

# THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – MATTHEW 5-7

## The First Beatitude: Poverty of Spirit

### Matthew 5:3-12

Faith Church of Linden

By Daniel Patz on March 22, 2026

*The following notes are a draft of my sermon. These are not my pulpit notes or a manuscript I use to preach with but something I type up before writing out my “pulpit notes”. I hope they are helpful.*

## Introduction

Last week we asked two big questions: How do we find true and lasting happiness? And why do so many people who call themselves “Christians” look no different from the world around them? Everyone—from Oprah’s studio audiences to Blaise Pascal’s philosophers—wants to be happy. Pascal wrote, “All men seek happiness. This is without exception... The will never takes the least step but to this object.”

Jesus agrees we were made for happiness—but He starts the greatest sermon ever preached with a shocking paradox that flips the world’s script upside down. He does **not** say, “Blessed are the successful, the confident, the self-made.” He says:

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

This first Beatitude is the foundation stone for everything we saw last week—the invitation to true flourishing, the way of the cross, the promises of glory, the grace-formed traits that mark every believer, the distinctiveness that sets us apart from the world, and the perfect fulfillment we see in Jesus Himself. Without poverty of spirit, none of the other Beatitudes make sense or are truly possible.

So today we will unpack this one truth in four clear points:

Poverty of Spirit **Defined, Illustrated, Commended, and Applied**—so you can see it, feel it, and live it.

## 1. Poverty of Spirit DEFINED

Poverty of spirit is **not** financial or material poverty. You can be rich in money and still be poor in spirit—or poor in money and proud in spirit. It is also **not** emotional weakness or merely low self-esteem.

Instead, poverty of spirit is a **Spirit-given awareness of our spiritual poverty before a holy God**. Break it down three ways:

(1) **Spiritual awareness** – This is not natural; it is produced by the Holy Spirit and the grace of God working deeply, growingly, and fruitfully in the heart.

(2) **Of spiritual poverty** – It is the personal acknowledgement of our complete spiritual bankruptcy, moral destitution, and helplessness. D.A. Carson put it perfectly: “Spiritual poverty is the personal acknowledgement of spiritual bankruptcy. It is the conscious confession of our unworth before God.”

(3) **Before God** – It is a right understanding of who we really are in the blazing light of God’s holiness. We see ourselves exactly as God sees us: finite creatures who are not God, and sinners under His just curse and wrath apart from Christ.

**Romans 3:23 ESV** “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”

**Romans 3:10-18 ESV** “as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’ ‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.’ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’”

To be poor in spirit is to be emptied of self-importance, self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and self-security. It is to know ourselves as sinners who cannot commend ourselves to God in any way and who are utterly dependent on His grace for salvation and every good thing. The origin of this awareness is seeing God in His holiness and seeing ourselves as we really are. The source is the Holy Spirit’s convicting work of grace in our hearts.

**Reflection Question:** On a scale of 1–10, how aware are you right now of your spiritual poverty before God? Are you still clinging to some sense of “I’ve got this” in any area of life?

## 2. Poverty of Spirit ILLUSTRATED

Let’s see what this looks like in real life through Scripture.

### Old Testament Examples

- **Moses** – When God called him to lead Israel out of Egypt, Moses didn’t puff up his chest. **Exodus 3:11 ESV** “But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?’”
- **Gideon** – The angel called him a “mighty man of valor” while he was hiding and threshing wheat in fear. **Judges 6:15 ESV** “And he said to him, ‘Please, Lord, how can I

save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.”

• **David** – The man after God's own heart repeatedly called himself poor and needy. **Psalm 86:1 ESV** “Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.” **Psalm 34:6 ESV** “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.”

• **Isaiah** – After seeing the Lord high and lifted up, the prophet didn't boast—he collapsed. **Isaiah 6:5 ESV** “And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’”

### Jesus' Teaching

• **The Pharisee and the Tax Collector** (Luke 18:9-14 ESV) “He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ‘Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.” But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.’”

• **The Prodigal Son** – He came home with nothing in his hands and nothing to offer. **Luke 15:18-21 ESV** “I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.” And he arose and came to his father... And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”

This is exactly how we must come to Christ—empty-handed.

• **Peter and the Disciples** – Peter thought he could be faithful in his own strength (John 13:37). After failure and restoration he learned the lesson he later wrote: **1 Peter 5:5 ESV** “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”

• **Jesus Himself** – Though He was rich in glory, He became poor for us. **Philippians 2:5-8 ESV** “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” **2 Corinthians 8:9 ESV** “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 by his poverty might become rich.”

**Reflection Question:** Which of these examples hits closest to home for you right now? Where in your life are you still trying to come to God (or others) with something in your hands instead of empty?

### 3. Poverty of Spirit COMMENDED

Jesus lifts this trait up and says, “This is what I treasure! This is the blessed life!” The Greek word **makarios** means “happy, flourishing, to be envied.” The world says, “Exalt yourself and you’ll be happy.” Jesus says the opposite: the way of grace, peace, and true joy begins with bowing low before God.

C.S. Lewis captures the relief perfectly in *Mere Christianity*: “And He [God] and you are two things of such a kind that if you really get into any kind of touch with Him you will, in fact, be humble—delightedly humble, feeling the infinite relief of having for once got rid of all the silly nonsense about your own dignity which has made you restless and unhappy all your life. ... To get even near it, even for a moment, is like a drink of cold water to a man in a desert.”

The promise is staggering: “**for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**” The kingdom belongs right now to beggars who know they have nothing and come to Jesus with open hands.

Without poverty of spirit we stay proud—and proud people cannot truly worship, love, forgive, or endure.

**1 Peter 5:5 ESV** “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Sadly, Christians and churches can become like the church in Laodicea: **Revelation 3:17 ESV** “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

In this very Sermon Jesus will warn at the end: **Matthew 7:22-23 ESV** “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

God says the opposite in Isaiah: **Isaiah 57:15 ESV** “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’” **Isaiah 66:2 ESV** “But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”

**Reflection Question:** Are you more motivated right now by the world’s approval or by the promise that the kingdom of heaven already belongs to the poor in spirit?

#### 4. Poverty of Spirit APPLIED

Having seen what poverty of spirit is and how Jesus commends it, let us now consider its implications and how we respond to it in daily life.

This is **not** a “to-do list” you can check off to earn the kingdom. You can no more manufacture poverty of spirit than you can make yourself born again. It is a gift of grace. But that doesn’t mean we do nothing.

**Reflection Question:** If someone asked you today, “How did you become a Christian?” would your answer include the moment you saw yourself as spiritually bankrupt and cried out for mercy? Or has your Christianity been more “God loves you and has a wonderful plan—choose Him”? Which story better matches what Jesus is saying here?

**Face the truth:** No one enters the kingdom of heaven who is not poor in spirit. If you are not poor in spirit, you are not a Christian—period. That is heavy, but it is merciful.

#### Am I Poor in Spirit? Questions to Ask Yourself Regularly

These questions are not meant to drive you to despair but to drive you to Christ. Use them prayerfully, regularly, and honestly—perhaps in your quiet time or as you reflect at the end of the day. They help reveal whether poverty of spirit is a growing reality in your heart.

1. **Am I growing in a deepening conviction of my sin—and of God’s grace toward sinners?**

Do I regularly open God’s Word and pray for the Holy Spirit to search my heart, showing me my true spiritual condition? Am I willing to be undeceived about my sin, or do I resist seeing how great my need really is? The mark of true conversion is ongoing godly grief over sin that leads to repentance and life, not worldly sorrow that leads to death. **2 Corinthians 7:10 ESV** “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”

2. **Am I becoming less impressed with myself and more captivated by Christ?**

As I walk with Jesus, do I see my sin as greater than I first realized—and His grace as even greater still? When I do anything good or right, do I quickly give praise to Him, knowing it is His work in me? Or do I still secretly take credit? Like Paul, who called himself the foremost of sinners, do I increasingly feel, “Though my sins are many, His mercy is more”? Is Christ becoming more precious to me than my own reputation or achievements?

### 3. What do I really believe I deserve—every day and for eternity?

Do I live with a subtle sense that God owes me comfort, ease, success, or fair treatment? Do I insist on my “rights,” complain when life is hard, or grow bitter when things don’t go my way? Or do I truly grasp that what I deserve is judgment and hell—now and forever—and that every breath, every mercy, every trial is far better than I deserve? Have I exchanged entitlement for humble gratitude?

### 4. How do I respond to criticism and to difficult people?

When criticism comes—whether deserved or undeserved—do I quickly defend myself, or do I pause and think, “I know I am a great sinner; there may be truth here worth hearing”? Do I see God’s humbling hand even in painful words? When I encounter annoying, frustrating, or even “the worst” people, do I remember how patient and merciful God has been with me? Do I secretly think myself better than them? If I feel superior, why? Is it because of my own virtue rather than God’s grace? Do I believe I deserve to be surrounded only by easy people?

### 5. Do I resent or welcome the Lord’s disciplining and humbling hand?

When I fall, fail, or face hardship, do I recognize that God sometimes allows these things to expose my spiritual poverty and teach me greater dependence on Him? In moments of struggle or loneliness, do I forget that He is wise, loving, and always for my good? When I feel like the biggest loser, do I remember that I am a sinner saved by grace—and that God is using even this to crush my self-righteousness and make Christ more precious to me?

I hope these questions serve you well. Ask them of yourself often, not to wallow in guilt, but to run to Jesus again as a beggar who has found infinite riches in Him. The poor in spirit are the truly blessed—because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**Conclusion** The Beatitudes are not a bar exam you pass to earn heaven. They are Jesus inviting us: “Come to Me poor, and I will make you rich. You are poor – I only save the sinner. Come empty, and I will fill you with the kingdom of heaven.” This is the good life. This is true flourishing. This is the doorway into everything we talked about last week.

If you have never come to Jesus this way—empty-handed, bankrupt, crying “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!”—today is the day. And if you have, but pride has crept back in, come again right now. The kingdom still belongs to the poor in spirit.

Luke 12:32 “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”