


CONTENTS

Introduction: Gaining Momentum	11
1. I Bring Nothing: The Enigma of Empty-Handedness	29
2. I Take Ownership: The Power of Spiritual Mourning	49
3. I Give Up Control: The Freedom of Total Submission	71
4. I Long to Be Righteous: The Energy of Renewed Affections	95
5. I Care about Others: The Joy of Complete Forgiveness	113
6. I Go after One Thing: The Focus of Single-Mindedness	133
7. I Give Up My Rights: The Gift of Making Peace	155
8. I Endure the Cost: The Price and Reward of a Godly Life	175
Conclusion: Use Your Momentum	189
Notes	191
Acknowledgments	197



*“Blessed are the poor
in spirit, for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven.”*

MATTHEW 5:3

I BRING NOTHING

THE ENIGMA OF EMPTY-HANDEDNESS

Some months ago, Karen and I decided to visit the Art Institute in Chicago. It is a vast place, much bigger than we had expected, and when we saw how large it was, I said to Karen, “We need a plan.”

We had about four hours and so, having found a map, we worked out a route that would make it possible for us to see the whole place in the time available, assuming that we didn’t stop for too long in any of the rooms.

When we had agreed on the plan, I said, “Right. Now let’s see the Art Institute!” And we did. It was a marvelous day and, having completed our tour, I felt pretty good about what we had done.

A few weeks later, a friend from England, who is an artist, came to stay in our home. In the course of conversation, she asked us about Chicago’s Art Institute.

“Oh yes,” I said, “we’ve been there.”

“What did you see?” she asked.

“We saw everything,” I said.

It was obvious that she was not impressed.

“Oh no,” she said, “that’s not the way to do it. When I go to an art gallery, I go to see three or four things, and I spend time with them.” I felt rather foolish. In our race to see everything, there was a profound sense in which we had seen nothing.

The artist’s counsel is helpful when it comes to the Bible. You’ve been reading the Bible. That’s great. But what have you seen? It is possible to race through the halls of Scripture, moving past the life-transforming truths that are all around you, and yet to remain largely unaffected. But wisdom takes a different approach. She stops beside a masterpiece and looks at it until its beauty passes through her eyes and into her soul.

As the Beatitudes have worked their way into my life, it has become clear to me that this is a place where we need to linger, until these words of Jesus press themselves inside us and impart some of the great blessing that they hold.

Our Lord tells us that the poor in spirit are blessed. What does this mean? *Poor* means that you don’t have much, and there’s nothing particularly blessed about that. If being poor could bring us into the blessing of God, your path of progress would be simple: renounce wealth and embrace poverty. But here’s the problem: wealth and poverty each bring their own temptations, and for this reason, Scripture gives us this prayer:

*Give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that is needful for me,
lest I be full and deny you and say, “Who is the Lord?”
or lest I be poor and steal
and profane the name of my God.*

—Proverbs 30:8–9

Money is a gift and a trust from God, but getting more of it will not bring you under God's blessing any more than having less of it can keep you outside.

Luke's gospel includes a shortened account of the Beatitudes in which we find four of the eight blessings recorded in Matthew, along with four warnings or "woes." In this shortened account, our Lord says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). But we should understand the shortened form in the light of the fuller statement of Jesus, where He specifically defines the poverty that is blessed as being "poor *in spirit*."

What would being poor in spirit look like in real life? Suppose that the most gifted football player on a high school team is a follower of Jesus. Does this mean that when he turns up for practice he should say to the coach, "Hey, Coach, my game's no good. I don't think I'm worth my place on the team. Maybe you should pick somebody else"?

When a Christian goes for a job interview, and the interviewer asks, "Now tell me, why we should give you this job?", should a Christian respond by saying, "Well, I'm not sure that you should. There are others who could do this job better than me"?

No. Being poor in spirit has nothing to do with false modesty that denies your God-given gifts and talents. "Poor in spirit" means that you recognize your poverty *before God*. It is an attitude toward yourself in which you know and affirm that you have not lived the life to which God has called you, and that, without Him, you cannot do so now.

To be poor in spirit is the first mark of a person who walks with God. You may be a multitalented sports star or a high flyer in business. You may be a mega mother, a brilliant musician, a technical guru, or a political genius, but if you have truly met with God, you will know that you do not have what He requires of you.

A GREAT PROPHET LOST BEFORE GOD

Isaiah was a gifted and godly preacher, and the people of his day would have celebrated this silver-tongued prophet for his remarkable ministry. If he were in ministry today, people would be cramming into conferences to hear him speak, and if he were on Twitter, he would have millions of followers.

Sometime into his ministry, Isaiah had a remarkable experience in which he saw a vision of God “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1). The sheer size of the throne dwarfed everything else. Giving us a sense of scale, Isaiah says that the train of God’s robe filled the temple. God is greater by far than all that was going on in the temple. His presence makes everything else look small.

Angelic creatures flew above and around the throne, calling out to each other, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.” When this announcement was made, the foundations of the building shook, smoke filled the temple, and Isaiah, the gifted and godly prophet said, “Woe is me! For I am lost” (vv. 1–5).

If Isaiah pronounces himself lost in the presence of God, where would that leave the rest of us? The world saw Isaiah’s gifts and talents, but in the presence of God, Isaiah saw only his own need. Coming into proximity with God made him poor in spirit.

Pride can only live in the soul of a person who is far from God. It puts its foot on the gas to get you as far from God as possible because pride cannot exist in the presence of God. When God comes near, pride has to go. So picture this: the smoke of God’s presence coming down into the temple of your life, and pride staggering out from your soul, coughing and spluttering because it cannot live in the awesome presence of God. This is what happened to Isaiah. In the presence of God, the gifted prophet became poor in spirit.

The gifted football player has much to offer his team. He will be

celebrated at school. He will be offered scholarships and all the rest of it. But if he has any knowledge of God at all, he knows, with Isaiah, that he is among the poorest of the poor.

The gifted graduate has a talent that she can offer to her company. She graduates *summa cum laude*, and she will be fast-tracked for promotion. She will draw the company of other gifted people who want to attach themselves to her because she's going somewhere. But if she knows God at all, she sees that however much attention she receives, and however celebrated she may become, she stands before God empty-handed.

BEING HUMBLE IN A SELF-AFFIRMING CULTURE

Becoming poor in spirit goes against the grain of our self-affirming culture. Writing in Great Britain in the 1950s, Martyn Lloyd-Jones described the mood of his time: "Express yourself, believe in yourself, realize the powers that are innate in yourself and let the whole world see and know them." That is the spirit of the age.¹

Not much has changed today! In our culture of affirmation, it sometimes seems that parents, teachers, counselors, politicians, and advertisers all conspire to tell us how great we are, and apart from a miracle of God's grace, we will believe them.

Wisdom calls us to trust God and doubt ourselves. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). But our culture turns that on its head and says, "Trust yourself and doubt God." That inversion is as old as the garden of Eden, and it's all around us.

The teaching of Jesus is directly opposed to the creed that says, "Believe in yourself." Jesus does not say, "Believe in yourself." He says, "Believe in God; believe also in me" (John 14:1). The person who says, "Believe in yourself," is putting himself or herself in the place of God.

The person who is far from God will often feel that she has the

ability to face whatever challenge comes her way. “I can do this! I’m up for it! I can handle it!” But the person who walks with God will say something different: “Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken” (Ps. 16:8). There is all the difference in the world between these two things.

I’m a dad, and having raised two sons, I’ve stood on the sidelines at their games and shouted “You can do it!” with everyone else. I regularly tell my sons that I am proud of them. Affirmation matters. But let’s be thoughtful about how we speak to our children, especially in the teachable moments of life. It is not a good reflection of faith in Jesus Christ for a father, mother, counselor, or friend to pump a Christian’s ego by constantly reinforcing the “You can do it” message that pervades our culture. It is a far better reflection of faith to say something like, “The Lord is with you and He will not fail you, and in Christ you can do all things.”

Do you see the difference between these two ways of speaking? One is godless. It puts self in the place of God and exalts the individual to the place of the divine. The other reflects the humility of one who knows that his or her strength lies in the presence and the blessing of a sovereign God.

Pursuing humility will be a challenge, not only because it goes against the grain of our culture, but also because it goes against the trajectory of all religion. Religion works on the idea that you must live a life that is pleasing to God in order to win His favor. Every religion in the world offers some variation on this theme. Did you make the right choices? Pursue the right disciplines? Follow the right paths? At the end of the day, this approach boils down to merit. Did you earn it? And that trajectory always promotes pride.

If you read the Bible, pray, serve in the church, and try to pursue a good and moral life, your flesh will announce to you that you have done something good. Then it will occur to you that others should do the same and before you know it, arrogance will have crept in through the back door of your attempts at a godly life.

A third challenge in pursuing humility is that the blessing of God makes humility harder. Here's the irony: the poor in spirit experience the blessing of God, but the more you experience this blessing, the harder it is to remain poor in spirit.

The more successful you are, the easier it is to believe that you are something, and the harder it is to humble yourself before God. If your children believe while others are rebelling; if your marriage prospers while your friend's is falling apart; if your business succeeds while others fail; if your ministry grows when others are in decline, it is hard to avoid the sneaking feeling that you must have done something right. Success of any sort, in any sphere, tends to make us think that we are something special.

So if you are religious, reasonably successful, and live in a self-affirming culture, the pursuit of humility will be a steep climb for you. Thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit, who comes to convince us of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:9). Without Him we would never know the blessing that belongs to the poor in spirit.

What do you know of this poverty of spirit in your own life?

People who are poor in spirit don't flaunt their gifts. They don't blame their sins and failings on others. Instead, they are unimpressed with their own attempts at living a godly life. As Thomas Watson says, "The poor in spirit, when he acts most like a saint, confesses himself 'the chief of sinners.' He blushes more at the defects of his graces than others do at the excess of their sins."²

In a world where personalities loom big and God is often regarded as a prop on the stage of our own performance, people who are poor in spirit know that they are a small blip on the radar screen of eternity. They know that God is glorious and awesome in His holiness. They know that He owes them nothing and they see that, even if viewed at their best, they are unworthy servants who hang and depend completely on the mercy of God.

ENJOYING A TASTE OF HEAVEN

To be poor in spirit is where the blessing of God begins. This is the gateway blessing that leads to all the others, and without this none of the other blessings can be reached.

The blessing promised to the poor in spirit is “the kingdom of heaven,” and it is promised in the present tense. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3, emphasis added).

Since heaven is a future blessing, we might have expected Jesus to say, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs *will be* the kingdom of heaven.” But our Lord doesn’t say that.

What makes this present-tense promise even more striking is that all of the other blessings are promised for the future:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they *shall be* comforted” (v. 4).

“Blessed are the meek, for they *shall* inherit the earth” (v. 5).

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they *shall be* satisfied” (v. 6, all emphases added).

But the promise of heaven breaks the pattern. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven.” That’s present tense—Jesus is talking about a taste of heaven that you can enjoy now.

Life in this world is a long way from heaven, and the things that may come to your mind when you think of heaven are a world away from the realities of earth. Streets of gold? I’ve never seen one. Redeemed people made perfect? Not where I live. Lions lying down with lambs? Nations no longer waging war? Every tear wiped from our eyes? None of this is ours yet. So what taste of heaven can the poor in spirit have *now*?

The poor in spirit taste the greatest blessing of heaven, which is the presence of God. As the Almighty declared to Isaiah: “Thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is

Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit” (57:15).

Do you see what is being said here? The sovereign Lord of the universe lives in two places. He dwells in heaven, the high and holy place, but He also lives with the person who has a contrite and lowly spirit. Heaven is to live with God, and the poor in spirit get a taste of it, because God comes to live with them. Heaven comes to the humble before the humble get to heaven.

This same truth is repeated in the Psalms: “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit” (34:18). And again, “For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar” (138:6).

God knows the proud from afar, but He lives with the lowly. If you want to move beyond relating to God from a distance, and feel His presence in your life, you must begin by humbling yourself.

This promise of God’s presence with the poor in spirit opens the door of hope, because the blessing is promised not on the basis of what we have, but of what we lack. C. H. Spurgeon describes the paradox of this first beatitude:

It is worthy of double mention that this first blessing is given rather to the absence than to the presence of praiseworthy qualities; it is a blessing, not upon the man who is distinguished for this virtue or remarkable for that excellence, but upon him whose chief characteristic is that he confesses his own sad deficiencies. . . . Not what I have, but what I have not, is the first point of contact between my soul and God.³

God can use brutal circumstances in your life to bring you to a place of being poor in spirit. When you find yourself saying, “I don’t have what it takes to face this,” God says to you, “I will dwell with you here.”

When you feel overwhelmed by the power of temptation, God can

use the intensity of your struggle to shatter your pride and make you poor in spirit. And if that should happen, the battle that brought you to the brink of despair can be the means of bringing you to a new place of blessing.

There is hope for you here when you know that you have messed up. If your failure should lead you to genuine humility before God, Christ will come and live with you, and the very sin that would have led you down the road to hell may, in God's kindness, be the means by which you find the path that leads to heaven.

People who feel they have something to offer God come to Him with their hands full, but as long as our hands are full, we are not in a position to receive. Watson says, "If the hand is full of pebbles, it cannot receive gold."⁴

People who are poor in spirit drop the pebbles because they want the gold and they know that it can only be received by empty-handed believers. When you know that you have nothing to offer God, you are in a position to receive all that He offers to you. When you accept that you cannot claim His blessing as a right, you are in a position to receive it as a gift. Empty-handedness is where the blessing of God begins.

SEVEN BLESSINGS FOR EMPTY-HANDED BELIEVERS

1. Empty-handedness will release you from the idea that God owes you.

God is your Creator. That means that He owns you and that you have a duty toward Him. But it is easy, especially in our culture, to forget this and slide into thinking that God is the one who has a duty toward us. We get the idea that we are the ones who should be writing a job description for God, a kind of Ten Commandments for what we require of Him: "Thou shalt provide a level of income that will sustain our chosen lifestyle. Thou shalt give us joy and fulfillment in mutually

satisfying relationships. Thou shalt insulate our loved ones from the sufferings experienced by others in this world.” And woe to God if He does not meet our expectations!

Do you see how pride is written all over this kind of thinking? Pride says, “I gave something to God, and now He owes me something bigger and better back.” As long as your heart is there, you are on a path to bitterness, disappointment, and resentment.

The blessing of God belongs not to those who list their demands, but to the poor in spirit who humble themselves before Him.

The person who is poor in spirit says: “I owe God *everything*, and I can give Him *nothing*. God owes me *nothing*, and He has given me *everything*.” When you are poor in spirit, you will be delivered from the lie that God owes you better than you had in your past and better than you have right now.

2. Empty-handedness will position you to ask and receive in prayer.

Thomas Watson says, “A poor man is ever begging,” and “He who is poor in spirit is much in prayer.”⁵ People who know their own need have an active prayer life, and when they pray they ask!

Jesus told a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector (Luke 18:9–14). Both of them pray, but their prayers are very different. The Pharisee prays about himself, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers” (Luke 18:11). The striking thing about this man’s prayer is that he does not ask for anything. He asks for nothing and he receives nothing. Why does this man not ask? Because in his heart, he thinks that he already has what it takes. He is not poor in spirit.

But the tax collector, with his head hanging in shame, asks, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:13). The tax collector asks of God

because he knows his own need. He is poor in spirit, and Jesus says that this man, not the other, went home blessed, justified, and forgiven.

3. Empty-handedness will help you to bear affliction.

The apostle Peter wrote to Christians in a culture that, like ours, was fast becoming antagonistic toward believers. “Do not be surprised,” he said, “at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Peter 4:12).

How do you prepare, as a Christian, when you know that trials lie ahead? You humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, because

GAINING MOMENTUM / Seven Blessings for the Empty-Handed

1. *Empty-handedness releases you from the idea that God owes you.* The person who is poor in spirit says: “I owe God everything, and I can give Him nothing. God owes me nothing, and He has given me everything.” When we list demands, we are moving toward bitterness, disappointment, and resentment. The blessing of God belongs to those who humble themselves before Him.

2. *Empty-handedness positions you to ask and receive in prayer.* When we come to God in humility to ask His help, we are recognizing we are needy. Jesus says that the person who comes to Him recognizing his or her need for divine help will be blessed and forgiven, just as the tax collector was (cf. Luke 18:13–14).

3. *Empty-handedness helps you to bear affliction.* God opposes proud people, but to the humble He gives grace to endure. That truth may not seem logical if you read stories of proud conquerors or are told, “When times get tough, the tough keep going.” Yet Scripture says “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). So it follows that humility will help you to endure every affliction, whether poverty, poor health, or some other trial.

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5–6).

If I give way to pride, God will stand against me, and I will come under His discipline. “Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord” (Prov. 16:5). An abomination! So God stands in the way of the proud. He opposes them. But to the humble He gives grace. The pursuit of humility might not be the first strategy you would think of for finding strength to face difficulty, but since God gives grace to the humble, it follows that humility will help you to endure in times of trial.

4. *Empty-handedness nourishes your love for others.* Pride is like a bucket of water poured out on the fires of love in any relationship. Seeking to exalt yourself or place someone in an inferior relationship has damaged many family relationships, whether a wife to her husband or a father to his son. But humility can fan the dying embers of love into a flame. Love gets choked by the weeds of pride, but it grows and thrives in the soil of a humble heart.

5. *Empty-handedness strengthens you to overcome temptation.* If pride leads to falling, as the Bible says (Prov. 16:8; 1 Cor. 10:12), it follows that humility helps you to stand. By pursuing humility, you will strike a blow at the master sin of pride, and in this way you will subdue the temptation of many other sins.

6. *Empty-handedness releases you from the tyranny of self.* The victorious Christian neither exalts nor downgrades himself. His interests have shifted from self to Christ. What he is or is not no longer concerns him. He believes that he has been crucified with Christ. With this focus on Christ, we will neither elevate nor deprecate ourselves.

7. *Empty-handedness leads you to worship Jesus.* The more you see in yourself, the less you will see in Christ, and the more you see in Christ, the less you will see in yourself. Once you and I see the poverty of our own position before God, we can recognize the glorious gift of Jesus Christ. And seeing that all your good has its source in Him will lead you to worship the Savior.

4. Empty-handedness will nourish your love for others.

Pride is always self-seeking and it is easily provoked. It is the opposite of love, which does not boast and “is not irritable or resentful” (1 Cor. 13:5). Pride will be like a bucket of water poured out on the fires of love in any marriage. But humility can fan the dying embers of love into a flame.

If you are in a relationship that has come under strain or perhaps has been broken in a way that makes you wonder if love could ever be restored, think about this: the greatest story of reconciliation in a broken relationship is the story of God reconciling with us through Jesus Christ. How did Christ go about this? The first move of the Savior was that He humbled Himself (Phil. 2:8). He took the form of a servant. That is how the great reconciliation began, and Christ says that your attitude should be the same as His (Phil. 2:5). Love gets choked by the weeds of pride, but it grows and thrives in the soil of a humble heart.

5. Empty-handedness will strengthen you to overcome temptation.

We noted earlier that being poor in spirit is a gateway blessing, an entry point that leads to other blessings. In the same way, pride is a gateway sin that opens the door to many other sins. We read in the book of Proverbs that “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (16:18). The New Testament version of this truth is, “Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

Now, if pride leads to falling, it follows that humility will help you to stand. When you know that your flesh is weak, you will watch and pray so that you do not fall into temptation (Matt. 26:41). By pursuing humility you will strike a blow at the master sin of pride, and in this way you will subdue the power of many other sins and open the door to many other blessings.

6. Empty-handedness will release you from the tyranny of self.

Self has more than one way of making you a slave, and if the focus on pride in this chapter seems remote to you, it could be that, rather than being trapped by self-love, you have been ambushed through self-loathing.

Self-loathing is a painful struggle for some people. If this is your battle, you will know what it is to wake up feeling that you hate yourself, and at some point you may even have thought about harming yourself. Self-loathing may seem a long way from self-love, but both are expressions of the same preoccupation with self.

“Self, whether swaggering or groveling, can never be anything but hateful to God,” A. W. Tozer wrote. “Boasting is an evidence that we are pleased with self; belittling, that we are disappointed in it.”⁶

Tozer’s point is simple: boasting and belittling are equally focused on self. In the end, it really doesn’t make much difference whether you destroy yourself by your swaggering or by your groveling. Self may exalt you or self may condemn you but either way, self is in control, and self is always a tyrant. But if you cultivate humility, the tyrant will be overthrown.

As Tozer points out,

The victorious Christian neither exalts nor downgrades himself. His interests have shifted from self to Christ. What he is or is not no longer concerns him. He believes that he has been crucified with Christ and he is not willing either to praise or deprecate such a man.⁷

7. Empty-handedness will lead you to worship Jesus.

The more you see in yourself, the less you will see in Christ, and the more you see in Christ, the less you will see in yourself. Spurgeon says, “Christ is never precious till we are poor in spirit. We must see

our own wants before we can perceive his wealth; pride blinds the eyes, and sincere humility must open them, or the beauties of Jesus will be forever hidden from us.”⁸

When you see the poverty of your own position before God, the gift of Jesus Christ will seem overwhelmingly glorious to you, and seeing all your good in Him will lead you to worship.

Here is the difference between a hypocrite and a true child of God: people who are far from God make much of themselves, and people who live near to God make much of Jesus Christ. People who are far from God focus on what they are doing for Him; people who live near to God find joy in what He is doing for them. They join with Paul in saying, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

HOW TO CULTIVATE HUMILITY

When you remodel a house, there are invariably two stages in the process: demolition and renovation. You begin with the “demo” day. Old carpet gets torn up; old cabinets and counters are ripped out. If you are a do-it-yourselfer, you even get to swing the sledgehammer at the wall!

The pursuit of humility begins with doing a “demo” on pride. In Alexander Maclaren’s memorable words, we must “rip up this swollen bladder of self-esteem.”⁹

How to Begin the Demo

A good place to begin the demolition is by regularly examining yourself in the light of God’s Word. Measure yourself by what God calls you to pursue. So, for example, when you read in 1 Corinthians 13 that “love does not insist on its own way,” ask yourself, “Where am I insisting on my own way?” When you read that “love is not irritable or

resentful,” ask God to bring to your mind where you may have fallen into these sins.

Growing up in Scotland, I learned some simple questions that I still use when reading the Bible. Is there a promise to believe? A command to obey? A sin to avoid? A warning to heed? An example to follow? Each of these questions will help you to demolish pride. Am I believing this promise? Am I obeying this command? Have I fallen into this sin? Am I hearing this warning? Am I following this example?

Use the Word of God as a mirror, and make sure that you take a good look at yourself in this mirror every day. Ask God to show you yourself when you read the Bible, and then measure yourself by what you read. The law reveals our sinfulness. Keep the mirror—God’s Word—before you and you will soon find yourself saying, as every true Christian does, “Lord, I fall a long way short of what You are calling me to be and to do.” You will feel your need of Christ and you will discover what it is to be poor in spirit.

From Demo to Reno

But there’s more to being poor in spirit than knowing and confessing your sins. Jesus was humble, and there was no sin in Him. The humility of Jesus did not spring from an awareness of sin, because He had none. It came from another source.

Andrew Murray is the writer who opened this up for me: “If humility is to be our joy we must see that it is not only the mark of shame because of sin, but, apart from all sin, humility is being clothed upon with the very beauty and blessedness of heaven and of Jesus.”¹⁰

Pause and linger over these words: “Humility . . . the very beauty and blessedness of Jesus.” That’s what we are to pursue. Far from the world of guilt and shame, humility is something beautiful. The reason you use the sledgehammer of the law to demolish pride, pretense, and

self-righteousness in your life is that they must be taken out in order to make way for something beautiful. The “demo” makes way for the “reno.” The old and ugly is removed so that the new and beautiful may be installed.

Murray goes on to explain that “humility is something deeper than contrition. “It is our participation in the life of Jesus.”¹¹

Being poor in spirit is part of becoming like Jesus, who humbled Himself. He said,

“I can do nothing on my own” (John 5:30).

“I have come down from heaven not to do my own will” (John 6:38).

“I do not seek my own glory” (John 8:50).

Since these are the words of the Son of God, how much more should they be mine? The blessedness of Jesus is seen in His gentle and lowly heart. In pursuing humility, you are reflecting the beauty of His life.

So examine yourself in the light of the Word of God and model yourself on the Son of God, knowing that God lives with the humble, and that the people who know their poverty before God are the ones who are blessed. As Watson puts it, “How poor are they that think themselves rich! How rich are they that see themselves poor!”¹²

The main theme of this book is that the Beatitudes map out a path for progress in the Christian life. Ahead of us are other blessings that include forgiveness, purity, and peace, but I’m glad that the Beatitudes don’t start there. If being pure in heart were the starting point for growth in the Christian life, nobody would ever get there. But it’s not. Being poor in spirit is! Thank God, the starting point is to recognize that we do not have what it takes.

I encourage you to grasp this first ring today. Humble yourself. Come to Jesus Christ today and tell Him that you do not have what

it takes to live a holy life. Tell Him that you do not have the power to change. Ask Him to give to you what you do not have, and then trust Him, look to Him, believing His promise that He will come to you, live with you, and bless you. Christians know their own poverty. They look to Jesus for what they do not have, and find in Him all that they need.