiritual growth won't take place until we are willing to face the need for changes.

When you stop growing, you stop living. When you stop changing you stop growing. You get into a rut and you rust out spiritually. We change when we grow, and when we change often we experience a lot of growth. We fear change because it is unpredictable. It fits into the realm of the unknown and that is scary to most people. Our security blankets are all gone. The old ways of doing things is always safe, but not

most people. Our security blankets are all gone. The old ways of doing things is always safe, but not necessarily healthy. The new is untested and discovering our spiritual blind spots is not always easy. The truth is it is not easy for anyone to grow. There is emotional pain when we become aware of our spiritual failures. Growth never takes place in a vacuum. It comes through conflict, pressures and difficult circumstances.

In Matthew 5:3 Jesus describes the theological concept of "conviction." Conviction means to bring to light, expose someone's sins before the Lord. It denotes to point something out to someone in order to be convicted and thus to reprove, correct, and show him his fault. Too often we try to do the work of the Holy Spirit when He alone can bring a depraved sinner under conviction and cause Him to turn from his sins and trust in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Nothing convicts like the Word of God under the power of the Spirit of God who inspired it.

Jesus told the story of a Jewish man who had two sons. The younger son asked for his share of the estate and went to a distant Gentile country. He squandered his estate with wild, reckless living. He wasted the whole sum with the wildest unrestrained extravagance.

Things went great until he ran out of money. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished (Luke 15:14). He joined himself to a hog farmer and he sent the young man into his fields to feed his hogs. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men (vv. 16-19). And he got up and came to his father. "

In contrast to King Saul this young man came to his senses, literally himself. He came under conviction in a moment of self-realization. He had been beside himself. The young man came to a deep realization of his spiritual need and repented. He realized he was the same kind of employee as his father's hired men and they have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger. His father's servants had great abundance, more than they can eat while he was dying of starvation.

We too must come to the place where we realize all the riches of heaven are at our disposal and we sit and sulk and lament in a pigsty. All the power of God rests upon us when we claim our inheritance. We live as heirs of God and draw from God's riches. You are a son, not a slave. But the only way you get out of a pigsty is to come to your senses and confess, I have a problem. "

THE PRIVATION OF SPIRITUAL POVERTY

Jesus said, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3).

The word Jesus used for "poor" describes absolute and abject poverty. The root means "to crouch, or to cower." It describes the poverty that is beaten to its knees. He is a beggar who has nothing at all and must live on other men's labors. He is so poor that he can only obtain his living by begging. He has been reduced to the very act of begging - covering his face with his hands in an act of being ashamed to let the giver know his identity. He is absolutely destitute. He is so oppressed and disillusioned that he is in special need of God's help. If God does not step in he will die. He can only be described as poor, miserable, beggarly helpless. He is powerless to do anything about his problem.

This kind of person is conscious of his spiritual destitution, and feels his need. It is a painful experience. It is

This kind of person is conscious of his spiritual destitution, and feels his need. It is a painful experience. It is the opposite of self-sufficiency. The spiritually poor person is aware of his condition and has enough pain to seek relief.

Ultimately we are talking about a man's attitude toward himself.

Isaiah 6:5 reminds us of such a response, "Woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips." The prophet Isaiah came to grips with his spiritual need. He experienced the pain of his sinfulness and depravity. He was saying, "I am not a spiritually prosperous man." I am guilty before God.

The Holy Spirit brings us to the place where we realize, "I am not as spiritually mature as I thought I was." "I am a sinner; I have a need." "I have a problem and it is really worse than I ever thought. God I want Help!"

And if you never come to that place you will never get help.

It is an attitude of utter dependence upon God. Until we admit our need we can never receive what God has for us. God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him.

Poverty of spirit is the opposite of spiritual pride. Jeremiah saw the depravity of man when he wrote, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (17:9). What a contrast this is with the cleansed pure heart of 20:9 when grace is experienced. John Calvin wrote: "He only who is reduced to nothing in himself, and relies on the mercy of God, is *poor in spirit*."

Alexander Maclaren observes: the word *poor* does not only signify one in a condition of want, but rather one who is aware of the condition, and seeks relief . . . to be inmost reality conscious of need, of emptiness, of dependence on God, of demerit; the true estimate of self, as blind, evil, weak, is intended; the characteristic tone of feeling pointed to is self-abnegation. Our proud, arrogant self-confidence must be broken. It is a lowly and just estimate of ourselves, our character, our achievements, based upon a clear recognition of our own necessities, weaknesses, and sins."

Do you feel the pain of your depravity so badly that you want to do something about it? Congratulations, you are poor in spirit. Only then can we receive help.

Why do I want to become aware of my spiritual poverty?

- It is the only way I can become more like Jesus. I cannot stay the way I am and become like Him. I have to change. I have to take off some attitudes and behaviors in my life and put on attitudes of Jesus like those found in Galatians 5:22-23.
- I want to become a better witness and have the ability to share Christ in a more mature manner.
- I want to develop my talents, abilities and gifts in a more responsive caring ministry.
- I want to become all that I am capable of being in Christ Jesus.
- I want to enjoy the fullest, highest, super abounding life that God offers me in Christ Jesus (John 10:10b).
- I want to be a person who has God's blessings.

I want to be a spiritually prosperous person who is identified with pure character and who has a sense of God's approval founded on His righteousness. I want to be the kind of person who enjoys God's favor and who is destined to enter His eternal kingdom. I want to stand right in the sight of God by means of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. As a spiritually prosperous or blessed person, I want that consciousness of perfect peace, perfect joy and perfect rest. The whole emphasis is on God's marvelous

consciousness of perfect peace, perfect joy and perfect rest. The whole emphasis is on God's marvelous grace. It is something God does for the person who confesses his poverty and relies wholly upon God and His provision. God gives His best to those who live in absolute, abject spiritual poverty. It is for those of us who consider ourselves the worst kind of sinners, the chief of sinners. If there is no sense of poverty, there is no blessing from God. Of course, the paradox is absolutely amazing—the poor in spirit are extremely rich. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

None of these spiritual goals can be achieved in my life unless I am willing to become aware of my needs and grow from them in Christ's likeness.

How do we come to a sense of spiritual poverty?

- We must accept the *responsibility* for our own lives. No one else can accept it for us.
- We must *know* ourselves—our strengths, weaknesses, fears, hidden desires, ambitions, gifts, natural abilities, etc. and be honest with ourselves. We must see ourselves the way God sees us.
- We must *accept* that which cannot be changed, *change* that which can be changed, and have the wisdom to know the difference (Romans 7).
- We must make a *commitment* to change and begin now. Ask the Holy Spirit to take control of your life.
- *Be yourself* to the glory of God.

SPIRITUAL POVERTY AND THE NON-CHRISTIAN

Nicodemus was a devoutly religious man who was spiritually dead (John 3:3, 5). He had been born physically and he needed to be born spiritually. There is no difference between Nic and any other person. He had to come to a sense of his spiritual need. Jesus told him,

"Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, You must be born again. The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus said to Him, How can these things be?" (John 3:5-9).

He was a highly educated, cultured, moral, religious successful man who had to realize that he was spiritually dead. The wages of sin is death. "The soul that sins will surely die." The apostle Paul made the same emphasis in Ephesians 2:1-3. We were all born spiritually dead. Spiritual birth and physical birth do not take place at the same time. One is involuntary; the other is a volitional choice.

King David realized his need when he cried out in Psalm 51:4, "Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge" (Psalm 51:4).

Jesus told another story that drives home this need in Luke 18:9-14. The writer Luke begins by telling us why Jesus told the story. He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt. Two men went up to the temple to pray one a Pharisee and the other worked for the Internal Revenue. He was a tax collector. This is how they were praying.

"The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get."

swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, the sinner! I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted " (Luke 18:11-14).

One man realized his poverty. The other remained arrogant. God's remedy is eternal life. We can receive this gift from God as we acknowledge and confess to Him our sinfulness and believe on His Son who died for us on the cross. John 3:16-17 makes it very clear that we must believe on Christ as our Savior. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. Romans 5:6-8 reminds us of why Christ died for us. For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. If there is no sense of poverty there is no recognition of our need for the gift of salvation. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

The poor in spirit are the only one who will enter into the Kingdom of God. It is a perfect example of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. It is the foundation of everything we are in Christ. Salvation is by grace alone and not works of self-righteousness. The spiritually poor have no merits and nothing to offer to God. They are spiritually bankrupt and under the wrath of God. The poor in spirit fully realize they deserve the judgment of God because they are sinners. They can only come and cast themselves upon the grace of God. If we take these words of Jesus seriously we realize that we cannot attain to them. We can never merit salvation. It drives us to seek Christ.

SPIRITUAL POVERTY AND THE CHRISTIAN

Moreover, Jesus teaches believers how to live a life pleasing to Him once we have put our faith in His shed blood to cover all our sins. This is how residents of the Kingdom of God are to live. We cannot be kingdom residents and be self-satisfied. There is always room to mature and grow as a Christian. No one can live the Christian life in and of himself without the power of God dwelling in him.

Romans 7:14-28 is a humbling passage of Scripture if we are honest with ourselves. The apostle Paul was incredibly honest and open with us. This is a Christian, a mature believer, who is wrestling with the reality of his spiritual poverty. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin (vv. 24-25).

The Lord condemns our self-sufficiency and spiritual pride. The Pharisees were intensely proud self-righteous men who declared they needed nothing. They spurned free, imparted righteousness that comes from God (2 Corinthians 5:21). The arrogant, spiritual proud receives nothing from God. Spiritual pride is evidence of sinfulness. The spiritually poor have an attitude of utter dependence upon God. They have come to the end of self-rule and cry out to God for deliverance.

We live in a day when Christians like to brag about their religious experiences. The apostle Paul had an experience that ranks far above any we have received. He told about it in 2 Corinthians 12:5-10 in only a few words. He waited fourteen years before he even mentioned the ultimate Christian experience, and he mentions it only once to illustrate what God was teaching him in his present circumstances. Listen to the poverty of this spiritual giant in his own words:

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me —to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

Years ago we had this friend who was a Medical Doctor who was doing his residency at Tulane University Medical School. He stood up one Sunday morning during the prayer and praise part of the worship service. His incredibly beautiful wife was sitting beside him and he said: "I want you to pray for me. I have a problem with lust." His honesty woke up that whole congregation. He hastened to say, No, I am not living in sin. I have not betrayed my wife. But I have a problem and I want to deal with it. And I want you to pray with me and help me. You don't find that kind of honesty in most worship services. The Holy Spirit must bring us to this place of honesty before we can grow spiritually.

PERSONAL APPLICATIONS FOR THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Lets take a quick inventory of our lives:

- At what point in my life have I experienced poverty of spirit?
- When have I experienced utter helplessness?
- Where is the pain in my life?
- If you could ask Jesus to change one thing about your life what would you ask Him to change?
- What is the one sin you seemingly cannot overcome?
- Where is your vulnerable spot? Where is your churning place?
- What is your deepest personal need?

God allows, even brings circumstances and opportunities into our lives to humble our hearts so we will listen to His voice and turn from our sinful ways and obey Him. God can use the experiences in our lives to get our attention, to cause us to trust Him and grow spiritually and then out of that growth reach out and minister to others who need a touch of His grace.

What are the results of such poverty?

You become completely detached from things, and God means everything to you. That is the greatest benefit. You come to the place in your life where you realize your utter lack of resources to meet life and you find your help and strength in Him. You realize you can do nothing without divine assistance; you have no power in yourself to do what God requires. Jesus put it this way, I'am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned (John 15:5-6).

Praise God for the furnace

Can you thank the Lord for the hammer, and the file and furnace He uses in your life? It was the enraptured Samuel Rutherford could shout in the midst of serious and painful trials, "Praise God for the hammer, the file, and the furnace."

Poverty of spirit refers to the deep convicting power of the Holy Spirit who brings to light and exposes our sins before the Lord. Let us be ruthlessly honest. Do we quickly quench His Spirit's quiet probing voice, or do we sit in contemplation and confess our sins to Him and draw from His strength to overcome?

Oh come Lord Jesus and make us aware of the dross in our lives that needs to be burned up. Cut out of our hearts those attitudes and behaviors in our lives that are not pleasing to You. Help us to be sensitive to You and Your Word and to humbly listen to You as You probe our hearts.

There is no one in the Kingdom of God who is not poor in spirit. The proudly self-sufficient are inevitably excluded from the presence of God. The poor in spirit have enough pain to want deliverance. The helpless and hopeless person puts his whole trust in God alone.

If you will recognize your spiritual poverty you can become spiritually prosperous by receiving Christ.

Is it worth the pain?

That is determined by the blessing. The spiritually prosperous person is so poor in spirit that he can receive the kingdom of heaven. Remember the blessing that comes with this beatitude? Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The pauper is rich! He is under the sphere of God's rule where at any given moment in time he acknowledges God's rule. We cannot have that if we are self-righteous. The poor recognize and submit to the sovereignty, royal power and dominion of the Lord. He rules over the hearts of those who are poor in spirit.

Therefore, all the rich benefits and blessings of His kingdom belong to its subjects. That is the paradox. I am poor, yet I am rich! In no sense can we merit the kingdom. We are too poor. But being what we are, we possess it. Jesus said it is theirs alone. Those who are not poor in spirit can never have membership in the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is spiritually discerned and one day His kingdom will be displayed in universal glory and manifest for all to see. Jesus said in Luke 17:21, where the King is, there is the Kingdom. The poor in spirit acknowledge in their heart the reign of the King and His Kingdom. Therefore, the subjects of the Kingdom are the objects of His care. The Lord provides for those who are spiritually poor. He provides for His people in His Kingdom.

Entrance into the kingdom of God is by the new birth (Matthew 18:3; John 3:5). The greatest blessings conceivable are found in the kingdom of God. Note the emphasis Jesus gave ~~it~~ is *now*. It is not merely in prospect, but in present possession.

One of the most enjoyable experiences I have ever had was with a carpenter named Victor. We were working together on a community development project building a water reservoir for the Waoranie Indians in Ecuador's rain forest jungle. Victor lived so far out in the jungle in an isolated area that the only radio station he could pick up was the short wave broadcast of HCJB, in the capital city of Quito. He kept hearing the radio spot, "Lea la Biblia" (Read the Bible), and if you don't have a Bible send 20 Sucres and we will mail you one. Victor was hard as a rock. He wrote to HCJB and said he wouldn't send them 20 Sucres, but if they really wanted him to have one they would send it. The secretary in Spanish Radio did just that. Victor began reading the Bible. The only place he knew to begin was from the first page. So read from cover to cover, again and again. He was still hard as a rock. In time, his wife became critically ill and was flown by Missionary Aviation Fellowship to HCJB's Shell Mera hospital and her life was saved. While in the hospital a missionary nurse led her to Christ. Victor was still reading his Bible, even though he had not put his trust in Christ as his Savior. His wife came home and shared with Victor her testimony of how she put her faith in Jesus Christ. As he listened he humbled his heart and with deep conviction of his unbelief and sin his wife led

Jesus Christ. As he listened he humbled his heart and with deep conviction of his unbelief and sin his wife led Victor to put his faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit brought Victor to a realization that he was lost, a spiritual pauper, who could never be saved unless he trusted in Christ. Today Victor preaches all over the jungles of Ecuador. Victor had to come to a sense of spiritual poverty to come to Christ, and you do too.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress;
Helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).



Series on the Beatitudes index

Here are some more studies on justification by faith in Christ: [Romans Series](#) and our [Union with Christ](#).

Title: Matthew 5:3 "Poor in spirit" The Spiritually Prosperous Person

Series: The Beatitudes of Jesus

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Wil is a graduate of William Carey University, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored in Panama, Ecuador and the U. S, and served for over 20 years as missionary in Ecuador and Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry head in over 100 countries for ten years. He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in world missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist pastor and teaches seminary extension courses in Honduras.

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