



Links Players

Desperate, Lost, And Spiritually Bankrupt

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:3 NIV).

I remember how excited I was 25 years ago when I became eligible to play for our club's Senior City League team. When I finally got the call to play, I was overjoyed. Unfortunately, it was an inauspicious start to my "senior career."

By the end of the front nine, I wanted to walk off the course. My hands were shaking the entire round. I lost my swing early in the round and never regained it. I had at least 6 or 7 three-putts. I made birdie on the last hole to shoot; well, let's not mention that.

I felt I had let my teammates down. I desperately wanted to go straight to my car, drive home, and not appear at my club for several weeks, hoping everyone would have forgotten my abysmal performance. I was desperate, lost, and embarrassed.

Jesus begins his Sermon on the Mount with eight beatitudes. The first, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," addresses those, albeit on a more significant level than I was, who are desperate and lost.

The Greek word for "poor" is "ptochoi," which means a state of abject poverty or absolute destitution. It is derived from the word "ptosso," which means to crouch or cower like a beggar asking for alms, much like the sore-covered beggar at the rich man's gate in Luke 16:20. It evokes the image of someone pressed low to the ground and stripped of all dignity.

In Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the synagogue (Luke 18:9-14), we find the smug, self-confident Pharisee who looked down on everyone else and prayed only about himself.

In sharp contrast to the Pharisee, the humble and contrite tax collector stood at a distance, beat his breast, and would not even look up to heaven. He cried out, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

He was truly "poor in spirit." He recognized his spiritual bankruptcy and his need for total dependence on God. Scripture contains many more examples of people who were "poor in spirit" --- Isaiah, Job, David, Solomon, and Peter.

In his song "Breathe," Michael W. Smith succinctly captures the state of one who is "poor in spirit": "I'm desperate for you; I'm lost without you."

Our culture emphasizes self-reliance, pride, self-righteousness, vanity, and ambition as keys to success and happiness. Jesus turns this notion on its head, proclaiming that the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to the "poor in spirit" --- those who are hopeless, helpless, needy, empty, lost, and desperate. What a shock that must have been for the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders present on the mountain.

If you sometimes feel, as I do, that you're being drawn back into culture's values, it is helpful for us to acknowledge these threats and recognize that things are heading in the wrong direction.

We need to recognize that we are powerless except when we commit to being fully dependent on God's grace and mercy.

Coupled with that acknowledgment, our attitude should be one of prayerfulness, gratitude, praise, and thanksgiving. We must be willing to: (1) go where God asks us to go; (2) do what he asks us to do; and (3) bear whatever he lays on us.

If we continue to do that in our daily lives, the blessing we receive —the Kingdom of Heaven —plus the blessings or privileges we receive from the other Beatitudes will allow us to experience a first installment now and, later, a glorious full harvest as a citizen of God's kingdom.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for blessing us when we are poor in spirit and when we find ourselves spiritually lost, desperate, and bankrupt.

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