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'Poor in spirit' something to strive for in life

By Karen O. Allen
ewerblessed.com/blog

Every Wednesday for the past decade I have met with my prayer partner, Jean. Before we pray, we discuss upcoming events, family, church and spiritual concerns.

On one of my recent visits Jean asked a question that gave me pause.

What does "poor in spirit" mean? I had an idea but confessed I really wasn't sure.

I agreed to do a little research and report back the next week. I was glad she asked since I had wondered about the answer myself.

So what is this phrase "poor in spirit" about?

Some might suggest it refers to economic poverty. That God wants us to be poor. Not true.

Certainly God warns us about the dangers of money, but that doesn't mean He desires us to be lacking. Quite the opposite.

God desires us to have an abundance, enabling us to be a channel of blessing for others.

The phrase poor in spirit is only used once in the Bible when Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).

The verse is the first of eight beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus shared insights into true righteousness and the blessings it brings.

This righteousness Jesus described is internal, a matter of Christian character. The Pharisees of the day knew nothing about this as they followed external righteousness based on law. Their concern was on conduct, not character.

Jesus' message was used as a teaching moment for His disciples and those listening on the mountainside, but the powerful words are still applicable today for believers.

Who, what and why?

Who are the poor in spirit? The rich tend to feel security in wealth. If that wealth is threatened, they

may feel their earthly life could collapse. Not the poor in spirit. The poor in spirit understand they have absolutely nothing of worth to offer God.

This doesn't mean they are worthless and can't do anything.

It means they are aware of their desperate need for His help and cannot live without Him.

To be poor in spirit means to be humble and honest with ourselves recognizing our sinful nature and submitting to His mercy for deliverance.

Being poor in spirit acknowledges that on a spiritual level all people are bankrupt.

In fact, we aren't just spiritually bankrupt, we are spiritually dead because of our sinfulness. But Christ allows for a resurrection of spirit to live beyond this life. He offers eternal life.

Being poor in spirit is something to strive for.

There is value and importance in its acquisition. The stakes are high. Those who are poor in spirit are blessed with the kingdom of heaven.

Humility, having a servant's heart and exhibiting dependence on God's grace and provision summarize the characteristics of the poor in spirit.

Being blessed with this quality results in embracing the spiritual wealth we have inherited in Christ.



ALLEN

Characteristics of being poor in spirit

(modified from Aksel Smith's ActiveChristianity)

▶ Does not exalt oneself and is not proud. May be considered insignificant by others but rejoices in humiliation.

▶ Does not seek honor from others.

▶ Occupies the lowest place, not to be recognized, but because that is where it is most suitable.

▶ Reserved in conduct — not aggressive or demanding.

▶ Gives up advantages for the benefit of others.

▶ Does not seek recognition; only a desire to do God's will.

▶ Longs for others to come under the influence of God.

▶ Works calmly and never in haste using every precious minute without waste.

▶ Denies himself or herself so as not to be offensive.

▶ Willingly accepts his or her cross to bear without complaint.

▶ Happy wherever he is as he knows God is there.

▶ Contributes to the good of others.

▶ No work is insignificant. Serving others, no matter how small, is worthy.

▶ Does not discriminate in any circumstance.

▶ Would willingly sacrifice his life if needed.

▶ Listens to God's voice and heeds His calling.

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Excerpts from the Beatitudes (Matt. 5)

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ... Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ...

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for

they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ... [G]reat is your reward. ..."

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