

A Poor and Contrite Heart

We Must Have It!

There is not one of us who does not crave to be close to our Creator, our “Daddy,” as it were, who made us in His image and loves us dearly. He is the one who called us out of this world of confusion and brought us into a brotherhood with Jesus Christ (John 6:44; Romans 8:29), and we desire to be like Him.

The logical question that results from this understanding, then, is how do we draw close to our Creator? How can we approach our heavenly Father and gain His favor, as would any child who dearly loves his physical father?

The answer to this weighty question is simple and complex at the same time ... simple because the answer is inherent in an attitude we must possess, but complex because to achieve that nature we must understand how to subdue our human nature, which wants to exalt itself against that essential attitude.

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Let us first lay some groundwork and review some of the chief scriptures that deal with this crucial issue of being poor and contrite.

Psalm 34:17-20. “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have a *broken heart*, and saves such as have a *contrite spirit*.

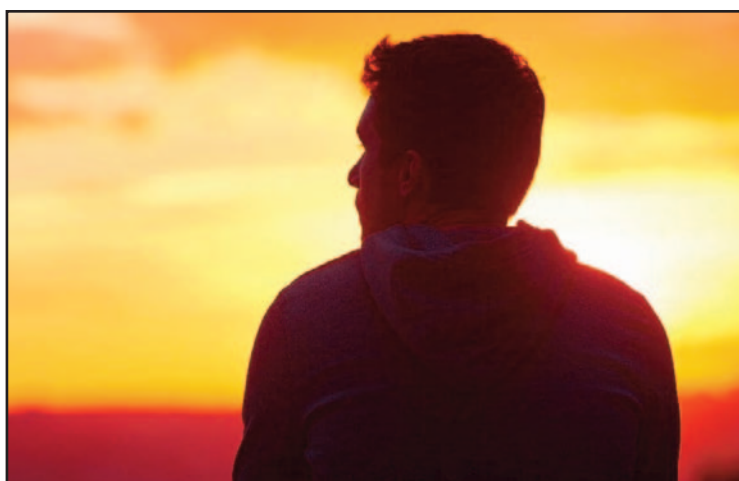
Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken.”

Psalm 51:16-17. “For You do not desire sacrifice, else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a *broken spirit*, a *broken* and a *contrite heart* — These, O God, You will not despise.”

Psalm 147:2-3. “The Lord builds up Jerusalem; He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. He heals the *brokenhearted* and binds up their wounds.”

Isaiah 57:15. “For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a *contrite* and *humble spirit*, to revive the spirit of the *humble*, and to revive the heart of the *contrite* ones.’”

Isaiah 61:1-3. “The spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has appointed Me to preach good tidings to the *poor*; He has sent Me to heal the *broken hearted*, to pro-



claim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are *bound*; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who *mourn*, to console those who *mourn* in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for *mourning*, the garment of praise for the spirit of *heaviness*”



Abraham was a very rich man in cattle, gold, and silver. Yet, he was a very humble man, so much so that he was chosen by God to begin the process of salvation for all of mankind through his descendant Jesus.

Isaiah 66:2. “For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,’ says the Lord, ‘But to this one will I look: on him who is *poor* and of a *contrite spirit*, and trembles at My word.”

Mathew 5:3-5. “Blessed are the *poor* in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who *mourn*, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the *meek*, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Old Testament word definitions for the previous verses:

broken = *shabar*, “to burst.”

heart = *leb*, “the heart, the feelings, the will, or intellect; the center of everything.”

contrite = *dakka* or *dakah*, “crushed to powder, contrite, to collapse (mentally or physically); from *dek*, “to crumble, bruise, beat to pieces, break, crush, smite, destroy.”

poor = *aniy*, “depressed, in mind or circumstance”; from *anah*, “looking down or browbeating, to depress.”

humble = *shaphal*, “depressed, literally or figuratively”; from *shaphel*, “to depress or sink; figuratively to humiliate.”

tremble = *chared*, “fearful, reverential”; from *chared*, “to shudder with terror, hence to fear, or to hasten with anxiety.”

captives = *shabah*, “to transport into captivity.”

bound = *ecar*, “to yoke or hitch; to fasten in any sense; to join in battle.”

mourn = *abel*, “lamenting” from *abal*, “to bewail.”

heaviness = *keheh*, “feeble or obscure”; from *kahah*, “to be weak, to despond, to grow dull.”

New Testament word definitions for Matthew 5:3-5:

poor = *ptochos*; from *ptosso*, “to crouch; a beggar (as cringing), i.e. a pauper; literally or figuratively distressed.”

mourn = *pentheo*; from *penthos*, “to grieve.”

meek = *praus*, “mild, humble by implication.”

It is abundantly clear from these scriptures that a broken and contrite heart is an attitude of heart and mind that is bowed down, crushed, reverential, depressed, heavy, grieving, and humble ... the opposite of the character of pride and self-righteousness, which the Creator has a lot to say about. For instance,

Psalms 10:2, 4. The wicked in his **pride** [*gaavah*, “arrogance or majesty”] persecutes the poor,

nor will he seek after God.

Proverbs 8:13. To fear Yahweh is to hate evil, and He hates **pride** [*geah*, “arrogance”], arrogancy, the evil way, and a perverse mouth.”

Proverbs 11:2. With **pride** [*zadoun*, “arrogance”] comes shame, but with the lowly [*tsana*, “humility”] is wisdom.

Proverbs 29:23. A man’s **pride** [*gaavah*] will bring him low, but honor will uphold the **humble** [*shaphal*, “depressed”].

Isaiah 28:3. The crown of **pride** [*geuth*, “arrogance”] of Ephraim’s drunkards will be brought low.

Jeremiah 48:29. The exceeding **pride** [*gaown*, “arrogance”] of Moab, and his arrogancy and loftiness, are cast in a critical light.

Daniel 4:37. Nebuchadnezzar related that those who walk in **pride** [*gevah*, “arrogance”] God is able to debase.

Obadiah 3. The **pride** [*zadoun*, “arrogance”] of your heart will deceive you..

Mark 7:20-23. The evil attitudes that come from within a person, including **pride** [*huperephania*, “haughtiness”], are what defile him.

Poor and Contrite ... and Humble

Humility is a very close synonym to being poor and contrite, and has already been introduced. There are several Hebrew words that mean humble, and a few in Greek, which are given below.

anach, “to be afflicted, bowed down, humble, meek” (Genesis 15:3; 16:6; 34:2; Psalm 105:18; Deuteronomy 8:2, 16; 21:24; Leviticus 23:28-29).

aniy, “poor, weak, afflicted, humble” (Deuteronomy 24:14-15; Psalm 9:12; 10:12, 17; 34:2; 69:32).

kana, “to be humble, to humble, subdue” (II Samuel 88:1; Leviticus 26:40-42; II Chronicles 7:14; 34:26-27).

shaphel, “to be low, become low, sink down, be humiliated or abased” (Isaiah 2:11-12, 17; Proverbs 29:23; I Samuel 2:6-8).

shaphal, “depressed, literally or figuratively” (Isaiah 57:15).

tapeinoo, “to make or bring low” (Matthew 18:4; 24:12; James 4:10; I Peter 5:6; Philippians 2:8).

tapoinophrosune, “humiliation of mind, i.e. modesty” (Acts 20:19; Ephesians 4:2; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:12-13; I Peter 5:5).

The English language defines *humility* in much the same way as both Hebrew and Greek, as “the state or quality of being humble; absence of pride or self-assertion.” *Humble* is defined as “having or showing a consciousness of one’s defects or shortcomings; not proud or self assertive; modest.”



Being poor, contrite, and humble means to be humiliated and abased, brought low, but it does not mean being weak and powerless. Rather, it means quite the opposite, for the spirit of God is the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind (II Timothy 1:7).

Why a Contrite, Humble Spirit Is Critical

Having defined the terms poor, contrite, humble, mourn, broken, and other words that describe a righteous person's character, why should we desire to have these qualities within us? The answers come pouring forth from God's word!

1. This is the mind of the Father and Jesus Christ.

Matthew 11:28-30. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Jesus Christ was, and is, gentle and lowly of heart, which means the Father is likewise, for if a person has seen Christ he has seen the Father (John 14:9; 12:45; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3); they are one, unified in character and purpose (John 10:30; 17:11, 21). "He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey ..." (Zechariah 9:9), and took the form of a bondservant, having no reputation, humbling Himself as He faced death by crucifixion (Philippians 2:7-8). Throughout the Old Testament the character of the Most High is likewise pictured as being lowly and contrite.

Exodus 34:6. "And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth.'"

Numbers 14:18. "The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression: but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation."

Psalms 86:5, 15. "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You But you, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth."

Joel 2:13. "So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm."

This is the character of our heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, lowly and of infinite kindness, full of mercy and patient beyond imagination, the epitome of the fruits of the spirit that He is (Galatians 5:22-23). This is the mind that puts others as greater than oneself.

Philippians 2:3, 5. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

It is the mind that submits to others in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21; I Peter 5:21), and washes the feet of one's brothers, taking the form of a humble servant (John 13:1-15).

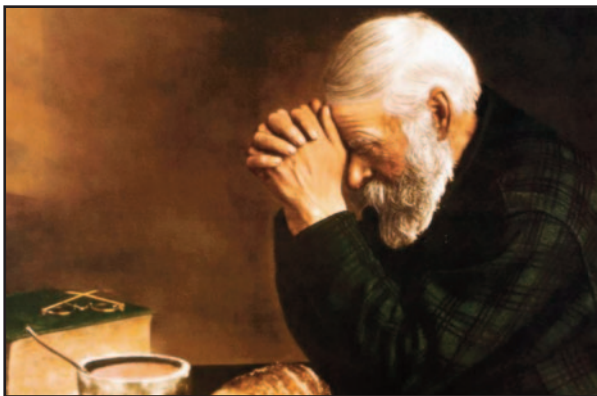
2. We must be close to our heavenly Father and to Christ. It is impossible to draw near to

the Father and Christ unless one is poor and contrite of spirit, for "... on this one will I look, on him that is *poor* (*aniy*, "depressed in mind or circumstances, brow beaten") and of a *contrite* (*nakeh*, "smitten, maimed, dejected") spirit, and who trembles at My word" (Isaiah 66:2). "The Lord is near to those who have a *broken* (*shubar*, "to burst, break") heart, and saves such as have a *contrite* (*dakka*, "crushed, bruised") spirit" (Psalm 34:18; see also Psalm 51:17).

Perhaps we can look at this closeness with Christ and the Father in the light of Isaiah 53. By having the same mind as He does we can identify with Him and draw close.

Isaiah 53:3-5, 7. "He is despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth."

This attitude of brokenness and sorrow while living in this world kept Him close to His Father in heaven, for He was in all ways tempted as we are, though through this temptation He never sinned. In Hebrews 2:15 this *temptation* [*peirazo*] is really a *test* [*peira*], which comes from the root word *peran*, meaning "to pierce." Sorrows are like being pierced (I Timothy 6:10). Living in this world where Satan holds sway, our Messiah continually experienced the stresses of life much like we do, and it is through this agonizing battle with sin and unrighteousness that we draw close to our Father. We have no other place to turn.



The rich have no advantage over the poor in God's system. Rather, they often face the great scourge of pride, which separates them from the Creator.



We Must Be Poor

Throughout Scripture we discover that being "poor of spirit" is usually tied to being physically poor. As I Corinthians 1:26-29 makes clear, it is not the wise according to the flesh, the mighty, noble, strong, and notable people of the world who are called to be His, but the weak, base, despised, and "things that are not," to bring to nothing the things that are, so no one should glory in God's presence.

In fact, the statement by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," is translated in other versions as one who is physically poor.

"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for Him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs" (*New Living Translation*).

"Blessed by the spirit are the poor, because theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven" (*Aramaic Bible in Plain English*).

“Happy, in spirit, are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens” (*Concordant Version*).

We are reminded that “... it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven,” and that it is “... easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:23-24). On hearing this the disciples were astonished, so Christ told them, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). Indeed, Abraham, the father of the faithful, was very rich in cattle, silver, and gold (Genesis 13:2). He, the chosen one of God to begin the plan of salvation this side of the Flood, being rich, yet did not let riches become his god. He understood that where his treasure was his heart would also be (Matthew 6:21; Luke 12:34). Joseph of Arimathea may be another person who was wealthy but a part of the elect, for he asked for and received the body of Christ to bury Him in his own tomb (Mark 14:43), and was a notable importer of metals. We also have the testimony of Paul in Philippians that some of Caesar’s household were among the saints (Philippians 4:22); some of them may have been quite wealthy.

Note also that the Hebrew word for *poor*, *aniy*, while oftentimes meaning “depressed, in mind or circumstances,” also can mean one who is physically poor, who has few possessions. For example, notice Isaiah 66:2; 41:17; 58:7; 26:6; 14:32; 10:2; 31:14; Proverbs 30:14; 31:9, 20. The implication in these scriptures is that when a person is poor in physical possessions he tends to be poor of spirit.

Having a Poor and Contrite Spirit

We are not speaking here of being depressed continually to the point of illness, for Proverbs 15:13 and 17:22 state that a [long-term] broken spirit “dries the bones,” but a *merry* [*sameach*, “blithe and gleeful”] heart is a *medicine* [*gehah*, “a cure”]. There obviously must be a balance between brokenness and being merry — we all have ups and downs — but for the elect who possess God’s spirit there is a natural proclivity towards meekness and mildness. We may even fail to see ourselves as worthy of any such high calling as we are given, failing at times to recall that we are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), called from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), destined to be kings and priests on the earth (Revelation 5:10), and brothers of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29). We need to recognize and internalize just who we really are as God’s chosen vessels (Romans 12:3).

How can we encourage an even closer walk with our Creator through fostering a poor and contrite spirit?

- 1. Live in reality!** Recognize yourself as one whom the Eternal really loves, and wants you to be close to Him, as a Father to a son, in gentleness, kindness, and humility.
- 2. Strive to know the mind of Christ ... the Creator of all that we see!** Live as He lives.
- 3. Allow the fruits of the spirit that are placed within you to blossom and grow.**
- 4. Don’t strive to become physically rich** (Proverb 23:4). This does not mean you should strive to be poor! Work hard at whatever your heart is set upon, and reap the rewards God will consequently shower upon you (Proverbs 10:4). Remember that God has chosen the *poor* [*ptosso*] of this world who are rich in faith to inherit the Kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him (James 2:5).
- 5. If you are wealthy in the goods of this world, realize that such wealth can be taken away in a moment**, as Job discovered (Job 1 and 2). Remember that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11), and He cautions the rich not to look down on the



The rich man lived sumptuously in the world, but faced great disappointment when faced with death and the future beyond ... whereas the beggar, in his humility, claimed an attitude that was right in the Father's eyes. Read the parable in Luke 16:19-31.

poor (James 2:1-9; 5:1-6). What the world's system considers great, our great God turns upside down.

Jeremiah 9:23-24. “This is what the Lord says: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, nor the strong man in his strength, nor the wealthy man in his riches. But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises loving devotion, justice and righteousness on the earth — for I delight in these things,’ declares the Lord.”

Never give up growing in the truth, and do not consider what the world thinks of you when you follow the difficult pathway that

leads to life. Remember that it is the humble who will be exalted.

I Peter 5:5-6. “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, but give grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time”