

What's your basic definition of someone who is "poor in spirit?"

First, let's get some terms straight.

- **"Beatitudo"** (Latin) = blessedness. In the Greek it means "fully satisfied" and implies a wholeness of joy and well-being-- a peace equivalent to the Hebrew word "shalom." Throughout the New Testament this word designates the joy that comes from salvation.
- The word **"blessed"** is often mis-translated. It comes from the Greek word *makarios*, which is itself a translation of the Hebrew word *'ašrê*, meaning "fortunate." Several Bibles translate "blessed" as "happy." (Today's English Version., Good News Trans., et. al.). But in today's society the word "happy" is trite and commonplace, void of meaning.¹

The term "blessed" in this context is richer and deeper than mere happiness. It encompasses a state of being deeply content and at peace, knowing that one is walking in alignment with God's will. It is a joyful assurance that transcends circumstances, grounded in the knowledge of God's unending love and mercy.

- **"poor"** –some mistakenly believe this simply means one who is destitute.
 - ✓ The Hebrew word for "poor" does imply that kind of poverty, but it also points to God as the one who is the ultimate savior. **[READ PS 69:32-33]**. To be poor in spirit means recognizing that everything good in our nature comes from God...and God alone. (i.e., It's none of our doing.)
 - ✓ In Greek the word is *"ptōchos,"* meaning one who is in a state of deep poverty or destitution. It does not infer that a person is simply gloomy, or even that he/she is a non-believer. *Ptōchos* is derived from a Greek verb meaning to couch or cower, and was often used to describe a beggar.



¹ Carson, pg. 131.



- A person who is poor but still able to help himself somewhat was *penē*; only the totally destitute were *ptōchos*. Any time we see the word “poor” in our Bibles it almost always refers to those who are *ptōchos*.² “The *penēs* had nothing superfluous, while the *ptōchoi* had nothing at all.”³
- Poverty is no guarantee of spiritual rewards. It is also not a blessing to be poor—only if it fosters humility before God. This interpretation is consistently found in the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴

Note that all of MT 5 is spoken in present tense: “Blessed ARE the poor,” not “The poor WILL be blessed,” in heaven, possibly. No, it’s happening right now! This means that the kingdom of heaven is already accessible to those who embody these virtues.

- “**Poor in spirit**” may include material poverty, but Jesus is calling us to a deeper meaning with his preaching—that of the heart and of the soul.
 - ✓ It begins by humbling ourselves. In this “beggar’s posture” we recognize that everything good in our lives is a blessing from God.
 - “The first step toward blessedness is a realization of one’s spiritual helplessness.”⁵ We cannot earn God’s favor, regardless of who we are or how wealthy we might be.
 - God does not call on us to sell all of our material possessions; instead, he calls us to always prioritize him over material things.

If we do not recognize our plight and fail to beg for his mercy and grace, our brief lifespan on this earth will truly be a waste.



How do I respond to a friend or relative who believes that anyone who follows Jesus is simply trying to live a fairytale?

Basically, we can share these profound truths. We can explain that a life of faith is not about escaping reality but about embracing a higher reality where true joy and eternal fulfillment are found. It is about living a life that reflects the values of humility, repentance, and

² The Bible’s only use of *penēs* is in 2 Corinthians 9:9.

³ *Interpreter’s*, “Lexical Aids to the NT,” pg. 1670.

⁴ Carson, pg. 131

⁵ *Key Word Bible*, fn. to MT 5:3, pg. 1129.

dependence on God, which ultimately leads to lasting peace and genuine happiness. And maybe the best answer: live your life as an example of what Christ required of us as believers.

Jesus put a value on humbleness and repentance. In the rabbinic circles of the first century, meekness and poverty of spirit were highly praised.⁶ In practical terms, being “poor in spirit” involves a lifestyle of humility, repentance, and reliance on God. It calls believers to reject pride and self-sufficiency because....

Blessings and strength come from the Lord.

If we are self-satisfied or proud in our hearts we will tend to believe that we don’t really need God.⁷ Christ wants us to follow him in humility and faith. A person might be quite well-to-do but still be poor in spirit.

[READ REV. 3:15-17 and 19-20].

Jesus says that he wants us to be with him on the throne of God...but it won’t happen if our faith, actions, or motives are wishy-washy.

Three Ways to Live Spiritual Poverty⁸

#1---Admit that we are sinners and want to be reconciled with God.

Our first step is to recognize that we depend fully upon God and his mercy. This includes the confession that we are sinners and that we need God’s grace.

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This is our opportunity to assume the position of the beggar, imploring God for his mercy, thus living the call of spiritual poverty.

#2---Ask God for help.

When we are proud and reliant on ourselves we are unable to ask for help, or acknowledge kind acts from others, or recognize when we have done wrong. Try practicing

⁶ Carson, Ibid.

⁷ “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6).

⁸ adapted from “What Does it Mean...,” [online]

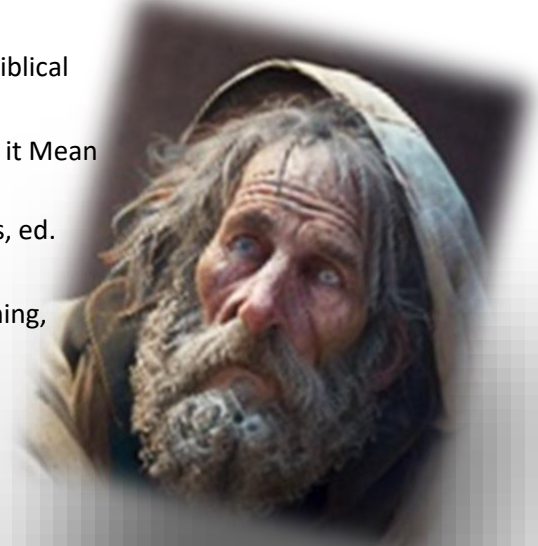
these phrases daily: "May I," "Thank you," and "Sorry."⁹ Find a time during your day to remember someone who has helped you in time of need---spouse, your children or grandchildren, neighbor, friend, pastor. Then, offer one of these three phrases to them, recognizing your faults or expressing your gratitude.

#3---Give alms to those in need.

Both our material and immaterial gifts are not our own; they come from God. Share as you can with others, whether financially or otherwise. Sometimes just showing your concern and listening to the emotions of others can be a gift...or a simple phone call or personal visit...or {fill in the blank}.

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⁹ In a 2020 audience on the meaning of being poor in spirit, Pope Francis stated, "When I give some advice to newlyweds who ask me how to carry on their marriage well, I tell them: 'There are three magic words: *may I, thank you, sorry.*' These are the words that come from the poverty of spirit."