

The Beatitudes: Poor in Spirit

My first step in spiritual growth is recognizing I bring nothing to God.



The Transformation for Adult LifeGroups

Matthew 5:3

June 9, 2019/June 12, 2019

TODAY'S TEXT

Text: **Matthew 5:3**

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

FIRST THOUGHTS

Would you consider yourself proud? Do you think you struggle with pride? It's been said that the first sign of being proud is not recognizing you are. Here are some subtle ways to identify pride in your life.

1. Assuming you already know something when someone else is teaching.
2. Considering certain tasks below you.
3. Not asking for help.
4. Feeling the need to constantly correct others or teach them things.
5. Talking about yourself a lot.
6. Disregarding the advice of others.
7. Name-dropping.
8. Justifying your shortcomings instead of owning them.
9. Unwilling to submit to the authority of others.
10. Constantly noticing the ways you are better than others (comparison).

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

When you consider the chief opponents of Jesus were the Pharisees, you can understand why pride and humility were the starting points of the Beatitudes. The Pharisees entire religious system was based on what they could accomplish for God. By having hundreds of specific rules and commands, they could easily tell where they stood with God. But this was in contrast to what Jesus taught. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus redefines the Law to a higher standard that even the Pharisees could not attain. Adultery is not just a physical act, but a lustful heart; murder is not just a horrible action, but an attitude of hate. And so He shows us that we really are poor in spirit. We are incapable of attaining God's standards. But the good news is this is the starting place of our relationship with God. When we recognize our need, then we recognize we need Him.

The Bible talks about pride in over 100 verses—and it is never presented in a positive light. For instance, pride is not simply feeling good about one's accomplishments or abilities. It is arrogance, a stubborn preference for self will over God's will.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

I Come Empty-Handed

> Read Matthew 5:3

- What are some words you associate with "poor"?
- What do you think it means to be "poor in spirit"?
- Why is it important that we approach God empty-handed?

The Enemies of Being Poor in Spirit

Even when we recognize we have nothing to offer God, we often don't approach him. What keeps us away?

- Our Pride—Pride can only live in the soul of a person who is far from God. The goal of pride is to get you away from God.
 - Read Philippians 3:4-11
 - How did Paul struggle with pride? What did he do to defeat it?
 - We may not have all the religious credentials Paul had, but what forms of pride do we embrace today?
 - What can we do to combat the pride that creeps into our lives?
 - How is pride a gateway sin that leads to many others?

- Our Self-Affirming Culture—Becoming poor in spirit goes against the grain of our self-affirming culture. The world tells us to affirm and value self. The Bible tells us to deny self.
 - Read Proverbs 3:5-6.
 - How have you seen culture elevate self over everything else? Why is it easy for us to believe this deception? Have you seen this even in the church?
 - How do you feel about this statement: If you are religious, reasonably successful, and live in a self-affirming culture, then becoming poor in spirit will be a steep climb for you.
- Our Own Success-- The irony is that the more we pursue humility, the more we experience the blessing of God, and the more we are tempted to pride. The more successful you are, the easier it is to believe that you are something, and the harder it is to humble yourself before God.
 - How does our temptation to pride grow as we grow closer to God?
- Our False View of God – Some people, even when they realize their need, don't approach God out of fear of punishment, shame or guilt. See the example of the Prodigal Son's reception in Luke 15:20-24.

The Blessings of Being Poor in Spirit

> Read Matthew 5:3 again—what is the promise attached to being poor in spirit? What do you think this blessing looks like?

Being poor in spirit will allow you to experience the Kingdom of Heaven by. . .

- Releasing you from the idea that God owes you.
- Positioning you to ask and receive in prayer.
- Nourishing your love for others.
- Strengthening you to overcome temptation.
- Freeing you from the tyranny of self—both self-love and self-loathing.
- Leading you to worship Jesus.

Which of these blessings do you think you need most? Why?

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

At this starting point of the Beatitudes, we can be thankful that step 1 is within our grasp—we begin with nothing. We start with admitting to ourselves and to God that we don't have what it takes. Christians know their own poverty. They look to Jesus for what they do not have, and find in Him all that they need.

PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK

- Ask God to show you the places in your life where pride has crept in. Recognize that pride cannot stand in the presence of God. Spend time in God's presence through prayer, worship, and Bible reading to help you eliminate pride.
- Next week we learn that our own poverty leads us to mourn our sin. Read David's prayer of confession and mourning in Psalm 51
- Reflect on this quote: *"It is worthy of double mention that this first blessing is given rather to the absence than to the presence of praiseworthy qualities; it is a blessing not upon the man who is distinguished for this virtue or remarkable for that excellence, but upon him whose chief characteristic is that he confesses his own sad deficiencies . . . Not what I have, but what I have not, is the first point of contact between my soul and God."* C.H. Spurgeon, 1873

READ THROUGH THE BIBLE

9th – Ecclesiastes 10-12; Psalm 94; Ephesians 5 | **10th** – Song 1-4; Ephesians 6 | **11th** – Song 5-8; Philippians 1 | **12th** – 1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 10-11; Philippians 2 | **13th** – 1 Kings 13-14; 2 Chronicles 12; Philippians 3 | **14th** – 1 Kings 15; 2 Chronicles 13-14; Philippians 4 | **15th** – 1 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 15-16; Colossians 1