



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PRAYER CLOSET MINISTRIES, INC.

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VOLUME XVII

MAY/JUNE, 2014

ISSUE 3

Blessed Are The Bankrupt

In **Matthew 5**, we see Jesus going up on a mountain, “And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain” (**5:1a**). In the gospel of Matthew, mountains are important. Seven times, we are told that Jesus is on a mountain: at his temptation (**4:8**), when he went away to pray (**14:23**), when he healed and fed the multitudes (**15:29-38**), during the Transfiguration (**17:1**), when he gave the Olivet discourse (**24**), the Great Commission (**28:16**), and here in **5:1** when he delivers the Sermon on the Mount.

Mountains are also important elsewhere in the Bible. We think especially of Moses and Mount Sinai where God spoke to Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments. Therefore, when we are told in **Matthew 5** that Jesus goes up on a mountain, we can know something important is going on here. It is a sign that something important is at hand.

At the same time, **Matthew 5:1** tells us that Jesus sat down. In ancient times, this symbolized authority. In Jesus’ day, rabbis would sit to speak from or about the Scriptures (**Luke 4:20-21**). Jesus sits to teach. He is about to reveal God’s truth – the truth He received from the Father. The fact that Jesus is on a mountain and sits to teach is powerful indication that something important – eternally crucially – is about to be spoken.

What’s interesting is that Jesus’ disciples gather around him, “and when he was set, his disciples came unto him” (**5:1b**). When Jesus went up on the mountain, His disciples drew

close and surrounded Him, ready to listen to His teaching. The words that He speaks are for His disciples – for those who follow Him. The crowds were free to listen (**7:28**). However, His primary purpose is to teach His disciples.

Jesus has been proclaiming the good news of the kingdom (**Matthew 4:23-24**). He has verified it with miracles – primarily through public healings. The miracles made Jesus popular. The crowds were curious about Jesus and eager for His healing. Yet, Jesus came to make disciples not attract crowds. Popularity and working miracles was not the purpose of Christ’s incarnation and ministry. It was to make disciples – to save and transform sinners!

This is why Jesus sets down to teach His disciples (**5:2**). He wants them to understand what it means to be a disciple – a follower – of Jesus Christ. In **Matthew 5**, we have recorded the words of Jesus about being a disciple. They are often called the beatitudes. Yet, these words are the profile of a disciple. His words reveal the character of those who have surrendered to Jesus and seek to follow Him.

In this issue of *The Prayer Closet*, we will examine the first of the beatitudes. The first beatitude is, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (**5:3**). Jesus teaches that the first character trait of His followers is they are “poor in spirit.”

What Does It Mean To Be “Poor In Spirit?”

When Jesus says that His followers are “poor in spirit,” what does He mean by that? First, we need to examine what it doesn’t mean. It doesn’t mean materially poor. Some interpret this phrase “poor in spirit” as those who are not rich – those lacking in material and financial resources. This is not Jesus’ meaning here. Jesus says poor “in spirit.” It doesn’t have anything to do with how much you have or don’t have in your bank account. It’s not about your financial status. Those who follow Jesus can be materially poor (**James 1:9**) or materially wealthy (**James 1:10**).

Being poor in spirit does not mean having a low self-esteem. It’s not looking around you and comparing yourself to others and then saying, “I just don’t measure up. I just don’t have what others have. I’m just not as good or talented or smart as others are.” The poverty of spirit that Jesus speaks of here is not self-hatred as you look at what others are and what others have. It is not having some morbid notion that you are personally valueless or a piece of trash.

Being poor in spirit is not going around and confessing how insignificant you are. It’s not like standing on the summit of a mountain, on the shore of a beach, or at the Grand Canyon and confessing how small you are. It’s not about being timid, insecure, or cowardly. This is not the poverty of spirit Jesus refers to here.

Being poor in spirit means that you are utterly bankrupt before God. You have nothing to commend yourself to God. You have nothing and can do nothing to make yourself right with God. The word “poor” in **Matthew 5:3** refers to a continuous state of utter poverty. The poor in spirit are spiritually bankrupt, morally insolvent. They have nothing to offer God. They are absolutely destitute before God with no hope and no help.

Being poor in spirit means seeing that I am utterly lost and separated from God. It is acknowledging that I have nothing to make myself right with God. It is coming to the place where I know that I can do nothing to pay for my own sin and rebellion.

Yet, being poor in spirit goes beyond this. It also means complete dependence on God. When I realize that I am bankrupt before God, I cast myself on His mercy. I look to Him for His grace and His forgiveness. I cry out for His power to change me and to help me. The person who is poor in spirit relies completely on God’s willingness to help and God’s power to help.

Jesus declares that this is what it means to be His disciple – to be one of His followers. His disciples see their bankruptcy and yield to Him. They acknowledge their need and rely on God. They turn from themselves to trust only in Jesus and His reign over their lives.

The truth is, everyone is spiritually bankrupt. All of our deeds are like a polluted garment (**Isaiah 64:6**). Everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (**Romans 3:23**). No one is righteous, not even one (**Romans 3:10**). No one really understands and seeks after God (**Romans 3:11**). No one does good before God (**Romans 3:12**). No one really fears God (**Romans 3:18**). This is the Bible’s assessment of everyone – the whole human race.

In one sense, then, everyone is poor in spirit. We are destitute before God and we owe Him a debt that we cannot pay. However, when Jesus speaks here of the poor in spirit, he does not refer to those who are **objectively** bankrupt. That would be all of us. Instead, here He specifically means those who **personally** come to know that they are bankrupt before God. He speaks of those who embrace and admit that they are spiritually and morally bankrupt before God.

The disciple of Jesus acknowledges his lostness and bankruptcy before God. He embraces the truth that he has sinned and owes God a debt that he cannot pay. The disciple of Jesus admits, “I’m ruined. I’m bankrupt. I am nothing and have nothing to offer to God to make me right with Him.” Being poor in spirit means knowing and admitting one’s spiritual neediness before God.

Yet, this bankruptcy drives us to depend on God. It leads us to trust in Christ, God’s answer for our sin. It compels us to rely daily on God for His power and help. It stirs us to seek

Him and pray to Him knowing that we have nothing in and of ourselves. Being poor in spirit manifests itself in daily dependence on God, His Word, and His Spirit.

Being poor in spirit means that we realize that we are utterly incompetent to run our own lives. We come to see that we are incapable of directing our own lives. We must have God! We must have Him to direct us. We forsake our self-reliance. We turn away from our self-sufficiency. We say good-bye to an independent spirit. We do all this because we see how bankrupt and helpless we are apart from God's grace and power through the good news of the gospel. We come to realize how hopeless we are and how much we need God day by day. The poor in spirit have an attitude of dependence on God – a dependence rooted in our spiritual bankruptcy.

What Benefits Do The Poor In Spirit Receive?

Being poor in spirit is foundational to being a follower of Jesus Christ. It's the starting point for all other character traits of His disciples. This cuts against the grain of modern thinking. It is the exact opposite of the world's belief. This world looks down on being broken and humble. It despises being destitute and relying on something or someone outside of oneself.

Yet, this is the way of God's kingdom. While the world doesn't understand it and despises it, God promises rich blessing to the poor in spirit. What benefits come to those who are poor in spirit?

Supernatural Joy

Jesus declares, "*Blessed* are the poor in spirit." The word "blessed" means a supernatural joy – a happiness that only God gives. It may sound contradictory to the world, but the way to true and lasting joy is by embracing your bankruptcy and relying on God. The path to true, abiding joy is by acknowledging what God says about you is true and then seeking after Him.

Why is this the path to true joy, the happiness that only God gives? When you come to God empty-handed, He graciously meets all your need. When we take our poverty to God, He makes us rich in giving us the grace that we need! In God's kingdom, the bankrupt actually become the rich! We have abiding joy because we rely on the God who is more than able and willing to meet our need.

The Bible is stunningly clear – God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (**1 Peter 5:5; Proverbs 3:34-35**). God's grace is not released into the proud heart and life. He does not grant His blessing, strength, and help to those who do not feel that they need Him. He does not grant His power to those who feel that they are self-sufficient in and of themselves. "God resists the proud," what ominous words! The proud, self-reliant person cannot receive from God.

Yet, to the humble, He gives grace. When you accept your bankruptcy and cry out to Him, He will grant you what you need. He will pour out His grace, His strength, and His blessing on you. He will give you salvation. He will give you help against your temptations. He will provide the power to do what you know that you cannot do yourself. He will fill you with His peace and His love.

This is why the broke are blessed! Those who are bankrupt receive from the riches of God. Those who embrace and admit being destitute in themselves receive all that they need from their loving Father and sovereign God. The joy of spiritual bankruptcy is that we can draw on the resources of our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ (**Philippians 4:19**).

Eternal Salvation

Jesus announces, "*Blessed* are the poor in spirit, *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" Those who admit and embrace their spiritual poverty will experience salvation. The destitute sinner who will acknowledge his lostness and inability will receive forgiveness of sins and a right relationship with God.

In this verse, Jesus equates entering the kingdom with salvation. To be saved means that you yield to Christ's reign and rule in your

life. You acknowledge that you are ruined, lost, and utterly bankrupt. You embrace Jesus, the Savior, the Lord, and the King. When you do this, you are saved. You enter His kingdom as one of His own.

There is nothing a person can do to earn salvation. You cannot merit a place in God's kingdom. You have to receive it by faith. It's important to notice that Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He slams the door on all works, all merit, and all attempts to be good enough to enter God's kingdom. It is a matter of embracing and admitting your lostness and bankruptcy and then relying on the Savior, Jesus Christ, that God has provided.

God sent His Son to die on the Cross and raised Him from the dead on the third day. This is God's answer for man's sin. This is God's solution for man's debt. Those who will admit their bankruptcy and will rely on Christ will experience God's salvation. It has nothing to do with merit, works, or our own efforts.

You enter God's kingdom by faith. First, you have faith that what God says about you is true. You are spiritually bankrupt, lost, separated, and facing the burning wrath of God. Yet, at the same time, it is faith that God has provided the answer and solution for your sin in Jesus Christ. One must trust what God says about his condition and His Son Jesus' work at the cross and the resurrection.

It is only those who will do this that will experience God's salvation – who will enter God's kingdom. That is why Jesus says that they are blessed. Those depending on themselves and their efforts are cursed (**Jeremiah 17:5; Galatians 3:10**). However, when a person embraces his bankruptcy and turns to Christ in faith, he experiences God's salvation and enters the kingdom.

Life In The Kingdom

When you embrace your bankruptcy and trust in Christ, you enter into the kingdom of heaven. You have a completely new way of life. You enter into a kingdom where there is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (**Galatians**

5:22-23). You become a member of a kingdom with many others who trust and love Jesus Christ. You have the privilege of approaching the King and asking of Him.

Yet, the most significant blessing is that you have a King who reigns over you in wisdom and love. You become a citizen in the kingdom where Jesus, who loves you and gave Himself for you, reigns as the king. Your King has compassion for you and will seek to meet your every need.

You will not find this in the world. All other kingdoms are sinful, broken, and impotent. All other kingdoms will falter, crumble, and fade away. Every kingdom, whether in our nations or in our personal lives, will not stand over time. Everyone whom we trust in and depend on in this world will fail us and disappoint us.

Yet, there is only one place to find an all wise, all-powerful King who always blesses and sustains His people. There is only one place that you can find a King who will never fail you or disappoint you. There is only one place where you can find Someone who loves you and is willing and able to change you. You can find it only in the kingdom of heaven where Jesus reigns.

Our King is ready and willing to help us. In our trials, He will sustain us. In our temptations, He will strengthen us and make a way out. In our battles, He will protect us and fight for us. In our moments of discouragement, He will lift our heads. In our moments of pride, He will humble us in His merciful hands. He is the all-sufficient King who reigns over us and meets our every need. This is the great blessing of being a member of His Kingdom!

At the same time, this King knows you. He sees you and knows you as you are. Your life is an open book before Him. There is great freedom in this. Jesus sees and knows what you are. Yet, He loves you and is willing and able to change you. The glorious truth is that our King is well aware of how sinful we are – how ruined and messed up we are.

However, He loves us and is willing to change us and sanctify us. In this kingdom, there is love, mercy, and grace to forgive us, sustain us, and to change us. Entering the kingdom of heaven means entering a new way

of life with a powerful and merciful King! This is why the poor in spirit have joy! Bankrupt and unworthy, the poor in spirit find forgiveness, wholeness, and godly change in King Jesus and His kingdom. What a reason for happiness!

What Does Being Poor In Spirit Look Like In Daily Life?

We have already seen the definition of being poor in spirit. We have also examined the benefits of being poor in spirit. Now, we need to see how this truth applies to daily life. What does being poor in spirit look like? What characterizes the life of one poor in spirit? When a person is poor in spirit, it affects every relationship of life.

Your Relationship To God

The person who is poor in spirit **trusts** in God. He turns to Christ and receives Him as personal Lord and Savior, trusting that His death and resurrection deals with his rebellion and lostness. He continues to trust God to provide all of his needs – physically, spiritually, and financially. The poor in spirit doesn't put his confidence in himself – his abilities, his power, his intelligence.

At the same time, the poor in spirit live a life of **dependence**. Since the poor in spirit knows that he is bankrupt and unable to please God, he depends on His Word and His Spirit. He depends on God's strength, confessing his lack of strength. He depends on God's wisdom, admitting that he's not wise enough to direct his own life. He depends on God's goodness, because he knows he doesn't merit anything from God.

The person who is poor in spirit **forsakes stubbornness before God**. For the poor in spirit, it's no longer about getting your way. It's no longer about getting your will done. The poor in spirit doesn't seek to manipulate God or to demand one's way from God. The poor in spirit are submissive to God. For the one who is poor in spirit, he quickly and willingly submits to the will and commands of his king.

Your Relationship To Others

Being poor in spirit does impact your relationship to others. The poor in spirit **shows mercy** to others. When you are bankrupt and unworthy and God shows mercy to you, how can you withhold mercy from others? Because he has experienced mercy from God, he extends that mercy to others. He has compassion for the weaknesses and struggles of others. He is willing to forgive the sins and failures of others. He doesn't look down on others, knowing that he himself is bankrupt and unworthy.

At the same time, he is **patient** with others. When you're unworthy and God shows you grace, it makes you willing to bear with others. We can look at others and be patient even though their lives aren't what they ought to be. The poor in spirit knows where he was and how far he has to go. He's willing to be patient and kind when people fail, stumble, and their weaknesses are exhibited.

Your Relationship With Those Outside The Kingdom

The person who is poor in spirit has a **passion** for those outside of the kingdom. He knows the unfortunate condition of those who have never come to faith in Jesus Christ. He understands what it means to be outside of the gracious and merciful kingdom of heaven. Therefore, he seeks to win others to Christ and His kingdom. He does this by interceding for those who need Jesus Christ. He shares the good news of the kingdom with those who have not surrendered to Christ. He seeks to live out the transformed life of the kingdom that others might be attracted to Christ and His kingdom.

Being poor in spirit has practical applications. It affects every relationship in your life. It leads you to trust Christ, depend on God, and to repent of willfulness and stubbornness. It stirs you to be merciful and patient to those around you. It fuels a passion to reach out to others that they might enter the kingdom and experience the King of this kingdom.

How Do I Become Poor In Spirit?

You may be saying, "I want to be blessed. I need to be poor in spirit. How do I become

poor in spirit?” It’s interesting. Jesus never tells us how to become poor in spirit. He tells us that we must be poor in spirit without ever commanding us to be poor in spirit.

At this point, you might want to throw your hands up in frustration. You are frustrated because you can’t figure out a way to be poor in spirit by doing something. Religion and morality turn Christianity into a system of achievement – “Do this and you will live.” However, the beatitudes turn this type of thinking on its head! The beatitudes say, “This is what you are. Now embrace it. Accept it. Confess it by faith.”

We must accept what God’s Word says about us. Our hearts are poisoned by sin and against God. Our hearts want to have our own way. We don’t want to submit to God. We don’t want to have God in control of our lives. We often desperately want to disobey Him. We want to take credit for the good that He has given, especially our niceness and religiosity. We kick, fight, and scrape to maintain our own kingdom. We are messed up people, utterly bankrupt in the need of God’s grace.

Yet, this is where we must turn to Christ and experience His grace. We must embrace these truths and admit, “This is me. This is exactly what I’m like. I don’t have anything to commend myself to God.” Once you do that, embrace Christ and His grace. Trust in Christ as your Savior and Lord – the King of your kingdom. Accept His forgiveness, love, and mercy. Revel and rejoice in that you have a wise and good King ruling over you – a King you can trust to do what is good and right for you in every circumstance.

At the same time, I understand that we live in a world that seeks to conform us to its warped, sinful image. The world proclaims, “Blessed are the independent, the self-sufficient, and the self-reliant.” We live in a “pull yourself up by your own bootstrap” world. Our hearts are also seeking to have our own little kingdom. We want control and don’t want to walk in poverty of spirit. How do you maintain your consciousness of your poverty of spirit? How do you continue to believe this truth when the world is telling you just the opposite? The following are some suggestions you might consider for this:

- **Meditate regularly on the gospel.** What is the gospel? It is the good news that God sent Jesus Christ to die on the Cross and raised Him from the dead on the third day. Only by trusting in this Savior and His death and resurrection can you be saved, forgiven, and accepted by God. Why is this needed? As you meditate on the gospel, it reminds you what God had to do to save you. You were so sinful and lost that He had to send His own Son to die in your place and then raise Him from the dead. God did all this to rescue you from your sin and your eternal damnation in hell.
- **Look daily at Jesus.** Jesus Christ humbled Himself before the Father. He became poor that we might experience the riches of His grace, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (**2 Corinthians 8:9**). We must focus on Jesus! He is the sinless Son of God, yet, He humbled himself before the Father. How much more must we who are sinful and bankrupt! He humbled Himself for us; we must embrace our poverty of spirit for Him. The only right response to the grace of Jesus is to acknowledge our poverty and receive His grace. Celebrate your poverty because it makes you eligible to receive the King and His gracious kingdom.
- **Meditate on the sinfulness of your heart.** The world that we live in downplays the sinfulness of man. It seeks to make excuse or explain away our sin. At the same time, our hearts are deceitful. We are easily blinded to our sin. That is why we must on a regular basis meditate on the sinfulness of our hearts. By doing this, we remind ourselves of the poverty of our spirit. One of the ways to do this is to read and meditate on **Romans 3:9-19, 23**. I also try to personalize it by placing myself in the verses: “I am no better than anyone else; I am a sinner like everyone else” (**Romans 3:9**). I have not done what is righteous in God’s sight” (**Romans 3:10**). “I do not understand the Word or the will of God on my own. I do not seek God as I ought” (**Romans 3:11**).

“I have gone out of the way seeking my own way and have become altogether unprofitable. I have not sought intently to do that good that God commands of me (**Romans 3:12**).

“My throat is an open grave with all kinds of uncleanness and rot. I have used my tongue for deceit. My lips are like a snake, full of deadly poison” (**Romans 3:13**).

I continue to do this throughout these verses, applying the truths to myself. This is a powerful reminder of my sinfulness and spiritual poverty. As soon you meditate on your sinfulness, run to Jesus! Rest in Him and rejoice in His grace. This will keep you from sinking in despair.

- **Confess you pride and ask God in His grace to work humility in your heart.** By nature, we are proud. We want to run our lives. We want to be in charge of our own little kingdom. Yet, we must realize that pride is the enemy of poverty in spirit. We must confess pride and ask God to work gently and powerfully to create humility in us.
- **Pray that you will not be self-deceived.** As I’ve read and memorized in Proverbs lately, one of the truths that has jumped out at me is our ability to deceive ourselves. Proverbs tells us that it is possible to deceive ourselves about our condition (**14:12; 16:2, 21:2**). Pray that the Holy Spirit will empower you to be sober about your condition. Ask that you will see yourself as you are and not give in to exalted ideas about yourself.

Prayer And Poverty Of Spirit

How does poverty of spirit affect our praying? Poverty of spirit has a major impact on your praying.

Poverty of spirit should motivate us to pray.

Prayer is the opportunity for spiritual beggars to ask of the able and generous heavenly Father. You and I have nothing; yet, we are invited to come to the Father and ask of Him. We are called to come to God and seek Him about our needs and the needs of others. For those who have nothing, the invitation to pray is a gift of grace!

Poverty of spirit should make us bold in prayer.

I often encounter people who say, “I don’t feel worthy to pray. I’m not worthy to come to God and ask of Him and speak to Him.” My answer is, “You’re exactly right! You’re not worthy to come. You’re not worthy to approach God.” However, the good news of the gospel is that sinful men and women can approach God through Jesus Christ the Lord. No one is worthy! Yet, through Jesus Christ, we are made worthy! When you trust in Jesus Christ, God covers you with the blood of His Son. He clothes you with the righteousness of His Son. This makes you worthy. This makes you acceptable. Since God has made you worthy, it ought to stir your heart to pray. You don’t deserve the privilege and gift of prayer. Yet, God has given you this precious gift. Embrace it. Take advantage of it. Use it. Seek the Father who has made you worthy and invited you to come to Him in prayer.

Spend time in prayer adoring God and reveling in His grace and mercy.

We are utterly bankrupt. Yet, we have received the riches of God’s grace and mercy. It is not due to our works or our merit. God has freely bestowed it on us through faith in Jesus Christ. This should stir us to praise God, to adore Him for His rich grace and unceasing mercy. We should rejoice in and revel in this grace and mercy that we have received because of what Christ did on the Cross and in His resurrection.

Confess your pride and self-reliance to God in prayer.

Let’s face it. We all want to run our lives. We want to have control. We want to take at least a little credit for the good in our lives. We want to think that we have something to commend ourselves to God. Yet, we must repent of this. We must confess this (**1 John 1:9**). When it comes to our minds, we must surrender it to God. When the Spirit convicts us, we must confess and ask for His forgiveness. We must pray for grace to seek to forsake pride and self-reliance and to walk in poverty of spirit and faith in Jesus Christ.

This first beatitude reminds us of the fundamental character of a Christian. A Christian is a person who has accepted what God says about him and then turns to Christ in faith. A Christian puts no hope in himself, his abilities, his resources, and his powers but turns and trusts in Christ. A Christian does not seek to win brownie points with God or gain favor with God but trusts in Jesus and walks in utter dependence on God.

This beatitude then confronts us with a question: Have I embraced my sinfulness and bankruptcy and turned to Christ? I would ask you to consider this. You may be religious. You may be moral. However, do you see that you have nothing to offer God to merit His forgiveness? Do you see that you have nothing to earn His salvation? Give up hope in your works, your abilities, your powers, and your strength. Acknowledge your poverty and weakness and turn to Christ. Cry out to Him, asking Him to save you and to come and take control of your life as your Savior, Lord, and King.

Perhaps you are a Christian. It's time to reaffirm your poverty of spirit. It's time to repent of trying to run the little kingdom of your own life and surrender to Christ the King again. It's time to confess pride and start walking again in daily dependence on God, His Word, and Spirit. It's time to confess again, "Father, I utterly need You. You are my only hope." This is the path to blessing in God's kingdom – "Blessed are the poor in spirit!"

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