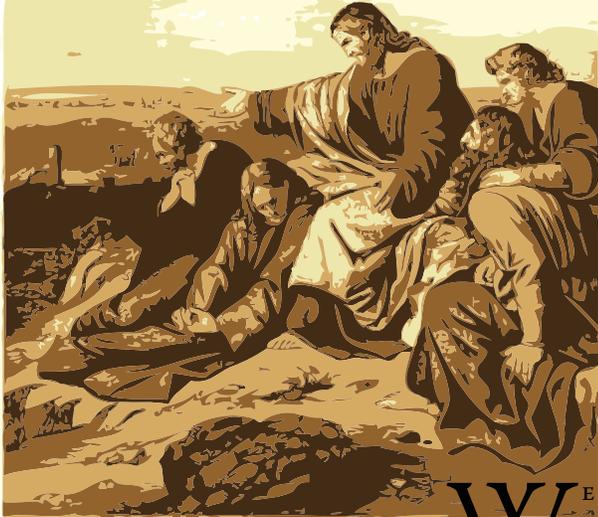


# Much to Learn



**W** E MET IN HER PARLOR—not a living room or family room, spaces so termed in a more modern home configuration. No, it was specifically a parlor, a small room just off the front hallway of the house designed for intimate conversation. A sedate Victorian concept long since discarded and forgotten in an age of home theatre systems and cell phones, the parlor was where the family gathered for quiet reading or conversation after dinner, and where young suitors came to nervously call on the daughter of the family.

The typical parlor was, by today's streamlined standards, grossly over-decorated, with heavy, elaborate draperies, gaudy family mementos, grand Persian rugs, and a small forest of potted ferns.

Once a week Mom would take me to Mrs. Snell's Bible School. We children would sit on

the floor of her parlor, grouped haphazardly around Mrs. Snell's straight-backed wooden chair and, surrounded by her large potted ferns, listen to her tell us the stories found in God's word.

Mrs. Snell was a stern but kindly woman of indeterminate age (I am tempted to call her "elderly," but then, *everyone* is elderly to a five-year-old boy). God had given her the gift of sharing His word with little children, and she did so with no-nonsense clarity. Sitting on her worn rug, enveloped in her fern forest, we sat and heard about Jesus, Zaccheus, Lazarus, Martha and Mary, John the Baptist, and Simeon. From the simple but profound stories we learned about grace, and mercy, and forgiveness—about God's love for us.



Reflections  
by the Pond

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*Teach me to do the thing that  
pleaseth Thee;  
Thou art my God, in Thee I live  
and move;  
Oh, let Thy loving Spirit lead me  
forth  
Into the land of righteousness and  
love.*

*Thy love the law and impulse of  
my soul,  
Thy righteousness its fitness and  
its plea,  
Thy loving Spirit mercy's sweet  
control  
To make me liker, draw me nearer  
Thee.*

*My highest hope to be where, Lord,  
Thou art,  
To lose myself in Thee my richest  
gain,  
To do Thy will the habit of my  
heart,  
To grieve the Spirit my severest  
pain.*

*Thy smile my sunshine, all my  
peace from thence,  
From self alone what could that  
peace destroy?  
Thy joy my sorrow at the least of-  
fence,  
My sorrow that I am not more Thy  
joy.*

John S. B. Monsell

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, "Blessed are the poor..."

Matthew 5:1-3

To be a disciple of Jesus is to be a pupil—a learner. But this learning does not take place in a formal classroom, with its rows and ranks of chairs, and the instructor standing with pointer before chalkboard scribblings. No, being taught by Jesus is more organic. Knowledge of Jesus and His ways is the result of spending time with Him, walking with Him, sitting at His feet and listening to His voice.

Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me." But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:38-42

What a Victorian, even archaic notion: to sit quietly, reflectively beneath the tutelage of the Lord, showing Him honor and respect by our silence. We are a society perversely enamored of the sound of its own voice. Technology has expanded to accommodate, feed and breed the narcissism of our day, until even the least among us can broadcast to the world, "I am going to the store now." The mind-set that believes everyone else on the planet is interested in the minutest, most trivial detail of one's day is a poor candidate for silently attending before the feet of the Master.

He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 5:2-3

Those who are poor in spirit have met, done battle with, and conquered their inbred conceit. They no longer consider their own intellect superior, their own words worthy of posterity. Instead, they have come to terms with the fact that they do indeed have much to learn—and that Jesus Christ is the best teacher.

For in His gentle counsel is the way of blessedness and joy: the revelation of heaven.

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."

Matthew 11:25-27

There is a deep, profound, spiritual joy that is far superior to any amount of superficial happiness—and far more rewarding than bathing in the shallow pool of one's own conceit. It speaks of God's riches poured into a life, of a clearer understanding of one's role in His kingdom, of an intimate communion that one discovers and enjoys only by being poor in spirit—of confessing one's abject poverty outside the grace of Christ.

To be poor in spirit is to understand that in ourselves we are utterly unworthy before God, deserving nothing, but that through Christ we are granted the right to stand before Him with confidence. And this blessed poverty is realized by sitting at the feet of our Lord: listening, learning.

To be poor in this world is to have an empty purse; to be spiritually poor is to have one's heart filled to overflowing with God.

