

POOR IN SPIRIT

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

- Matthew 5:3

The Sermon on the Mount was Jesus' first and most important teaching about life in His kingdom. Before he instructs disciples about conduct and actions, he speaks of **character**. Many leaders and persons may have great capabilities and even causes, but if they do not have good character, their long term success will be diminished. How many Christian leaders have had seemingly great and effective ministries, but moral defects have ruined their influence.

Jesus is the greatest leader of all time and His influence continues to grow throughout the years as prophesied over 2700 years ago - Isaiah 9:7, **'of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end.'** Jesus' most important factor was and is his impeccable character. He perfectly reflected the image of God the Father. The Greek word for image is **ikon**.

He (Jesus) is the sole expression of the glory of God - the Light-being, the out-raying of the divine - and He is the **perfect imprint** and very image of [God's] nature, upholding and maintaining and guiding and propelling the universe by His mighty word of power.

Hebrews 1:3a Amplified

Character

Character applies to the aggregate of moral qualities by which a person is judged apart from intelligence, competence or special talents.

Merriam- Webster.com

The way someone thinks, feels and behaves, someone's personality.

Britannica.com

Character can be traced back to the Greek word *charassein*, meaning 'to sharpen, cut in furrows, or engrave.' The word for the Greeks was *Charakter*, a noun meaning **'mark, distinctive quality'**.

Our character is the distinctive traits impressed or otherwise formed by an outside or inside force upon us. There are two major factors involved in this formation:

- Inheritance (from our parents and ancestors)
- Influence (our environment, friends and experiences)

A perfect environment and genes are not a guarantee of perfect character. Consider the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, who lived in a paradise but still had major character breakdowns. God in his sovereignty, chose to give mankind free will to choose what they will do with their freedom. All humans born since Adam have inherited a sin nature, which I describe as A.I.D.S. (Adam Inherited Death Syndrome.) I got this illustration in the late 1980's while observing a billboard in London about A.I.D.S. (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), As an evangelist and Bible teacher, I am often looking for ways to use concepts from the natural or secular world to convey spiritual truths. (Jesus and the apostle Paul did the same thing). The following scripture corroborates Adam's effect on all of mankind:

‘...just as **through one man (Adam) sin entered the world**, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.’
- Romans 5:12

Poor in spirit This is not about being materially poor but it is about being spiritually bankrupt and completely destitute, however those who are physically poor are often more open to receive spiritual help than those who are rich and self-satisfied: Luke 6:20-25, James 2:5, Revelation 3:17.

‘**In spirit**’ refers to the inner man eg. Psalm 34:18, 51:17, Isaiah 66:2. The Greek (Gk.) has 2 words for being poor in the physical realm. The normal word for poor was (penes) which meant you struggled to meet your daily needs, even though you might have a job.

The worst form of being poor (**ptochos**) is used here. This is the **absolute poverty** of a cringing beggar (a pauper) who crouches and cowers, one who cannot help himself in any way. Jesus used the word ptochos, which meant the person was **begging poor**, one **helpless** to do anything for himself. Jesus could not have used a more humiliating term to his hearers. It is used in other places. Identify the person in each: Mark 12:42-43, Luke 14:21, 16:20-21, James 2:2-3. Those poverty stricken persons relied upon the grace of others. God speaks elsewhere of those who are brokenhearted, crushed in spirit, oppressed and lowly, humble and submissive in spirit - Psalm 34:18, Isaiah 57:15, 66:12, Proverbs 16:19.

Humble - from the Latin humus = ground, of the earth
From Latin humilis = low or lowly

The Bible defines **humility as “the fear of the Lord”** (Proverbs 22:4). To be humble is to be face down in the dirt, submitting to the authority of another, without personal pride.

Jesus set the example for us, as He made the greatest descent of anyone ever. From the glories of heaven to lowliness on earth as a servant. - Philippians 2:5-11. This passage describes his ‘kenosis’, which means he emptied himself of his right to operate in His God attributes except as permitted by God the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus came to earth to live as a man and became known as ‘Jesus of Nazareth’ not ‘Jesus from Heaven’. That would only be alluded to at times by Him. Jesus did not just come to earth to die for our sins, **He came to show us how to live on this earth as citizens of another kingdom, a heavenly one.** Jesus was dependent on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and that is the only way we can walk in full obedience and fruitfulness.

God resists / opposes the proud but give grace to the humble.
(Gk.= sets himself in battle array against the proud) - James 4:6

Just as water flows to lower areas around it., God’s grace streams towards those who are helpless, humble and hungry.

- **Mary** - Luke 1:46-53. She was a humble vessel who gladly submitted to God’s will and acknowledged God’s gracious blessings.
- **Prodigal son** - Luke 15:11-24. He went from ‘give me’ to ‘make me.’
- **Tax collector** - Luke 18:13-14
- **Apostle Paul** - humbled/ Acts 22:3-11 and humble/ Phil.3:3-9, 1 Timothy 1:15-16, 1 Corinthians 15:9-10. God’s grace gave him persistence, boldness, power.
- **Moses** - Exodus 3:11 given wisdom and boldness to lead millions of people.
- **Gideon** - Judges 6:15-16 given courage to overcome the enemy
- **David** - 2 Samuel 7:18-22 God chooses humble shepherd boy to be king

Not many mighty or noble are called. God chooses the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the mighty, the base and despised things of the worldthat no flesh should glory in His presence.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 paraphrased

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven Only the poor in spirit have access to God's kingdom.

The Greek reads: **'Theirs and theirs only is the kingdom'**

Humility is a key virtue in God's kingdom. Note that Jesus' promise is in the present tense, 'theirs **is** the kingdom'. Those who humbly accept God's favor and His kingship over them have access to the King's riches and resources as citizens of His kingdom. All that we need for this life is provided, but goodness beyond description awaits God's children in the city He has prepared for those who love Him. Here are a few blessings of God's grace now: John 1:16, 1 Corinth. 3:21-22, 2 Corinth.9:8, Ephesians 1:3, 2:7, 3:20, 2 Peter 1:3

Grace is God giving everything to those who deserve nothing.

- Colin Urquhart

Being 'poor in spirit' is not just an entry attitude into God's kingdom, it is **a way of life**. In our work, relationships and all activities, we are not meant to be self-sufficient for we have strengths but also weaknesses, and we have need of God's help and that of others. When making important decisions, there is safety in seeking God and also from counselors. Proverbs 11:14. One thief on the cross with Jesus was humble enough to ask Him, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom'. We will see that man in heaven! (Although people do have death bed repentance experiences, it is presumptuous to believe that one will have such an opportunity for now is the day of salvation.)

One of Jesus' disciples often exhibited pride and boastfulness. It was Peter. However, after he denied knowing Jesus, he experienced great shame and this led him to become more humble. After the Holy Spirit fell on Peter at Pentecost, he was still bold, but it was not about him but about Jesus - Acts 2. Peter's experience from pride to humility is inspiring. The following words take on extra meaning when we realize who wrote them.

'...all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. 1 Peter 5:5-6 NKJV

Peter did, and Jesus chose him to preach the first message from the new born church at Jerusalem to a waiting world hungry for hope. 3000 were saved that day and the rest is history. God blesses those who are hungry and humbled. For example, the dramatic rise of new Christians in places of persecution like China and Iran.

All persons start with DNA from earthly parents. Christians receive a new DNA when they are born again by the Holy Spirit. They are **a new creation, a new species of being** according to 2 Corinthians 5:17. They are **partakers of the divine nature** - 2 Peter 1:4.

Our character now comes from our Heavenly Father for we are born of Him! We have his DNA (Divine Nature Attributes) Fruit of the Spirit - Galatians 5:22-23, 1 John chapters 3-5

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