The First Beatitude – Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

When a mortal surveys the universe it sees, one or more of the following attitudes may be present: "I want it all." "I want to do it all." "I have it all." "I know it all."

If we follow this line of thinking a little further, the truth may be more like this:

"I want it all . . . but only the good part of the material world; don't bother me with the moral or spiritual aspects."

"I want to do it all . . . but only if it is fun and pleasurable for me."

"I have it all . . . but I must need more, because I am never satisfied."

"I know it all . . . but I live in fear that others will discover I really don't understand it all, or that there is something I am missing."

When these attitudes fail us in our hours of need, a voice from within struggles to be heard: "God help me!" This is where the First Beatitude kicks in.

"God help me!" This simple statement is tossed out casually, even humorously, countless times a day by many people. If they only knew that the true idea behind these words -- humbly approached and sincerely felt -- could lift them out of their troubles, perhaps they would not take God's name in vain this way.

"God help me." Can He really help us, and do we deserve His help? Jesus brought us the good news, which said, in essence, that we are all God's beloved children. We have a right to be joyful, even blissful, as the word "blessed" in each of the Beatitudes indicates. In the Beatitudes, found in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus outlines for us the necessary steps to take to realize our status as the spiritual children of God, made in His "image and likeness."

Jesus offers us promises and rewards in the Beatitudes. He explains the "cost." Being receptive to this message of the Christ, means receiving freely God's grace and light. We are also expected to let these gifts soften our hearts and change our attitudes, so that we are prepared to receive more light. The Beatitudes -- or as we might say, the "attitudes to be" -- start at the point where we realize we need God's help. From there, each unfoldment of light, or improved understanding, brings us new vistas and new responsibilities. The rewards are priceless.

The First Step - Becoming "poor in spirit"

William Barclay, in his book "The Gospel of Matthew, Volume One," explains that the Greek word for poor "describes absolute and abject poverty . . . it describes the poverty which is beaten to its knees." He continues to state "the Jews had a special way of using the word Poor." It can describe a "man, who, because he has no earthly resources whatever, puts his whole trust in God."
In the first Beatitude, Jesus is not glorifying material poverty, as some may assume. There is nothing "blessed" about the miseries of extreme poverty. The added phrase "in spirit" alerts us to the fact that Jesus is referring to a lack of spiritual resources or spiritual attitude. One way to paraphrase this Beatitude might be "how joyful are those who become aware of their lack of spiritual sense, and admit they need God's help." They are the ones who sincerely cry out on bended knees, physically or mentally, in their darkest hours: "God help me."

If Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount with this Beatitude, it must be important. Indeed, it is the jumping-off point of our spiritual journey. The question may be asked: how do we position ourselves to begin at this beginning? Each individual has his or her own path, his or her own unique mission and experiences in life. Each will have a different "road" to take. Mary Baker Eddy, the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science, uses a phrase which summarizes two basic ways of moving forward spiritually: "suffering or Science." In other words, we can be forced by unpleasant circumstances to stop what we are doing and pay attention to God, or we can think and reason our way to divine Truth on a regular basis! "Choose you this day whom ye will serve."

We learn from the New Testament, as well as in the teachings of Christian Science, that there are qualities of mortal thought that seem to block or cloud our vision. There are also opposite spiritual qualities that can provide clarity of thought. These qualities can have an effect on the kind of attitudes we impart. They can determine whether or not we see our need for God's help, and open our thought to Him, or whether we depend upon other so-called powers.

In addition to the balance of material versus spiritual qualities in our thinking, we can suddenly find ourselves knocked down on our knees and blinded by the light, such as the Apostle Paul experienced on the road to Damascus. This can happen to anyone when there is an important need for God to be heard in our hearts, and we have not been listening -- or worse, we have heard, but not obeyed. The story of Jonah and the Whale is a good example of this. These experiences can melt resistance to God rather abruptly!

An easier way is to monitor our thoughts, words, and actions on a daily basis. We can strive for "self-knowledge." We can become aware of our attitudes. If we can cast out the evil suggestions that war against God, we will be in a better position to hear God's voice. We cannot claim the "kingdom of heaven" as ours, as Jesus promised in the first Beatitude, unless our consciousness is cleared of the debris that would hide it from us.

Material qualities that impoverish us

In my studies on the Beatitudes, I have collected from various writings a list of mortal qualities, or attitudes, that keep us from turning to God as the source of all good and wisdom. These qualities make us "rich in material thinking." Our goal is to awake to see how "poor in spirit" we are. These material attitudes keep us from recognizing our spiritual poverty.

If you are sincerely interested in entering the realm of this first Beatitude, and molding your lives accordingly, you might wish to carefully ponder these qualities and see if they are present or
active in your daily thinking. A collection of citations relating to these qualities is found later in this essay. I have sorted them into three main categories:

**PRIDE** -- of race, religion, nationality, culture, gender, economic class, scholarship, fame, personal goodness and self-righteousness, personal intellect, skills, and talents; conceit, vanity, "know-it-allness."

**FEAR** -- of criticism, disapproval of family and friends, public ridicule; fear of the loss of popularity, social prestige, power or authority over others, cherished beliefs, habits of thought, preconceived personal opinions, worldly honors or distinction, material possessions, money, material pleasures.

**IGNORANCE** -- willful ignorance; easily influenced by false suggestions; easily manipulated by others or the media; superficial thinking or reasoning; covetousness; prone to sentiment rather than to sound thinking; believing versus understanding; ingratitude; selfishness, apathy, indifference, prejudice, intolerance.

A lot to think about! But that is what the first Beatitude does -- it is asking us to let God shed new light on our situation and see that we have been depending upon the undependable! We have to lose our trust in materialism, or material thinking. We have to drop our hold upon it and cling to God instead.

By indulging in the sinful thinking outlined above, we darken our thought. Unless we can recognize this harmful influence, perhaps through our prayers, our Biblical and metaphysical studies, our observance of other's examples, reasoning, or revelation, we may find ourselves in a situation, or state of mind, that seems hopeless. We become desperate. We are forced to admit that we cannot solve our problems with our own resources, either material or intellectual. At this point, we can either give up, or kneel in humility and say, "God help me."

How do we rid ourselves of the harmful attitudes and take on the attitudes that bless? In Christian Science, we are taught that the material qualities can be seen as no part of God's creation, and therefore have no real substance or place in our being. We deny their power or reality. We are taught that spiritual qualities find their source in God, and therefore are real and eternal. It is the purpose of man to show forth these spiritual qualities in our lives, in order to bear witness to God, to express Him. Our daily meditation or prayer includes denying sin, or error, so that we do not find ourselves mesmerized by these mortal suggestions that seem to bombard us from the world, and it includes affirming truths about God and man that we wish to experience and express. This method is part of the system of Christian Science healing, which has proven to heal sickness and sin, as well as purifying our character and uplifting morals. The first Beatitude is a reminder of the importance of staying in touch with God and seeking His will and wisdom.

**The kingdom of heaven**

The reward of those who are "poor in spirit" is the *kingdom of heaven*. What exactly is the kingdom of heaven? Jesus told a number of parables for his followers to ponder (see Matthew
These were appropriate for the level of spiritual receptivity of his times, and still have much food for thought. Today, in the revelation of Christian Science, we have new views of the kingdom of heaven. You will find explanations of the "kingdom of heaven" in the following pages under the Citations. You will find that the kingdom of heaven is not a far-off physical location, but a state of mind -- a reign of divine harmony in consciousness.

According to William Barclay, the translation of the phrase "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" indicates that it is in the present tense. The "poor in spirit" possess the kingdom now not later, not as a future reward. How is it possible to possess the kingdom of heaven now? The ever-presence of God's kingdom is a major theme in the teachings of Christian Science, which will be explained in the Citations section. The point being made now is that the negative attitude, or state of being spiritually poor hides the very presence of God. But, the moment one awakes from this nightmare -- the belief that one has a mind or life separate from God -- this new awareness opens the eyes to the presence of God's kingdom. It is the awareness and recognition of being "poor in spirit" that brings the light. The kingdom becomes a possession by the very fact that we all already live there! As Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: "for behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

When we come to this point -- the point of recognition that we are spiritually poor and we need God's help -- how does this attitude alone deserve the reward promised by Jesus, that of "the kingdom of heaven"? For additional insight, we can turn to this account in Matthew 18: "Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

In reading further in Matthew, we find there are two other requirements. Jesus said that we must do "the will of my Father which is in heaven." He tells us that "a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." The first Beatitude, then, supports these requirements when it indicates that the kingdom of heaven is to be possessed by those who are "poor in spirit" -- those who recognize that material riches are no help and that they are ready to follow God's will.

**Spiritual qualities that enrich us**

To enter the kingdom of heaven, then, we must "become as little children." Jesus is not telling us to return to our physical childhood (as if we could!), or to take on a childish or immature demeanor. He is recommending that we take on the pure, innocent childlike qualities that are native to our true spiritual selves. From my studies on the First Beatitude, I can sum up those qualities in three main categories:

*Teachableness and receptivity to good*

*Humbleness and humility*

*Trustfulness*
Those particular qualities that seem so natural to most children, are ones that can be easily lost sight of as we are burdened with layers of worldliness, materiality, and mortal egotism. Jesus is telling us that to receive our ownership of the kingdom of heaven, we must shed those layers, and let the childlike qualities shine through and soften our hearts.

Below you will find a list of citations from the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, related to the above qualities, plus a few more. These can be used in study or teaching Sunday School.

We have work to do. We must yield to God's will and wisdom. If we don't forward this process willingly, or we have been tuning God out of our lives for a while, we may have to have more than one jolting experience to get us to humble ourselves before God, and ask for His help and guidance. Even when we do consecrate ourselves to a more spiritual life, we must make this choice every day. The very act of turning in prayer to God, acknowledging Him as the Supreme Being, and thanking Him for all His blessings, is the demonstration of the attitude of the "poor in spirit."

**CITATIONS ON THE FIRST BEATITUDE FROM THE WRITINGS OF MARY BAKER EDDY**

"The Poor"

"The rich in spirit help the poor in one grand brotherhood, all having the same Principle, or Father; and blessed is that man who seeth his brother's need and supplieth it, seeking his own in another's good. Love giveth to the least spiritual idea might, immortality, and goodness, which shine through all as the blossom shines through the bud." (S&H 518)

"The feverish pride of sects and systems is the death's-head at the feast of Love, but Christianity is ever storming sin in its citadels, blessing the poor in spirit and keeping peace with God." (Message of 1901)

"We cannot choose for ourselves, but must work out our salvation in the way Jesus taught. In meekness and might he was found preaching the gospel to the poor." (S&H 30)

"The loss of material objects of affection sunders the dominant ties of earth and points to heaven." (Retrospection and Introspection 31)

"The Stranger enters a massive carved stone mansion, and saith unto the dwellers therein, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' But they understand not his saying. . . . These are believers of different sects, and of no sect; some, so-called Christian Scientists in sheep's clothing; and all 'drunken without wine.' They have small conceptions of spiritual riches, few cravings for the immortal, but are puffed up with the applause of the world: they have plenty of pelf, and fear not to fall upon the Stranger, seize his pearls, throw them away, and afterwards try to kill him." (Mis. 325)

"Is poverty crying aloud in the land? Then we should know the purpose of God is rich in blessing to the poor -- in Spirit. The fullness of the earth belongs to the healthful circulation of honesty,
virtue and progress in the footsteps of Truth." (quoted in Divinity Course and General Collectanea, pg. 97)

**Becoming "as little children"

"Jesus loved little children because of their freedom from wrong and their receptiveness of right. While age is halting between two opinions or battling with false beliefs, youth makes easy and rapid strides towards Truth." (S&H 236)

"The sharp experiences of belief in the supposititious life of matter, as well as our disappointments and ceaseless woes, turn us like tired children to the arms of divine Love. Then we begin to learn Life in divine Science. Without this process of weaning, 'Canst thou by searching find out God?'" (S&H 322)

"Willingness to become as a little child and to leave the old for the new, renders thought receptive of the advanced idea. Gladness to leave the false landmarks and joy to see them disappear, -- this disposition helps to precipitate the ultimate harmony. The purification of sense and self is a proof of progress." (S&H 323)

"When, as little children, we are receptive, become willing to accept the divine Principle and rule of being, as unfolded in divine Science, the interpretation therein will be found to be the Comforter that leadeth into all truth." (Mis. 189)

"The new birth is not the work of a moment. It begins with moments, and goes on with years; moments of surrender to God, of childlike trust and joyful adoption of good; moments of self-abnegation, self-consecration, heaven-born hope, and spiritual love." (Mis. 15)

"A child can measurably understand Christian Science, for, through his simple faith and purity, he takes in its spiritual sense that puzzles the man. The child not only accepts Christian Science more readily than the adult, but he practices it. This notable fact proves that the so-called fog of this Science obtains not in the Science, but in the material sense which the adult entertains of it." (Message of 1900)

**Teachableness and Receptiveness

"Parents should teach their children at the earliest possible period the truths of health and holiness. Children are more tractable than adults, and learn more readily to love the simple verities that will make them happy and good." (S&H 236)

"When the sick or the sinning awake to realize their need of what they have not, they will be receptive of divine Science, which gravitates towards Soul and away from material sense, removes thought from the body, and elevates even mortal mind to the contemplation of something better than disease and sin." (S&H 323)
"A third class of thinkers build with solid masonry. They are sincere, generous, noble, and are therefore open to the approach and recognition of Truth. To teach Christian Science to such as these is no task. They do not incline longingly to error, whine over the demands of Truth, nor play the traitor for place and power." (S&H 450)

"We know that a desire for holiness is requisite in order to gain holiness; but if we desire holiness above all else, we shall sacrifice everything for it. We must be willing to do this, that we may walk securely in the only practical road to holiness. Prayer cannot change the unalterable Truth, nor can prayer alone give us an understanding of Truth; but prayer, coupled with a fervent habitual desire to know and do the will of God, will bring us into all Truth. Such a desire has little need of audible expression. It is best expressed in thought and life." (S&H 11)

"If all who seek his commemoration through material symbols will take up the cross, heal the sick, cast out evils, and preach Christ, or Truth, to the poor, -- the receptive thought, -- they will bring in the millennium." (S&H 34)

"In the walk to Emmaus, Jesus was known to his friends by the words, which made their hearts burn within them, and by the breaking of bread. The divine Spirit, which identified Jesus thus centuries ago, has spoken through the inspired Word and will speak through it in every age and clime. It is revealed to the receptive heart, and is again seen casting out evil and healing the sick." (S&H 46)

**Humbleness and Humility**

"Experience shows that humility is the first step in Christian Science, wherein all is controlled, not by man or laws material, but by wisdom, Truth, and Love." (Mis. 354)

"When divine Love gains admittance to a humble heart, that individual ascends the scale of miracles and meets the warmest wish of men and angels. Clad in invincible armor, grasping the sword of Spirit, you have started in this sublime ascent, and should reach the mount of revelation; for if ye would run, who shall hinder you? So dear, so due, to God is obedience, that it reaches high heaven in the common walks of life, and it affords even me a perquisite of joy." (My. 188)

"Blindness and self-righteousness cling fast to iniquity. When the Publican's wail went out to the great heart of Love, it won his humble desire." (S&H 448)

"The baptism of repentance is indeed a stricken state of human consciousness, wherein mortals gain severe views of themselves; a state of mind which rends the veil that hides mental deformity. Tears flood the eyes, agony struggles, pride rebels, and a mortal seems a monster, a dark, impenetrable cloud of error; and falling on the bended knee of prayer, humble before God, he cries, 'Save, or I perish.' Thus Truth, searching the heart, neutralizes and destroys error." (Mis. 203)
"When a hungry heart petitions the divine Father-Mother God for bread, it is not given a stone, -- but more grace, obedience, and love. If this heart, humble and trustful, faithfully asks divine Love to feed it with the bread of heaven, health, holiness, it will be conformed to a fitness to receive the answer to its desire; then will flow into it the 'river of His pleasure,' the tributary of divine Love, and great growth in Christian Science will follow, -- even that joy which finds one's own in another's good." (Mis. 127)

"What we most need is the prayer of fervent desire for growth in grace, expressed in patience, meekness, love, and good deeds." (S&H 4)

"Human pride is human weakness. Self-knowledge, humility, and love are divine strength." (Mis. 358)

**Trustfulness**

"Step by step will those who trust Him find that 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.'" (S&H 444)

"Trust Truth, not error; and Truth will give you all that belongs to the rights of freedom. The Hebrew bard wrote, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." (Mis. 297-298)

"Desire is prayer; and no loss can occur from trusting God with our desires, that they may be moulded and exalted before they take form in words and in deeds." (S&H 1)

"The new birth is not the work of a moment. It begins with moments, and goes on with years; moments of surrender to God, of childlike trust and joyful adoption of good; moments of self-abnegation, self-consecration, heaven-born hope, and spiritual love." (Mis. 15)

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**Pride and Fear**

"Pride and fear are unfit to bear the standard of Truth, and God will never place it in such hands." (S&H 30)

"At present mortals progress slowly for fear of being thought ridiculous. They are slaves to fashion, pride, and sense." (S&H 68)
"As in Jesus' time, so to-day, tyranny and pride need to be whipped out of the temple, and humility and divine Science to be welcomed in." (S&H 142)

"The pride of circumstance or power is the prince of this world that has nothing in Christ. All power and happiness are spiritual, and proceed from goodness." (Mis. 155)

"Remember that human pride forfeits spiritual power, and either vacillating good or self-assertive error dies of its own elements." (Mis. 268)

"Instead of relying on the Principle of all that really exists, -- to govern His own creation, -- self-conceit, ignorance, and pride would regulate God's action." (Mis. 354)

"Through the channels of material sense, of worldly policy, pomp, and pride, cometh no success in Truth." (Ret. 79)

"The true understanding of Christian Science Mind-healing never originated in pride, rivalry, or the deification of self." (Rudimental Divine Science 17)

"The feverish pride of sects and systems is the death's-head at the feast of Love, but Christianity is ever storming sin in its citadels, blessing the poor in spirit and keeping peace with God." (Message of 1901)

"Jesus commanded, 'Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead;' in other words, Let the world, popularity, pride, and ease concern you less, and LOVE THOU." (Message of 1902)

**Ignorance**

"The time for thinkers has come. Truth, independent of doctrines and time-honored systems, knocks at the portal of humanity. Contentment with the past and the cold conventionality of materialism are crumbling away. Ignorance of God is no longer the steppingstone to faith. The only guarantee of obedience is a right apprehension of Him whom to know aright is Life eternal. Though empires fall, 'the Lord shall reign forever.'" (S&H vii)

"We may hide spiritual ignorance from the world, but we can never succeed in the Science and demonstration of spiritual good through ignorance or hypocrisy." (S&H 242)

"Ignorance, like intentional wrong, is not Science. Ignorance must be seen and corrected before we can attain harmony." (S&H 251)

"The only excuse for entertaining human opinions and rejecting the Science of being is our mortal ignorance of Spirit, -- ignorance which yields only to the understanding of divine Science, the understanding by which we enter into the kingdom of Truth on earth and learn that Spirit is infinite and supreme." (S&H 280)

"It is ignorance and false belief, based on a material sense of things, which hide spiritual beauty and goodness." (S&H 304)
"It is our ignorance of God, the divine Principle, which produces apparent discord, and the right understanding of Him restores harmony." (S&H 390)

"We cannot spend our days here in ignorance of the Science of Life, and expect to find beyond the grave a reward for this ignorance. Death will not make us harmonious and immortal as a recompense for ignorance." (S&H 409)

"The procuring cause and foundation of all sickness is fear, ignorance, or sin." (S&H 411)

"Pride is ignorance; those assume most who have the least wisdom or experience; and they steal from their neighbor, because they have so little of their own." (Mis. 2)

"Ignorance was the first condition of sin in the allegory of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden." (Mis. 109)

**Kingdom of Heaven**

"What is the kingdom of heaven? The abode of Spirit, the realm of the real. No matter is there, no night is there -- nothing that maketh or worketh a lie. Is this kingdom afar off? No: it is ever-present here." (Miscellaneous Writings 174)

"The kingdom of heaven is the reign of divine Science: it is a mental state. Jesus said it is within you, and taught us to pray, 'Thy kingdom come;' but he did not teach us to pray for death whereby to gain heaven. We do not look into darkness for light. Death can never usher in the dawn of Science that reveals the spiritual facts of man's Life here and now." (Mis. 174)

"**KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.** The reign of harmony in divine Science; the realm of unerring, eternal, and omnipotent Mind; the atmosphere of Spirit, where Soul is supreme." (S&H 590)

"Let us learn of the real and eternal, and prepare for the reign of Spirit, the kingdom of heaven, -- the reign and rule of universal harmony, which cannot be lost nor remain forever unseen." (S&H 208)

"It is 'easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,' than for sinful beliefs to enter the kingdom of heaven, eternal harmony. Through repentance, spiritual baptism, and regeneration, mortals put off their material beliefs and false individuality." (S&H 241)

"Let unselfishness, goodness, mercy, justice, health, holiness, love -- the kingdom of heaven -- reign within us, and sin, disease, and death will diminish until they finally disappear." (S&H 248)

"He who gains self-knowledge, self-control, and the kingdom of heaven within himself, within his own consciousness, is saved through Christ, Truth." (My. 161)

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