

The Poor in Spirit

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 3). –
Matthew 5:1–3

Understanding the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1–12 requires us to comprehend the meaning of the term blessed. Many people think the word means “happy,” but that view is inadequate. Happiness, in an ultimate sense, is certainly a part of being blessed by God, but divine blessing goes far beyond mere happiness. It involves God’s favor, His willingness to come near and dwell among His people. This is the chief meaning of the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:22–27. The hope of Israel was that God would shine His face on the people, that there would be close, intimate fellowship between the Creator and His creatures. The New Testament expands on this, revealing that our ultimate hope is the Beatific Vision — face-to-face communion with God and His glory in eternity (1 Cor. 13:12; 1 John 3:2).

How do we enjoy the Lord’s favor and experience a taste of His presence now, and then, for all eternity, the fullness of His glory? The answer is found in the very first beatitude. Jesus tells us that only the “poor in Spirit” will receive the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3). Poverty in spirit is an emptying of our self-reliance and any claim we (falsely) believe to have on God. It is a recognition that we are utterly dependent on divine grace and undeserving of His favor. It is repentance for setting ourselves up as “gods” and then a resting in the Lord’s promise of salvation.

God’s presence is felt most strongly in the kingdom of heaven, which was inaugurated in Christ’s ministry and will be consummated at His return. Entry into this kingdom and, ultimately, seeing God’s beauty face to face comes only through repentance and faith, the renunciation of sin and selfreliance in order to trust in Jesus alone. This turning happens decisively at conversion but is also a continual practice throughout the Christian life.