

CATHOLIC ARMORY

Rejoice and Be Glad

The Beatitudes and the Pursuit of Happiness

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

Matthew 5:12

An inductive Catholic Bible study in eight sessions · Complete Leader Guide

Using This Guide

Rejoice and Be Glad is an eight-session inductive study of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-16) for young adults and parish groups, built for 90-minute gatherings. Its scope is Matthew 5:1-16 by design; the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, and Luke's parallel sermon with its woes (visited in Dig Deeper boxes), lie deliberately outside it. Each session has three parts. Part 1, the Leader Preparation Guide, is yours alone: background, Old Testament roots, three Voices of the Church, Catechism connections, leader-only thread notes, goals, and a timed plan with pre-chosen cuts. Part 2, the Discussion Guide, is the meeting itself: opening prayer, two Win questions to open the circle, a Build section of inductive questions with shaded answer boxes (share the answer after the group has worked, never before), live discovery moments where the group finds the Old Testament sources themselves, a steelman that presents the strongest opposing view at full strength before answering it from the text, two Send questions, Live It This Week practices, a closing prayer, and a memory verse. Part 3 is a reference card listing every passage used.

All Scripture quotations follow the Revised Standard Version, Second Catholic Edition (RSV2CE). Participants receive nothing in advance: after each session, hand out that session's two-page Take-Home sheet, which recaps what the group found, carries the session's three Voices, and assigns the week's practices. Take-Home 1 includes the sealed My Guess slip; collect the sealed envelopes at Session 1 and guard them unopened until Session 5, when they are opened; slips handed back in return to their writers once more, voluntarily, at the close of Session 8, so retain them. Several threads run across the eight sessions and one of them resolves only in Session 8; the guide will tell you what to hold back and when to let it go. Trust the discovery method: the group remembers what it finds far longer than what it is told.

A word to the leader before Session 1: read the whole of Matthew 5-7 once in one sitting, and pray the Beatitudes slowly. You cannot lead a group up a mountain you have not begun to climb yourself. The study will ask the group for honesty about grief, mercy, purity, and cost; they will give it to the degree they see it in you.

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Take-Home sheets 1-8 are separate two-page handouts, distributed after each session, and are merged as their own Take-Home Run PDF.

Session 1: The Mountain of Happiness

Matthew 5:1-12

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the Beatitudes are Jesus' answer to the question every human being is already asking: what does it take to be truly happy? They see him ascend the mountain as the new Moses, giving the law of the kingdom with an authority all his own.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 1718: the Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness, a desire God himself placed in the human heart in order to draw us to himself.

What You Need to Know

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) opens with eight short sayings that have shaped the moral imagination of the world. Each follows the same two-part shape: a condition ("Blessed are the poor in spirit") and a promise ("for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"). The Greek word translated "blessed" is *makarios*: a declaration that someone is genuinely blessed, truly fortunate, well off in God's judgment, not in a passing mood. (Greek writers could use it of the untroubled happiness of the gods; but it is the promises Jesus attaches, more than the dictionary, that lift this blessedness beyond circumstance.) Jesus is making a claim about who is actually, objectively well off, and his list contradicts nearly every list the world would write.

Watch the staging in Matthew 5:1-2. Jesus sees the crowds, goes up the mountain, and sits down: in the ancient world, sitting was the posture of the authoritative teacher. His disciples come to him, and he opens his mouth and teaches. Matthew's first readers, steeped in the Old Testament, could hardly miss the picture: a man ascends a mountain and delivers the law of God. But where Moses received the law, Jesus gives it, on his own authority. Six times in this chapter he will say, "You have heard that it was said... but I say to you."

Count the promises. The first and eighth beatitudes share the identical promise, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and both are in the present tense while the middle six are future ("they shall..."). The repetition forms a frame, a literary *inclusio*, marking off the eight as a single composition: the promise of the kingdom frames the whole unit. Verses 11-12 then turn from the third person to the second ("Blessed are you") and expand the eighth beatitude, ending with the command that gives this study its title: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

Do not resolve tonight the tension the group will feel: these blessings sound backwards. Let it stand. The whole study is the answer, and Session 8 will reveal the key: the Beatitudes are, before anything else, a portrait of Jesus himself. Do not say this yet.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 19:3 sets the pattern: "Moses went up to God," and from the mountain Israel received the law. Matthew has already sounded Mosaic and new-Israel chords over Jesus' infancy: a murderous king, a rescue, Egypt, and a call out of it (Matthew 2:13-15, where Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1, God's word about his son Israel). The two types overlap rather than compete: Jesus relives both Moses' story and Israel's. The group will work with the actual texts in the discovery moment at Build 3; do not hand them the conclusion.

Psalms 1 opens Israel's prayer book the same way Jesus opens his sermon: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked." The Old Testament already knew a beatitude tradition: happiness located in relationship to God rather than in fortune. Jesus stands inside that tradition and radicalizes it.

Voices of the Church

ST. AUGUSTINE · DE SERMONE DOMINI IN MONTE, BOOK I

St. Augustine, at the opening of his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, teaches in substance that whoever ponders this sermon will find in it the perfect measure of the Christian life: everything needed for right living is gathered here. The sermon, for Augustine, is the Gospel's condensed rule of life.

Application (ours, not the saint's): if a group learned only Matthew 5-7 and lived it, they would be recognizably, radically Christian.

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA · HOMILIES ON THE BEATITUDES

St. Gregory of Nyssa preached eight homilies on the eight Beatitudes, and he opens with an image the whole series will climb: the Lord teaching on the mountain is calling us up an ascent, step by step, each beatitude leading higher, through the great promise that the pure in heart will see God, and onward still, through peacemaking and persecution, into the kingdom. The Beatitudes, in Gregory's reading, are not eight scattered sayings but one ascent. (The ladder-and-rung shorthand we will use for it is ours, not his vocabulary.)

We will keep Gregory's ladder in view for all eight sessions.

ST. LEO THE GREAT · SERMON 95, ON THE BEATITUDES

St. Leo the Great, preaching on this passage in the fifth century, teaches in substance that the Lord chose the mountain so that the height of the place might match the loftiness of what he taught, and that the same Lord who once spoke to Moses now speaks in person: the giver of the old covenant is the preacher of the new.

Leo's point guards the group against a common mistake: the Sermon on the Mount does not correct the God of the Old Testament; it is the same God, now speaking face to face.

Catechism Connection · CCC 1716-1719, 1721

CCC 1716-1719 places the Beatitudes "at the heart of Jesus' preaching" and teaches that they respond to the natural desire for happiness. CCC 1718 quotes St. Augustine: "We all want to live happily; in the whole human race there is no one who does not assent to this proposition, even before it is fully articulated." God placed that desire in us in order to draw us to himself, who alone can fulfill it.

CCC 1721 states the destination plainly: God put us in the world to know, to love, and to serve him, and so to come to paradise. Calling the Beatitudes the map of that road is this study's bridge, resting on CCC 1716-1719, which present them as revealing the goal of human existence and the way of the kingdom.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

FACE OF CHRIST (plant, do not reveal): from tonight on, quietly collect evidence that each beatitude describes Jesus himself. Tonight's line: he had nowhere to lay his head (Matthew 8:20); the fuller poverty text, 2 Corinthians 8:9, joins the log in Session 2. The thread resolves in Session 8.

LADDER (plant): name Gregory's ladder image tonight; each future session will identify its step.

SEALED GUESS (plant): before the closing prayer, each participant writes one sentence answering "What do you think it takes to be truly happy?" on the provided slip, seals it in the envelope, signs the flap, and hands

it in. The leader keeps the envelopes unopened until Session 5. Do not discuss the answers.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain what *makarios* means and how it differs from a mood.
2. Participants discover the Moses-mountain parallel from the texts themselves.
3. Participants identify the *inclusio* frame (5:3 and 5:10) and the shift to "blessed are you" in 5:11.
4. Each participant writes and seals a My Guess slip.

Time Note

90 minutes: Win 12, Read 8, Build 45, Steelman 10, Send 8, Sealed Guess + Live It + Closing 7. If running short: cut Build 5 and the Dig Deeper box; never cut the sealed guess.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you climbed the mountain and opened your mouth to teach us the way of happiness. Open our ears tonight. Give us the honesty to admit where we have looked for blessedness in the wrong places, and the courage to follow you up the mountain, step by step, all the way to joy. Amen.

Win: Opening the Circle

Win 1. Describe a moment when you were genuinely happy. What made it different from ordinary pleasure?

Win 2. If you asked ten strangers on the street what it takes to be happy, what answers would you get?

Build: Into the Text

Build 1. Read Matthew 5:1-2 slowly, before any beatitude. What does Jesus do, physically, step by step? Why might Matthew bother recording the posture?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He sees the crowds, ascends the mountain, sits down, and his disciples come to him; then he opens his mouth to teach. Sitting was the posture of the authoritative teacher (a rabbi sat to teach, and the teacher's chair became such a symbol of authority that the Church still calls a bishop's seat his cathedra). Matthew is staging a scene of authority before a word is spoken.

Build 2. Read Matthew 5:3-12 aloud, one beatitude per reader. First reactions: which one sounds most wrong to the world's ears? Which one stings you personally?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let this run; do not correct anyone. The offense is the point. The world calls blessed the rich, the amused, the assertive, the satisfied, the winners. Jesus overturns that entire ranking of who is fortunate. Name the tension and promise the group that the study exists to resolve it honestly.

Build 3. DISCOVERY. Half the group reads Exodus 19:3-8 and Exodus 20:1-3; half reads Matthew 2:13-15 and then rereads Matthew 5:1-2. Compare notes: what echoes do you hear, and what picture is Matthew painting?

Leader cue: Live discovery: let them find the new Moses parallel. Supply nothing until they have worked at it.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

A man goes up a mountain and the law of God is given. Moses received it; Jesus gives it on his own authority ("but I say to you," 5:22 and following). And Matthew 2 has already sounded the chords: a murderous king, Egypt, a call out of Egypt, with Matthew quoting Hosea 11:1 about God's son Israel, so Jesus is painted as new Moses and faithful Israel at once. The conclusion the group should reach: the Beatitudes are not good advice; they open Christ's authoritative proclamation of the New Law, which is chiefly the grace of the Holy Spirit and finds its written expression above all in this sermon (CCC 1965-1966).

Build 4. Compare the promise in 5:3 with the promise in 5:10. What do you notice about the wording and the tense? What do the six promises in between have in common?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

5:3 and 5:10 share the identical promise, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," both present tense; the middle six are future ("they shall be comforted... shall see God"). The repetition frames the eight as one unit: the kingdom brackets everything. The present tense means the kingdom is not only a future reward; it begins now, in the poor in spirit and the persecuted.

Build 5. In verse 11 the grammar suddenly changes. Find the change. What does it do to you as a listener?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The third person ("blessed are those") becomes second person: "Blessed are you." The sermon stops describing categories and starts addressing the room. Every listener since has had to decide whether verses 11-12 are about them.

Build 6. The word "blessed" translates the Greek *makarios*: truly fortunate, genuinely well off. Try reading verses 3-12 three ways: "blessed," "fortunate," "truly happy." What do the attached promises tell you about which sense Jesus means, and what does the strongest sense do to the sermon's difficulty?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Most groups find the strongest reading also the hardest, and that is honest. The promises (the kingdom, comfort, the vision of God) show Jesus means more than luck: he is claiming the mourning are genuinely well off, not technically fortunate in some spiritual bookkeeping. Either he is wrong, or our working definition of happiness is.

Steelman: happiness is pleasure plus good fortune

Present this at full strength; let the group feel its weight before answering. The most instinctive rival account of happiness is also the most plausible: happiness is pleasure, security, and success. Health, money, love, esteem, and freedom from pain. Every advertisement assumes it; most of our decisions assume it. On this view the Beatitudes are a beautiful coping mechanism: a way for the poor, the grieving, and the persecuted to reinterpret their losses as wins. Consoling, perhaps, but false, and even a little cruel, because it dresses misfortune up as blessing. And its refined forms are stronger still: Epicurus taught stable tranquility over consumption, and modern secular accounts locate flourishing in virtue, meaning, relationships, and agency; these versions already explain why the rich can be miserable.

Press the group: if a friend said that to you kindly over coffee, what honest evidence could you offer against it? Do not let anyone answer with a slogan.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Two lines of answer, one from experience and one from Israel's own wisdom literature. First, experience: comfort has not abolished misery, and everyone in the room knows satisfied, successful, miserable people; even the refined versions of the rival account (tranquility, meaning, relationships) name goods that death, loss, and boredom can still reach. Ecclesiastes stages the same experiment in its royal speaker's voice ("whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them," Ecclesiastes 2:10) and files the verdict one verse later: vanity (2:11). Pleasure and fortune are goods, but they leak. Second, the Beatitudes do not call suffering good. They locate happiness in something suffering cannot confiscate: the kingdom, comfort, mercy, the vision of God. The question the study will keep asking is whether that something is real. Tonight it is enough to establish that the rival account, even at full strength, cannot explain why the people who

have the most are not the happiest people we know.

DIG DEEPER

Luke 6:20-26 records a shorter, sharper form of the Beatitudes, delivered "on a level place," with four blessings matched by four woes ("woe to you that are rich..."). The Church receives both forms as inspired. Matthew's "poor in spirit" and Luke's blunt "you poor" illuminate each other, and Session 2 will take up exactly that relationship.

Send: Down the Mountain

Send 1. Which beatitude will be hardest for you to believe by the end of this study? Say it out loud; the group will hold you to it in Session 8.

Send 2. Jesus' first hearers walked down the mountain into ordinary life. What is one situation this week where the world's definition of happiness will be preached at you?

Live It This Week

- Memorize Matthew 5:12a and say it each morning: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."
- Once this week, catch an advertisement in the act of defining happiness for you. Name its definition in one sentence.
- Read Matthew 5:1-12 once, slowly, before Session 2.

Closing Prayer

Father, you made us for happiness and we have hunted it in a hundred wrong places. Thank you for a Teacher who tells us the truth. Seal in our hearts what we heard tonight, and bring us back up the mountain together. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MATTHEW 5:12A

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 1, in order:

- Matthew 5:1-2 (staging)
- Matthew 5:3-12 (full read)
- Exodus 19:3-8 (discovery)
- Exodus 20:1-3 (discovery)
- Matthew 2:13-15 (discovery)
- Matthew 5:22 (answer citation)
- Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 (steelman)
- Luke 6:20-26 (Dig Deeper)
- Psalm 1:1-2 (leader background)
- Matthew 8:20 (leader thread, unread)
- Matthew 5:12a (memory verse)

Session 2: Poor in Spirit

Matthew 5:3

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers who the *anawim* of the Old Testament are, why the first beatitude is first, and what poverty of spirit asks of people who are not materially poor.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 2544-2547: poverty of heart; the kingdom belongs to those who hold everything with open hands.

What You Need to Know

The first beatitude is the foundation stone; Fathers like St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. John Chrysostom read the others as built upon it. "Poor in spirit" is Matthew's Greek wording for a posture the Hebrew Scriptures had already named. The Old Testament's *anawim* (the poor, the lowly, the afflicted) were those who, having nothing to lean on, leaned entirely on God, and the prophets increasingly associate the faithful remnant with exactly these humble and lowly ones. Zephaniah tells the humble of the land to seek the LORD; Isaiah is anointed to bring good tidings to the afflicted. Mary's *Magnificat* is an *anawim* song; so is the first beatitude.

Matthew writes "poor in spirit"; Luke's parallel says bluntly "you poor" (Luke 6:20). These are not rivals. Material poverty can strip away the illusions that wealth funds, which is why Jesus speaks so severely about riches; but Scripture knows poor men with grasping hearts and rich men (Abraham, Job, Joseph of Arimathea) whose hands were open. Poverty of spirit is the interior posture the exterior condition can teach: dependence, not destitution, is the blessing. The Church holds both texts together: a real preference for the poor, and a real demand on the rich.

Note the tense once more: "theirs IS the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom already belongs to the poor in spirit, really and presently, even as its fullness is still to come. Everything else in the Christian life fits through this door, which is why the door is first.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Zephaniah 2:3 addresses "all you humble of the land" and 3:12 promises that God will leave in Israel "a people humble and lowly" who seek refuge in the name of the LORD. Note the difference in register: 2:3 holds out a hope ("perhaps you may be hidden"), while 3:12 gives a promise. Prophetic remnant theology and *anawim* theology grow together here.

Isaiah 61:1 ("the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted") stands directly behind this beatitude, and the group will discover in Build 4 what Jesus does with this text in the synagogue at Nazareth. Psalm 34:18 belongs to the same root system: "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit." File it; it returns in Session 3.

Voices of the Church

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA · DE BEATITUDINIBUS, AS QUOTED IN CCC 2546

The Catechism, at 2546, quotes St. Gregory of Nyssa on this beatitude: "The Word speaks of voluntary humility as 'poverty in spirit.'" Gregory reads the first beatitude as humility freely chosen, in imitation of the God who freely became poor.

Application (ours, not the saint's): the first step of the ascent: nothing can be climbed by a hand that will

not first let go.

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM · HOMILIES ON MATTHEW

St. John Chrysostom, preaching through Matthew in Antioch, teaches in substance that the poor in spirit are the humble and contrite of heart, and that Christ set this beatitude first deliberately: pride was the first sin and the root of the rest, so humility is laid as the foundation of the whole edifice. Where pride toppled even angels, the lowly heart stands secure.

Application (ours, not the saint's): the order of the Beatitudes is itself a teaching. No one hungers for righteousness, shows mercy, or endures persecution well who has not first been emptied.

ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX · STORY OF A SOUL; ACT OF OBLATION TO MERCIFUL LOVE

St. Thérèse of Lisieux's "little way" is a sustained enactment of this beatitude: remaining little, expecting everything from God as a child expects everything from its father, and coming before him, as her Act of Oblation to Merciful Love prays in substance, with empty hands. She did not trust her own accumulated merits; she trusted his mercy.

Application (ours, not the saint's): poverty of spirit is not self-hatred. It is the relief of finally telling the truth about where the money comes from.

Catechism Connection · CCC 544, 2544-2547

CCC 544: the kingdom belongs to the poor and lowly, to those who accept it with humble hearts; Jesus was sent to preach good news to the poor and identifies himself with them. CCC 2544-2547 gathers the tradition under the heading "poverty of heart": the Lord asks his disciples to prefer him to everything, and abandonment to the providence of the Father frees us from anxiety. The precept is detachment; the promise is the kingdom, already given and still to be completed. (The open-hands image in tonight's touchstone is our gloss on these paragraphs.)

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

FACE OF CHRIST (develop, do not reveal): tonight's line of the portrait is 2 Corinthians 8:9, "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor." Note it privately; the citation and its place in the portrait stay sealed until Session 8 (paraphrase in prayer or patristic summary is fine, as tonight's closing prayer shows).

ANAWIM ROOTS (plant openly): tonight the group meets Zephaniah, Isaiah 61, and Psalm 34. Tell them these texts will keep resurfacing; the Old Testament root system runs under the whole sermon.

LADDER: first rung named (letting go). SEALED GUESS: envelopes remain sealed; if anyone asks, smile and say Session 5.

Session Goals

1. Participants can define *anawim* and locate the tradition in Zephaniah and Isaiah.
2. Participants can state the relationship between Matthew's "poor in spirit" and Luke's "you poor" without flattening either.
3. Participants discover the Isaiah 61 / Luke 4 connection themselves.

4. Participants answer the prosperity-gospel steelman from the text.

Time Note

90 minutes: Win 12, Read 5, Build 45, Steelman 12, Send 8, Live It + Closing 8. If running short: cut Build 6 and compress the Dig Deeper; keep the Nazareth discovery whole.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, your Son had nowhere to lay his head. Teach us tonight the freedom of empty hands. Show us what we are gripping, and give us the trust to open our fingers. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Opening the Circle

Win 1. What is something you would find genuinely hard to give up, not because it is expensive, but because of what it means to you?

Win 2. Have you ever met someone who had very little and yet seemed free? What was that like to be around?

Build: Into the Text

Build 1. Read Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20 side by side. What is different? Why might both be in the Bible?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Matthew: "poor in spirit"; Luke: "you poor," with a matching woe for the rich. Both are inspired. Luke guards against spiritualizing poverty into a comfortable metaphor; Matthew guards against reducing it to a bank balance. Held together: material poverty can teach the dependence that blesses, and wealth endangers it, but the beatitude finally names a posture of the heart available to (and required of) everyone.

Build 2. DISCOVERY. Read Zephaniah 2:3 and 3:12. Who is God addressing, what future does he hold out to them, and what descriptions keep repeating?

Leader cue: Live discovery: the anawim. Let the group notice "humble" and "lowly" themselves and build the profile from the text.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The "humble of the land" who do God's commands and seek refuge in his name. Zephaniah 2:3 holds out the hope that the humble may be hidden on the day of wrath; 3:12 promises that God will leave exactly such a people. The prophets increasingly locate Israel's future not with the powerful but with the *anawim*, the poor of the LORD who lean on him entirely. The first beatitude is addressed to a people who already existed.

Build 3. Read Psalm 34:6 and 34:18. What do these verses claim God is actually like? How would a member of the *anawim* pray this psalm?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

"This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him"; "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit." Not a God who rewards the self-sufficient, but one whose nearness is promised precisely to the emptied. For the *anawim* this is not poetry; it is their entire security.

Build 4. DISCOVERY. Read Isaiah 61:1-2. Now read Luke 4:16-21. What does Jesus do with this text, and what does he claim?

Leader cue: Live discovery: the Nazareth scene. Give them time; the payoff line is Luke 4:21.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Isaiah: the Spirit-anointed one brings good tidings to the afflicted (the *anawim*). In the Nazareth synagogue Jesus reads from this Isaiah scroll (Luke gives the reading in the synagogue's Greek form, which also weaves in a line of Isaiah 58:6), rolls up the scroll, and says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He claims to be the Anointed One, and he defines his mission as good news to the poor. The first beatitude echoes the heart of that mission in one sentence.

Build 5. "Theirs IS the kingdom." Present tense. What difference does the tense make to someone in the room who feels they have nothing?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The kingdom is not only a consolation scheduled for later; it already belongs to those with empty hands, though its fullness is still to come. The poor in spirit are already citizens, which is why saints in real destitution have spoken of wealth.

Build 6. Honest inventory: for people who are not materially poor, what does poverty of spirit concretely require? Push past vague answers.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Concrete forms: holding possessions as an owner accountable to God and a steward for others; generosity that actually costs something; refusing to let net worth or achievement fund identity; the daily admission, in prayer, that everything is received; readiness to lose anything rather than lose God. The test is not owning things but whether we could open our hands without losing ourselves.

Steelman: the prosperity reading

At full strength: Scripture repeatedly attaches material blessing to faithfulness. Deuteronomy promises prosperity in the land for obedience; Abraham, Job, and Solomon are wealthy precisely as blessed men; Job's fortunes are restored double. Malachi even says, "put me to the test... if I will not open the windows of heaven for you" (Malachi 3:10, abridged). On this reading, God wants his people visibly blessed, poverty is a condition to be escaped by faith, and "poor in spirit" means poor in worldly attachment while rich in fact. Many sincere Christians hold some version of this.

Press: this steelman quotes real verses. Where exactly does it go wrong? Answer from the text, not from taste.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Grant what is true: creation is good, prosperity can be a blessing, and God is generous. But the reading collapses on the New Testament's central data point: Jesus. He is the most faithful man who ever lived and he was laid in a manger because there was no room (Luke 2:7), had nowhere to lay his head (Matthew 8:20), and died stripped of everything. If prosperity tracked faithfulness, Calvary is inexplicable. Further: Jesus pronounces woes on the rich (Luke 6:24), warns that wealth chokes the word (Matthew 13:22), and says it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom (Matthew 19:23-24). The Deuteronomic blessings were real but pedagogical, and the Old Testament itself already complicates them: Job suffers though blameless and upright, and the *anawim* are met and blessed by God in the midst of their poverty (dependence, not deprivation, being the blessing), which never makes destitution good or its relief optional. The first beatitude does not promise the poor in spirit an upgrade; it gives them the kingdom.

DIG DEEPER

Luke's parallel sermon sharpens tonight's comparison: Luke 6:20-26 has four blessings answered by four woes ("woe to you that are rich..."). Some readers argue that Matthew spiritualized an originally socioeconomic blessing. Read the woes this week and test that claim against tonight's work: Matthew's *anawim* background is already both socioeconomic and spiritual, and Luke's own Gospel blesses a rich Zacchaeus the moment his hands open (Luke 19:1-10). The two evangelists guard each other; neither cancels the other.

DIG DEEPER

Mary's *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) is the great *anawim* prayer of the New Testament: God has "regarded the low estate of his handmaiden," exalted those of low degree, filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich empty away. Pray it this week alongside Matthew 5:3 and notice how completely the mother has absorbed what the Son will preach.

Send: Down the Mountain

Send 1. What is one thing you are gripping that this beatitude is asking you to hold with open hands?

Send 2. Who in your life is materially poor, and what would it mean to receive them as the beatitude does, rather than as a project?

Live It This Week

- Memorize Matthew 5:3 and add it to Matthew 5:12a from last week.
- Make one act of generosity this week that actually costs you something, and tell no one.
- Pray the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) once this week, slowly.
- Read Matthew 5:4-5 before Session 3.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, rich beyond telling, you became poor for our sake. Unclench our hands. Give us the happiness of the anawim, who lean on you entirely and receive the kingdom with empty hands. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MATTHEW 5:3

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 2, in order:

- Matthew 5:3
- Luke 6:20 (parallel)
- Zephaniah 2:3; 3:12 (discovery)
- Psalm 34:6, 18
- Isaiah 61:1-2 (discovery)
- Luke 4:16-21 (discovery)
- Luke 6:24; Matthew 13:22; Matthew 19:23-24 (steelman)
- Malachi 3:10; Luke 2:7; Matthew 8:20; Deuteronomy 28 (steelman)
- Luke 6:20-26 (Dig Deeper)
- Luke 1:46-55 (Dig Deeper)
- 2 Corinthians 8:9 (leader thread, unread)

Session 3: Those Who Mourn and the Meek

Matthew 5:4-5

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers why the tradition holds these two beatitudes close together, finds the Old Testament source Jesus is quoting nearly word for word in "the meek shall inherit the earth," and learns the difference between meekness and weakness from Moses and from Christ.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 1716-1717; comforting the afflicted is a spiritual work of mercy (CCC 2447).

What You Need to Know

We take 5:4 and 5:5 together for reasons in the text itself. Both grow from the same Old Testament soil: Psalm 37 gives the meek their promise word for word, and Isaiah 61, which stood behind "poor in spirit" last week, continues "to comfort all who mourn." A number of ancient manuscripts even transmit these two beatitudes in the reverse order (meek before mourners), and modern Catholic Bibles print the well-attested sequence used here; nothing doctrinal hangs on it: the two sayings travel as a pair. Pastorally, be alert tonight: someone in the room is likely grieving something real. Leave silences alone; do not force resolution; point gently toward the sacraments and real support.

The tradition's applications of blessed mourning can be helpfully organized in three concentric circles (the grouping is ours). Bereavement, first and most simply: the God of this beatitude is the God of Psalm 34:18, near to the brokenhearted, and Jesus wept at a tomb (John 11:35). Second, mourning over sin, our own above all: what St. Paul calls godly grief, the grief that produces repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). Third, mourning over the world's evil, refusing the numbness that stops noticing. In all three, the beatitude blesses hearts soft enough to break and promises comfort in a verb from the same word family as the Paraclete, so Christians have fittingly heard in it an echo of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

Meekness (Greek *praus*) is among the most misheard virtues in the list, and the popular war-horse illustration (strength answering the rider) is a modern preaching image, not documented Greek usage, so let Scripture's two exemplars carry the definition; "strength under governance" is this study's own summary of what they show. Moses, who confronted Pharaoh, shattered the tablets, and led a nation, is called the meekest man on earth (Numbers 12:3). And Jesus applies the word to himself: "I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29), the same Jesus who made a whip of cords. Meekness is power that refuses to avenge itself, anger governed by love.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalm 37:11 reads: "But the meek shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity." Jesus is quoting his Bible nearly verbatim; the group will discover this at Build 3. The whole psalm is instruction to the *anawim*: fret not because of the wicked, trust, wait, and the land will be yours. (Both Greek texts use the same word, *ge*, for land and earth; the Church reads the promise in its widest scope, beyond one territory, rather than Jesus swapping in a new word.)

Isaiah 61:2-3 extends last week's anointing text: "to comfort all who mourn... to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning." The Messiah's job description includes professional comforter of Zion's grievors. Psalm 126:5 compresses the promise: "May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy!"

Voices of the Church

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA · HOMILIES ON THE BEATTITUDES

St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches, in substance, that the mourning Christ blesses is not every sadness but grief awake to what we have lost: made for communion with God, we have fallen from it, and the soul that feels that distance and weeps for it is already turning home. Such mourning is the opposite of despair. (Our image for it, not his: such grief is homesickness, and homesickness points toward a home.)

Application (ours, not the saint's): the next steps of the ascent: the hand that let go (Session 2) now feels what it lost, and grief bends the will soft enough to be governed.

ST. AUGUSTINE · CONFESSIONS, BOOK IX

When his mother, St. Monica, died at Ostia, St. Augustine recounts in Book IX of the Confessions that he restrained his tears, judging loud grief unfitting for a death so full of hope, until at last he stopped fighting and wept freely for the mother who had wept so many years for him, and he found in those tears not faithlessness but rest.

Application (ours, not the saint's): Christian hope does not cancel grief; it holds it. The room should hear clearly that tears at a graveside are not a failure of faith. Jesus wept at one.

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES · INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE

St. Francis de Sales, the Church's great doctor of gentleness, teaches in substance that meekness must govern us not only toward our neighbor but toward ourselves: after a fault, correct your heart calmly and without bitter self-directed anger, for harshness toward oneself is still harshness, and a heart bullied into virtue does not stay there. Gentleness, he insists, gains more than vehemence ever will.

Application (ours): as a young priest, de Sales evangelized the hostile Chablais region through patient preaching and pamphlets rather than personal violence (the region's politics were another, rougher matter); his meekness had a spine.

Catechism Connection · CCC 1716-1717, 2447; see also 736 on the fruits of the Spirit

CCC 1716 sets the Beatitudes at the heart of Jesus' preaching, and 1717 teaches that they express the vocation of the faithful and shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of Christian life. CCC 2447 lists comforting the afflicted among the spiritual works of mercy: the second beatitude creates work for the whole Church.

Gentleness appears among the fruits of the Spirit the tradition draws from Galatians 5 (CCC 736): meekness is not temperament; it is harvest.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

FACE OF CHRIST (develop, do not reveal): two more lines of the portrait tonight: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35) and "I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). The group reads both tonight for other purposes; do not connect them to the thread aloud.

ANAWIM ROOTS (develop openly): Isaiah 61 returns ("to comfort all who mourn") and Psalm 37 joins the root system. Name the pattern: the Beatitudes keep quoting the *anawim* texts.

LADDER: rungs named (grief that turns home; strength governed). SEALED GUESS: still sealed; two sessions to go.

Session Goals

1. Participants can name the three circles of blessed mourning (bereavement, sin, the world's evil).
2. Participants discover Psalm 37:11 as the verbatim source of Matthew 5:5.
3. Participants can define meekness as strength under governance, with Moses and Jesus as the proof texts.
4. The grieving in the room leave more accompanied than corrected.

Time Note

90 minutes: Win 12, Read 5, Build 44, Steelman 12, Send 8, Live It + Closing 9. If running short: cut Build 6 and the Psalm 126 detour inside Build 2. Do not rush the mourning material; cut from the meekness half instead.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father of all comfort, you count every tear. Sit with us tonight. Bless the grief in this room that we have never said out loud, and teach us the strength you call meekness, the strength of your Son. Amen.

Win: Opening the Circle

Win 1. Without naming anyone, describe someone you would call strong. What makes them strong?

Win 2. Our culture is uneasy around grief; we often do not know what to say at a funeral. Why do you think that is?

Build: Into the Text

Build 1. Read Matthew 5:4. What kinds of mourning could Jesus mean? Build the list before evaluating it.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Three circles, all real in the tradition: mourning the dead; mourning our own sin (2 Corinthians 7:10, "godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation"); mourning the world's evil, the refusal to grow numb. The beatitude blesses the heart soft enough to break. What it does not bless is despair. Gregory teaches that blessed mourning grieves the true good we have lost; a modern way to say it (ours, not his) is that such grief is homesick, and homesickness knows there is a home.

Build 2. Read John 11:32-36. Jesus is minutes from raising Lazarus and he knows it. Why does he weep anyway, and what does that tell the mourner in the pew?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He weeps with Mary and with the crowd; the famously brief verse "Jesus wept" shows God incarnate grieving at a tomb he is about to empty. Hope did not anesthetize him. Therefore Christian hope does not require the bereaved to skip grief; it accompanies them through it. (Psalm 126:5 makes the same promise in seed form: sowing in tears, reaping in joy.)

Build 3. DISCOVERY. Read Psalm 37:1-11 and then Matthew 5:5 again. What do you find, and what is the psalm's advice to people watching the wicked win?

Leader cue: Live discovery: Jesus is quoting Psalm 37:11 nearly word for word. Let them find it and say it.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Psalm 37:11: "the meek shall possess the land." Jesus lifts the third beatitude straight from the psalter, widening "the land" to "the earth." The psalm's counsel: refrain from anger, fret not, trust in the LORD, wait. The meek renounce the shortcut of grabbing; the psalm promises they lose nothing by it in the end.

Build 4. Read Numbers 12:3, remembering who Moses is and what he did. If THIS man is the meekest on earth, what is meekness not?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Moses defied Pharaoh, smashed the tablets in anger at idolatry, and governed a stiff-necked nation for forty years. Meekness is therefore not timidity, passivity, or the inability to be angry. In the very chapter, Moses

does not defend himself when Miriam and Aaron attack him; God defends him. Meekness is strength that declines to avenge itself.

Build 5. Read Matthew 11:28-29 and Matthew 21:5 (with Zechariah 9:9 behind it). Jesus claims the word for himself. What does his version of meekness look like in action?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

"I am gentle and lowly in heart": the only place in the Gospels where Jesus directly describes his own heart. His meekness rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, not a war-horse; it also overturns tables and speaks woes. Strength under the Father's governance: never weakness, never cruelty.

Build 6. Put the pair back together: what do mourning and meekness have to do with each other? Why might they travel together in the manuscripts and in life?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Both are postures of the *anawim* who refuse to seize control: the mourner does not numb the loss, the meek do not avenge the wrong. Both hand the outcome to God and receive it back as gift: comfort for the one, the earth for the other. A heart that has truly grieved is hard to provoke into grasping.

Steelman: meekness manufactures doormats

At full strength, in the voice of its sharpest critics: praising meekness is how the powerful keep the powerless quiet. Teach a woman in an abusive marriage that meekness is blessed and she will stay; teach an exploited worker to turn the other cheek and he will be exploited twice. A morality born among the persecuted has dressed its helplessness up as virtue, and calling submission blessed does not make it noble; it makes it useful to someone else. Any honest reading must admit this critique has historical cases to point to.

Press: where is the real distinction between meekness and submission to evil? Demand it from tonight's texts, not from sentiment.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The exemplars refute the caricature. The Moses whom Scripture calls meekest is the same man who confronted Pharaoh; his meekness liberated slaves rather than pacifying them. Jesus, meek and lowly of heart, rebuked kings, cleansed the temple, and told the officer who struck him, "why do you strike me?" (John 18:23): he did not pretend the blow was fine. Meekness renounces private vengeance, not justice, not protection, not truth-telling. And say this plainly, without euphemism: this beatitude does not tell anyone to remain in abuse. A person in danger should get safe and get help, and helping them do so is a work of mercy; leaders who hear of abuse involving minors or vulnerable adults must act: follow civil law and diocesan safeguarding policy, report through the channels they require, and call emergency services in imminent danger; charity requires no less. The Church's saints of meekness (Moses at court, de Sales in hostile territory) were the opposite of doormats: they were unbudgeable.

DIG DEEPER

A textual note your study Bible may flag: some ancient manuscripts place 5:5 before 5:4, reading meek

before mourners. Nothing doctrinal hangs on the order, and modern Catholic Bibles print the well-attested sequence, but the variant is a small window into how closely the pair were felt to belong together, both growing from Psalm 37 and Isaiah 61.

Send: Down the Mountain

Send 1. Privately, in the quiet before we close (no one will be asked to share this aloud): what are you mourning that you have never brought into God's presence?

Send 2. Where this week will meekness (strength that declines to avenge itself) actually cost you something: a comeback unsaid, a grudge released, a correction given gently?

Live It This Week

- Memorize Matthew 5:4-5; recite 5:3-5 together each morning.
- Comfort one afflicted person this week: a text to the grieving, a visit, a Mass offered. Comforting the afflicted is a spiritual work of mercy; do it on purpose.
- When provoked this week, delay your response by ten seconds and hand the outcome to God before you speak.
- Read Matthew 5:6 before Session 4, and come hungry.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, gentle and lowly in heart, you wept at your friend's tomb and you did not avenge your own wounds. Comfort the mourners among us; govern our strength. We wait for the earth you promised. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MATTHEW 5:4-5

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 3, in order:

- Matthew 5:4-5
- 2 Corinthians 7:10
- John 11:32-36
- Psalm 126:5
- Psalm 37:1-11 (discovery)
- Numbers 12:3
- Matthew 11:28-29
- Matthew 21:5 / Zechariah 9:9
- John 18:23 (steelman)
- Isaiah 61:2-3 (roots)
- Psalm 34:18 (recall)

Session 4: Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

Matthew 5:6

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers what "righteousness" means inside Matthew's Gospel, tastes the Old Testament's vocabulary of holy hunger, and confronts the question of whether God actually makes people righteous or only declares them so.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 27 and 2017: the desire for God is written on the human heart, and the grace of the Holy Spirit confers on us the righteousness of God. The satisfied hunger has a Eucharistic address.

What You Need to Know

The fourth beatitude blesses an appetite. Hunger and thirst are the body's most honest votes: they cannot be argued out of existence, only fed or starved. Jesus blesses those whose deepest appetite is for righteousness (Greek *dikaioσύνη*), and he promises satisfaction (the verb evokes being filled to the full, the word used when the five thousand ate and were satisfied). The beatitude therefore makes two claims: that righteousness is the food the soul was built for, and that God intends to serve it.

What is righteousness in Matthew? Follow the word through the Gospel and a profile emerges: it is exceeding, lived, and sought. Exceeding: "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). Lived: in Matthew 6:1-18 righteousness is something you DO (almsgiving, prayer, fasting); leader note: the RSV2CE renders 6:1 "your piety," but the Greek there is *dikaioσύνη*, the same word as in 5:6 and 6:33. Sought: "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (6:33). Matthew's righteousness is real conformity of the heart and life to God's will. This will matter enormously in tonight's steelman.

The satisfaction has an address. Jesus calls himself the bread of life and promises that whoever comes to him shall not hunger (John 6:35); and the Church's Eucharistic faith gives the fourth beatitude a concrete address at the altar. Do not spring this early; the Eucharistic landing comes late, at Build 5.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalms 42:1-2 supplies the beatitude's deep background: "As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." Israel already prayed its desire for God as thirst. Isaiah 55:1-2 issues the invitation ("every one who thirsts, come to the waters") and the diagnosis: "why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?"

Amos 8:11 names the curse that is this beatitude's photographic negative: "a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD." And 8:12 shows what that famine looks like: people staggering from sea to sea, running to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD and not finding it. The beatitude's photographic negative is desperate hunger without satisfaction.

Voices of the Church

ST. AUGUSTINE · CONFESSIONS I.1

"You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." (Wording varies slightly by translation.) The most famous sentence St. Augustine ever wrote is the fourth beatitude in autobiographical form: he had gorged his appetites for years and remained starving, because the appetite beneath the appetites was for God.

Application (ours, not the saint's): restlessness is data. It is the stomach growling for the one food we have not tried.

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA · HOMILIES ON THE BEATITUDES

St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches, in substance, a beautiful paradox about this beatitude: with every other food, eating ends the hunger; with righteousness, the taste enlarges the appetite. The soul that partakes of God desires him more, not less, and this ever-expanding desire is not frustration but the very shape of beatitude, since the Good it feeds on is infinite.

Application (ours): step four of the ascent: the emptied, grieving, governed heart now discovers what it was hungry for all along.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS · SUMMA THEOLOGIAE I-II, Q. 2, A. 8

St. Thomas Aquinas argues that no created good can constitute human happiness, teaching in substance that the object of the will is the universal good, as the object of the intellect is universal truth; therefore nothing less than God, the universal good himself, can bring the human will to rest. Every finite good leaves a remainder of desire.

Thomas gives Augustine's cry its architecture: the restlessness is not a design flaw. We are built with a God-sized appetite on purpose.

Catechism Connection · CCC 27, 1718, 2017; on the Eucharist as our bread, 1391

CCC 27 opens the whole Catechism with this beatitude's anthropology: the desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God, and only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for. CCC 1718 adds that the Beatitudes respond to this natural desire for happiness, a desire of divine origin that God alone can satisfy. CCC 2017 states the Catholic answer to tonight's steelman in one line: the grace of the Holy Spirit confers upon us the righteousness of God. Conferred, not merely credited. CCC 1391 locates the feeding: the principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus, who said, "he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

FACE OF CHRIST (develop, do not reveal): tonight's lines of the portrait: he fasted forty days and was hungry (Matthew 4:2); on the cross he said, "I thirst" (John 19:28). The one who blesses hunger and thirst knew both. Keep it for Session 8.

ANAWIM ROOTS (develop openly): Psalm 42 and Isaiah 55 join the root system; note aloud that the Beatitudes keep speaking psalter.

LADDER: rung named (the appetite discovered). SEALED GUESS: opens NEXT session. Bring the envelopes to Session 5 without fail.

Session Goals

1. Participants can define Matthew's righteousness from 5:20, chapter 6, and 6:33 (exceeding, lived, sought).
2. Participants can articulate Gregory's paradox: this food enlarges the appetite it satisfies.
3. Participants answer the imputation-only steelman from Matthew's own text.

4. Participants connect the promised satisfaction to the Eucharist.

Time Note

90 minutes: Win 12, Read 5, Build 43, Steelman 14, Send 8, Live It + Closing 8. If running short: cut Build 2's Isaiah 55 second read and the Dig Deeper; protect the steelman, it is the doctrinal center of the night.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

God our Father, you built us hungry. We have spent our money for what is not bread and our labor for what does not satisfy. Set before us tonight the food we were made for, and sharpen our appetite for righteousness until only you can fill it. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win: Opening the Circle

Win 1. What is the hungriest or thirstiest you have ever been, and what did satisfaction feel like when it came?

Win 2. What do people around us feed their deepest hungers with? What do you feed yours with, honestly?

Build: Into the Text

Build 1. Read Matthew 5:6. Jesus blesses an appetite, not yet an achievement. Why might desire be the thing he blesses?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Because appetite is honest and appetite directs a life. You can fake behavior for an evening; you cannot fake what you crave. Blessing the hunger also means the beatitude is open to the failing; you need not already be righteous to be blessed; the famished are blessed first, and real hunger then moves toward repentance, grace, and obedience. To borrow tonight's image for Luke 18:9-14 (the leader's illustration, not Luke's wording): the Pharisee is full and goes home empty; the tax collector is starving and goes home justified.

Build 2. DISCOVERY. Read Psalm 42:1-2, Isaiah 55:1-2, and Amos 8:11-12. Build the Old Testament's theology of appetite from these three texts.

Leader cue: Live discovery: thirst as prayer, the invitation, the famine. Let them assemble it.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Psalm 42: desire for God prayed as bodily thirst. Isaiah 55: God's open invitation to the thirsty, with the devastating diagnosis that we spend ourselves on non-bread. Amos 8:11-12: the worst famine is famine of God's word, and its picture is desperate, unsatisfied seeking, from sea to sea. Together: the soul has an appetite only God feeds, the table is set, and to hunger apart from him is starvation. (A further pastoral warning of our own, not Amos's: appetites can also be deadened, and that state may be worse still.)

Build 3. Word study inside Matthew. Read 5:20, then skim 6:1-18, then 6:33. (Leader note before the answer: RSV2CE renders 6:1 "your piety"; the Greek is *dikaioσύνη*, the same word as 5:6 and 6:33.) What is righteousness in this Gospel?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Exceeding (5:20: surpassing the scribes and Pharisees, not by more rules but from the heart, as 5:21-48 will show); lived (6:1 heads the unit on almsgiving, prayer, and fasting; the Greek calls these your *dikaioσύνη*, which the RSV2CE renders "piety": practices, not paperwork); sought (6:33: seek it first, before food and clothing). Matthew's righteousness is real conformity of heart and life to God, and that definition is about to matter.

Build 4. The promise: "they shall be satisfied," the same fullness-word used when the five thousand "ate and were satisfied" (14:20). What is Jesus claiming about righteousness that the world does not believe?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

That it satisfies. The world files righteousness under duty: the spinach of life, eaten grimly while pleasure sits elsewhere. Jesus files it under food: the thing the appetite was actually for. The saints testify to this reversal, and many a disillusioned hedonist half-knows it.

Build 5. Read John 6:35 and John 6:53-56. Where does Jesus locate the feeding? What does that make of Sunday morning?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

"I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger." The fourth beatitude's promise has a concrete address: the altar. The Church's living tradition hears "they shall be satisfied" being fulfilled, already and not yet, at the altar; CCC 1391 supplies the ground: the principal fruit of Communion is intimate union with Christ. Sunday is the hungry being fed, which is why skipping the meal starves more than a habit.

Build 6. Gregory's paradox: every other food ends hunger by satisfying it; this food enlarges the hunger it satisfies. Test the paradox against experience: is growing desire for God frustration or happiness?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Happiness, because the Good being tasted is infinite: there is always more, and the more is always better. Frustration is wanting what you cannot have; this is wanting what you increasingly do have. The saints describe exactly this: deeper satisfaction and sharper longing, together, growing. Heaven itself, in Gregory's image, fully satisfies and yet is no dead end of desire: an everlasting feast.

Steelman: righteousness credited, not conferred

At full strength, in its classic Reformation form, held sincerely by many of the best Christians you will meet: no one can actually become righteous enough for God; "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64:6). The good news is precisely that God credits Christ's perfect righteousness to the believer's account: imputed, not infused. In its strongest form the position distinguishes carefully: justification rests solely on Christ's righteousness imputed through faith, while sanctification is a real, ongoing work of grace in the believer; but that interior renewal is never the ground of the justifying verdict, and the hunger of Matthew 5:6 is an ongoing longing satisfied fully only in the kingdom. What it denies is precisely the Catholic claim: that justification itself makes us inwardly just. This reading takes sin with utter seriousness and gives all glory to Christ, which is exactly its power.

Press: this is a serious position held by serious Christians. Answer it from Matthew's own definition of righteousness, established an hour ago, before reaching for anything else.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Honor what is right in it: we cannot earn righteousness, the initiative is entirely God's grace, Christ's work is the whole foundation, and our Protestant brothers and sisters affirm real sanctification too. But Matthew keeps righteousness stubbornly concrete: it exceeds (5:20), it is done (6:1-18), it is sought first (6:33), and 5:48 crowns the chapter: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Those texts do not settle the mechanism of justification by themselves, but they weigh heavily toward the Catholic account, which is not that we achieve righteousness but that grace actually produces it in us: "the grace of

the Holy Spirit confers upon us the righteousness of God" (CCC 2017; see 1989-1992 and the Council of Trent, Session VI). Justification is not only the remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man: we are not only declared just but made just, as fire does not merely label wood hot. So the real dispute is narrow and deep: whether God's one grace merely accompanies a forensic verdict or actually constitutes our justice. Both traditions affirm ongoing sanctification; the fourth beatitude's picture of ongoing hunger met by ongoing feeding sits naturally inside the Catholic grammar of it: grace upon grace, hunger and satisfaction enlarging together, until we see him face to face. Leave no caricature standing; the disagreement deserves the care we gave it tonight.

DIG DEEPER

The tradition invites pairing this beatitude with the Our Father's fourth petition (the pairing here is ours to make; CCC 2837 supplies the ground), "give us this day our daily bread," hearing in the unusual Greek word *epiousios* (rendered "daily," possibly "supersubstantial") a hint of bread beyond bread. CCC 2837 gathers that tradition: the petition asks for all that sustains us, and the Fathers heard in it, too, the Bread of Life. The beatitude blesses the hunger; the prayer orders the meal.

Send: Down the Mountain

Send 1. What have you been feeding your deepest hunger, and what has it actually delivered?

Send 2. If righteousness is food and not spinach, what would seeking it FIRST (6:33) change about your next seven days?

Live It This Week

- Memorize Matthew 5:6; recite 5:3-6 each morning.
- Fast from one meal or one comfort this week, and when the hunger speaks, answer it out loud with Psalm 42:2.
- Receive Holy Communion this Sunday with the fourth beatitude on your lips as you walk up: "they shall be satisfied." If you have been away from the sacrament, let this be the week you talk to a priest.
- Read Matthew 5:7 before Session 5. The sealed envelopes open next week.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, bread of life, you fasted in the desert and thirsted on the cross. Feed the hunger you have blessed in us. Give us this day the bread beyond bread, and do not let our appetite die of the world's snacks. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MATTHEW 5:6

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 4, in order:

- Matthew 5:6
- Psalm 42:1-2 (discovery)
- Isaiah 55:1-2 (discovery)
- Amos 8:11-12 (discovery)
- Matthew 5:20; 6:1-18; 6:33 (word study)
- Matthew 14:20
- John 6:35, 53-56
- Isaiah 64:6 (steelman)
- Matthew 5:48 (steelman)
- Luke 18:9-14 (leader background)
- Matthew 4:2; John 19:28 (leader thread, unread)

Session 5: The Merciful

Matthew 5:7

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the strange reciprocity of the fifth beatitude (the only one where the gift and the reward are the same thing), traces God's *hesed* through the Old Testament, and opens the sealed envelopes from Session 1 to measure their own definitions of happiness against the ladder so far.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 2447 (the works of mercy) and CCC 2842 (forgiven as we forgive). Mercy is the hinge of the ladder.

What You Need to Know

The fifth beatitude is the hinge. The first four describe postures toward God (emptiness, grief, governed strength, hunger); with mercy, the ladder turns outward toward the neighbor, and it turns with a striking symmetry: this is the only beatitude whose condition and promise use the same word: mercy given, mercy received (and God's mercy always exceeds ours). Jesus returns to the principle relentlessly: forgive and you will be forgiven (Matthew 6:14-15); the measure you give will be the measure you get (Matthew 7:2); and the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:21-35) dramatizes the terrifying converse. James compresses it: "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy; yet mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13).

Behind "mercy" stands the great Hebrew word *hesed*: God's covenant love, his steadfast, stubborn, promise-keeping kindness, the word the psalms repeat in the refrain "his steadfast love endures for ever." When Hosea speaks God's line "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6), the word is *hesed*, and a verse Jesus quotes twice in Matthew's Gospel (9:13 and 12:7), both times against religious men who kept the ritual and skipped the mercy. The group will discover this double citation themselves.

The tradition gives mercy hands and a schedule: the corporal works (feed the hungry, give drink, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, bury the dead) and the spiritual works (instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, admonish the sinner, forgive offenses, bear wrongs patiently, pray for the living and the dead). Matthew 25 stages six of the corporal works as the final judgment scene (burying the dead joins the traditional list from Tobit), with one detail that changes everything: "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." Mercy is never generic; it has Christ's face on the receiving end.

TONIGHT THE ENVELOPES OPEN. Run the ritual exactly: after Build 5 and before the steelman, return each sealed envelope to its writer. Each participant opens their own, reads their sentence silently, and then, only if willing, reads it aloud. No one comments on anyone else's sentence. Then ask the two ritual questions in Build 6. The point is not to embarrass anyone's answer but to let the ladder so far interrogate it.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Hosea 6:6, "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice" (the Hebrew word is *hesed*), is the beatitude's taproot, and Jesus' double citation of it (Matthew 9:13, defending his table fellowship with sinners; 12:7, defending his hungry disciples) shows what mercy looked like in his hands: sitting at table with the wrong people, and defending his hungry disciples against a merciless application of the sabbath law.

Exodus 34:6-7 is God's self-description at Sinai: "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." Israel repeats this formula across centuries of prayer and prophecy (Psalm 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2, where Jonah complains about it). The merciful obtain mercy because mercy is what God is.

Voices of the Church

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM · HOMILIES ON MATTHEW

St. John Chrysostom, the fourth century's great preacher of almsgiving, teaches in substance that the almsgiver benefits more than the receiver, that care for the poor is care for Christ, and that God has arranged matters so that the wealth we release becomes our treasury while the wealth we hoard becomes our accuser.

Application (ours, not the saint's): Chrysostom would ask our generation one question: what surplus has God entrusted to you, and where is it going?

ST. FAUSTINA KOWALSKA · DIARY OF ST. FAUSTINA

St. Faustina Kowalska, the Polish religious sister whose Diary carried the Divine Mercy message to the modern Church, testifies throughout that work to mercy as the greatest of God's attributes, and records the Lord asking of souls three degrees of mercy toward neighbor: the merciful deed, the merciful word, and, where those are impossible, merciful prayer. (Her Diary is private revelation: an approved devotion carrying ecclesiastical approbation, binding no one (CCC 67); its theology of mercy, however, is the Gospel's own.)

Deed, word, prayer: nobody in this room is exempt from all three.

ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA · HER LIFE AND LETTERS

St. Teresa of Calcutta spent five decades doing Matthew 25 with her hands: the dying lifted from Calcutta's gutters, the abandoned held until the end. Her letters, published in *Come Be My Light*, reveal that for much of that time she worked in interior darkness, without felt consolation, which makes the witness stronger, not weaker: her mercy did not run on feelings.

She teaches, in substance, that we serve Jesus in the distressing disguise of the poor: Matthew 25:40 taken with complete literalness.

Catechism Connection · CCC 1829, 2447, 2842; on God's mercy, 210-211

CCC 2447 defines and lists the works of mercy, corporal and spiritual: charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his bodily and spiritual necessities. CCC 2840 explains the reciprocity that runs through tonight's texts: the outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate a heart that refuses to forgive; in confessing our sin, the heart opens to grace. CCC 2842 adds the depth of the "as": a vital participation in God's own mercy, never a merely external imitation. CCC 1829 lists mercy among the fruits of charity. CCC 210 grounds it all in Exodus 34:6, God revealing himself as merciful and gracious after Israel's worst sin; CCC 211 adds the enduring faithfulness of the divine name.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

FACE OF CHRIST (develop, do not reveal): tonight's portrait lines: he sat at table with sinners (Matthew 9:10-13) and defended his hungry disciples by Hosea's mercy (12:1-8). Log also, for Session 8, a line tonight's texts do not open: the word from the cross (Luke 23:34). Keep all of it silent until the reveal.

SEALED GUESS (RESOLVE tonight): envelopes open between Build 5 and the steelman. Follow the ritual in What You Need to Know. Collect the slips again afterward if participants are willing; Session 8 uses them

one last time (voluntary).

ANAWIM ROOTS (develop): Hosea 6:6 and Exodus 34:6 join the root system. LADDER: the hinge rung; the ladder turns toward the neighbor.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain the unique reciprocity of the fifth beatitude and its sharpened form in Matthew 6:14-15 and 18:21-35.
2. Participants discover Jesus' double citation of Hosea 6:6 and what he used it to defend.
3. Participants can list several corporal and spiritual works of mercy without notes.
4. The sealed-guess ritual lands: each participant measures their Session 1 definition of happiness against the ladder so far.

Time Note

90 minutes: Win 10, Read 5, Build 40, Sealed Guess ritual 12, Steelman 12, Send 6, Live It + Closing 5. If running short: cut Build 4's second parable read-through; never cut the ritual.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father of mercies, your name is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. We have received mercy we did not deserve and withheld mercy we owed. Open the hard place in each of us tonight. Amen.

Win: Opening the Circle

Win 1. Describe a time someone showed you mercy you had no right to expect. What did it do to you?

Win 2. Which is harder for you: asking for forgiveness, or granting it? Why?

Build: Into the Text

Build 1. Read Matthew 5:7 and compare it with the other seven beatitudes. What is structurally unique about this one?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

It is the only beatitude where condition and promise share one word: the merciful obtain mercy. The poor get a kingdom, the mourners get comfort, but the merciful receive the very thing they gave, in greater measure, for God is not outdone. And CCC 2840 explains the mechanism: refusing to forgive does not switch God's mercy off; it hardens the heart against receiving what is always being offered.

Build 2. Read Matthew 6:14-15 and then the parable in Matthew 18:21-35. How seriously does Jesus mean the reciprocity? What is the servant's exact failure?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

With full severity: "if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." The servant is forgiven a national debt (ten thousand talents, an absurd, unpayable sum) and then chokes a man over a hundred denarii: real money, about a hundred days' wages, yet a rounding error beside his own forgiven debt. His failure is not bookkeeping but blindness: he walked out of the amnesty unchanged by it. The king's question is the beatitude inverted: "should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?"

Build 3. DISCOVERY. Read Hosea 6:6. Now hunt through Matthew 9:10-13 and Matthew 12:1-8 and find what Jesus does with this verse. What is he defending each time?

Leader cue: Live discovery: the double citation. Let them find both instances and name what occasioned each.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice": a verse Jesus reaches for twice in Matthew. In 9:13 he is defending his dinner table full of tax collectors and sinners; in 12:7 he is defending his hungry disciples plucking grain on the sabbath. Both times the opponents kept the ritual and flunked the mercy. "Go and learn what this means," he says: a rabbi's homework assignment, still due.

Build 4. Read Exodus 34:6-7a. Where does this scene happen, and why does Israel keep repeating it for centuries afterward (see Psalm 103:8; Jonah 4:2)?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

At Sinai, in the aftermath of the golden calf and Moses' intercession: God proclaims his own name to Moses as "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love," right after Israel's worst betrayal. Israel quotes it in psalms, in prophets, and Jonah even quotes it as a complaint (he knew God would forgive Nineveh). The merciful obtain mercy because they are resembling the family: mercy is what the Father is like.

Build 5. Read Matthew 25:34-40. The works of mercy get an identity twist at verse 40. What is it, and what does it do to the phrase "charity case"?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

"As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me." The hungry, the stranger, the sick, the prisoner: each carries Christ's face. (Interpreters discuss whether "my brethren" means Christ's disciples first or every needy person; the Church's living application embraces every neighbor in need.) Mercy is never downward benevolence to an inferior; it is service rendered to the King in disguise, which abolishes the whole posture behind "charity case." Matthew 25 brings concrete mercy into the final judgment, and the examinees are surprised in both directions.

Build 6. SEALED GUESS RITUAL. Envelopes are returned and opened (see leader notes). Then, in pairs: (a) Where does your Session 1 sentence agree with the ladder so far (empty hands, honest grief, governed strength, hunger for righteousness, mercy)? (b) Where does the ladder correct it?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

No answer key exists for this one; the leader's job is to protect honesty. Common landings: most Session 1 definitions involve acquiring (comfort, security, love received), and the ladder keeps locating happiness in what is released and received as gift. If anyone's sentence was already the Gospel, congratulate them and ask whether they live it. Close the ritual by pointing forward: three steps remain, and the next (Session 6) carries the promise the whole ascent aims at: seeing God.

Steelman: mercy cheats justice

At full strength, in two voices. The philosopher: justice means giving each what is due; mercy, by definition, gives less punishment than is due; therefore every act of mercy is an act of injustice, and a society (or a God) that forgives freely teaches that wrongs do not matter. The wounded: you did not see what was done to me or to the person I love. Telling me to forgive the unrepentant is telling me the wound did not count; and in real cases, pressured forgiveness has sent people back into danger and let predators keep hunting. Any account of this beatitude that cannot answer BOTH voices is not worth having.

Press: answer the philosopher from the cross and the wounded from the whole counsel of the Church. Do not rush the second answer.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

To the philosopher: in the Gospel, mercy never waves sin away; it absorbs its cost. The cross is precisely justice and mercy meeting: sin is taken with total seriousness (it costs the life of God's Son) and the sinner is spared (Romans 3:25-26: God shows righteousness in justifying). Forgiveness is not the claim that the debt was small; the one wronged releases the claim and absorbs the cost rather than extracting it (only Christ's cross expiates sin). That is why forgiving is agony and why only the forgiven-much do it well. To the

wounded, with all gentleness: the Church does not teach that forgiveness means pretending, trusting again, or staying. Forgiveness is releasing the debt to God's justice; reconciliation additionally requires repentance and rebuilt trust, and sometimes it is rightly never restored. A person in danger should get safe first; protecting the vulnerable is itself a work of mercy, and abuse of minors or vulnerable adults must be acted on: report as civil law and diocesan safeguarding policy require, and call emergency services in imminent danger. Forgiveness can then be a long healing, at grace's pace, not a performance demanded on schedule. The beatitude blesses the merciful; it never arms the abuser.

DIG DEEPER

The Church asks us to know the works of mercy by heart. Corporal: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, bury the dead. Spiritual: instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, comfort the sorrowful, admonish the sinner, forgive offenses, bear wrongs patiently, pray for the living and the dead. Fourteen doors; every life stands near several.

Send: Down the Mountain

Send 1. Whose name came to mind tonight as the person you have not forgiven? You do not have to say it aloud; you do have to say it to God this week.

Send 2. Pick one corporal work of mercy you have literally never done. What would doing it this month require?

Live It This Week

- Memorize Matthew 5:7; recite 5:3-7 each morning.
- Do one corporal work of mercy this week, in person if possible, and look the person in the eye.
- Begin forgiving one debt: name the person and the wound to God, and ask for the grace to release it (release is not reunion; see tonight's steelman).
- Read Matthew 5:8 before Session 6: the promise the whole ascent aims at.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, you ate with sinners and prayed mercy over the men with the hammers. We have been forgiven ten thousand talents. Make us merciful as our Father is merciful, and let the current flow through us unblocked. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MATTHEW 5:7

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 5, in order:

- Matthew 5:7
- Matthew 6:14-15
- Matthew 18:21-35
- Hosea 6:6 (discovery)
- Matthew 9:10-13 (discovery)
- Matthew 12:1-8 (discovery)
- Exodus 34:6-7a
- Psalm 103:8; Jonah 4:2
- Matthew 25:34-40
- James 2:13 (leader background)
- Romans 3:25-26 (steelman)

Session 6: The Pure in Heart

Matthew 5:8

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers what purity of heart means in its full breadth (an undivided heart, not merely chastity), climbs Psalm 24's hill of the LORD to find this beatitude's Old Testament shape, and looks steadily at the promise the whole ladder ascends toward: they shall see God.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 2518-2519: the pure in heart are promised the vision of God; purity of heart attunes intellect and will to God's holiness in charity, chastity, and love of the truth.

What You Need to Know

This session carries the promise the whole ascent has been aiming at: they shall see God, the vision the tradition calls beatific because it IS beatitude, the happiness every session has been circling. (In Gregory's own series the ascent continues on through peacemaking and persecution; treating this as the summit promise is the study's framing, not his sequence.) Tonight has two jobs: widen the group's understanding of purity (most rooms hear only chastity) and let the promise land with its full weight.

The heart, in Scripture, is not merely the seat of feelings; it is the control room of the person: the place where thinking, willing, and loving happen ("out of the heart come evil thoughts," Matthew 15:19). Purity of heart is therefore singleness: an undivided control room, one throne with one occupant. The Catechism gives it three arenas (CCC 2518): charity, chastity, and love of the truth. Chastity belongs on the list; Jesus himself puts the lustful look on the heart's account in this very sermon (5:27-28). But a heart can be chaste and still divided by ambition, resentment, vanity, or greed. Purity is about the whole throne room.

The promise is staggering and Scripture says so. "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18); Moses was told "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). Yet Jesus promises the pure in heart precisely the vision. The New Testament holds the resolution: the only-begotten Son has made him known (John 1:18 again), now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12), and "when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is," with this beatitude's own logic attached: "every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself" (1 John 3:2-3). The vision is the destination; purification is the packing.

Pastoral note: the chastity material must be handled without either euphemism or shaming. Assume the room contains people carrying habits, histories, and wounds in this area. The message (ours, distilled from Gregory's direction, against the world's caricature): purity is not the hatred of desire but its healing; the pure heart does not see less, it sees more. And the confessional exists; say so plainly and warmly.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Psalm 24:3-4 is the beatitude's Old Testament silhouette, and the group finds it in tonight's discovery: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?... He who has clean hands and a pure heart." The psalm asks the ladder's question (who gets up the mountain into God's presence?) and gives the beatitude's answer.

Psalm 51:10 supplies the crucial correction to any self-improvement reading: "Create in me a clean heart, O God." The verb is God's creation verb; the psalmist (traditionally David) does not scrub his heart; he asks for a new one. Ezekiel 36:25-26 turns that prayer into a covenant promise: "a new heart I will give you... I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

Voices of the Church

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA · HOMILIES ON THE BEATITUDES

St. Gregory of Nyssa, preaching on this beatitude, teaches in substance that the promise seems at first to exceed human nature (how can creatures see the invisible God?), and answers with an image: as a purified mirror holds an image of the sun, so the heart scoured of sin finds the image of God restored in itself, and in that restored image truly sees him. Purity does not shrink the soul's vision; it is the polishing that makes vision possible.

Application (ours, not the saint's): everything the ascent stripped away (grasping, numbness, vengeance, false food, hardness) turns out to have been grime on the mirror.

ST. AUGUSTINE · CONFESSIONS X.27

"Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new; late have I loved you!" (Wording varies slightly by translation.) St. Augustine's most famous cry after the restless heart is this one, and it continues: you were within me, and I was outside, hunting through the beautiful things you made. His divided years were not a search for the wrong object but in the wrong direction: the Beauty was interior, waiting behind the noise.

Application (ours, not the saint's): impurity of heart is not usually loving bad things; it is loving good things in God's chair.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS · SUMMA THEOLOGIAE I, Q. 12; I-II, Q. 3, A. 8

St. Thomas Aquinas, treating how God can be known, teaches in substance that the created intellect can, by God's grace and not by nature, be raised to see the very essence of God, and that this vision is the creature's final happiness: the mind's long hunger (Session 4's hunger) coming to its table. What no eye has seen, God has prepared; the light of glory will strengthen the intellect for a sight it could never reach alone.

Thomas turns the beatitude's promise into precise hope: seeing God is not a metaphor. It is the point of everything.

Catechism Connection · CCC 1720, 2518-2519; on the beatific vision, 1023, 1028

CCC 2518 quotes this beatitude and defines its subject: the pure in heart are those who have attuned their intellects and wills to the demands of God's holiness, chiefly in three areas: charity, chastity or sexual rectitude, and love of truth and orthodoxy of faith. CCC 2519 attaches the promise: the pure in heart are promised that they will see God face to face and be like him; even now purity of heart enables us to see according to God. CCC 1023 and 1028 name the destination: those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified see him as he is, face to face; the Church calls this contemplation the beatific vision, in which God opens himself inexhaustibly. (The Scholastic phrase "vision of the divine essence" is the tradition's technical name for what these paragraphs describe.)

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

FACE OF CHRIST (develop, do not reveal): tonight's lines: no guile was found on his lips (1 Peter 2:22), and "I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:29). The undivided heart has a name. Session 8 says it aloud.

ANAWIM ROOTS (develop): Psalm 24 and Psalm 51 join the root system; note that the ladder's question (who ascends the hill?) was the psalter's question first.

LADDER (the promised height): tell the group plainly tonight that this is the promise the whole ascent aims

at; two sessions remain, and in Gregory's own series the ascent continues through them, turning outward into the world. SEALED GUESS: resolved last week; slips in reserve for Session 8.

Session Goals

1. Participants can define purity of heart as the undivided heart, with CCC 2518's three arenas.
2. Participants discover Psalm 24:3-4 as the beatitude's Old Testament shape.
3. Participants can state why the promise is shocking (Exodus 33:20; John 1:18) and how the New Testament resolves it (1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2-3).
4. The chastity conversation happens honestly, without euphemism or shame, and points to grace and the confessional.

Time Note

90 minutes: Win 10, Read 5, Build 45, Steelman 12, Send 8, Live It + Closing 10. If running short: compress Build 5 and the Dig Deeper; do not cut Build 4 (the promise) or the pastoral close.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

God of glory, no one has seen you and lived, and yet your Son has promised that the pure in heart shall see you. Create clean hearts in us tonight; take out whatever is stone. We want to see you. Amen.

Win: Opening the Circle

Win 1. When has your attention been so completely undivided (a person, a landscape, a piece of music) that you lost track of yourself? What was that like?

Win 2. Without sharing anything private: what competed hardest for your heart's attention and loyalty this week, and how did the contest go?

Build: Into the Text

Build 1. First, the word. Read Matthew 15:18-19. What is "the heart" in Jesus' usage, and what does that make purity of heart?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The heart is the control room: the source of thought, will, and act ("out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery..."). Purity of heart is therefore not one moral lane but the state of the whole throne room: undividedness, a heart with one Lord. CCC 2518 names its three arenas: charity, chastity, love of the truth.

Build 2. DISCOVERY. Read Psalm 24:3-6. What question does the psalm ask, what answer does it give, and what has this psalm to do with a study that began on a mountain?

Leader cue: Live discovery: the holy hill. Let them connect the psalm's ascent to the sermon's mountain and Gregory's ladder.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

"Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?" is the ladder's question in psalter form, and the answer is tonight's beatitude in silhouette: clean hands and a pure heart, a soul not lifted to what is false. The reward the psalm itself names is seeking: such a one belongs to the generation "who seek the face of the God of Jacob." The beatitude answers that lifelong seeking with the promise the psalm dared not print: they shall see. The Beatitudes began with Jesus ascending a mountain; the sixth tells us who gets to the top of the one that matters.

Build 3. Chastity belongs on purity's list; Jesus puts it there. Read Matthew 5:27-28, and alongside it Psalm 51:10 and Ezekiel 36:25-26. What does Jesus trace into the heart, and what do the prophets say God can do about hearts like ours?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

He traces adultery into the look, from the courtroom into the control room, without ever releasing the act: the heart can be guilty where the body never moves. Handle without euphemism: lust is real, common, and confessable. But the standard is good news because of WHERE the beatitude aims: hearts get healed, not just behavior managed (Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26). Purity is not the hatred of desire; it is desire healed of using people. And the confessional is open; grace, not white-knuckling, is the method. Say this warmly.

Build 4. Now the promise. Read Exodus 33:18-23 and John 1:18a. Why should "they shall see God" stop us in our tracks?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Because Scripture testifies that no one can see God unaided and live: "man shall not see me and live"; "no one has ever seen God." (Theophanies like Isaiah 6 are mediated glimpses, not the unveiled essence; and in 33:21-23, at the end of tonight's reading, even Moses is granted the back, not the face.) Jesus stands on a hillside and promises fishermen the thing Moses was refused. Either it is the wildest overpromise in religious history, or something has changed.

Build 5. Read the rest of John 1:18, then 1 Corinthians 13:12 and 1 John 3:2-3. How does the New Testament cash the promise, and what is the beatitude's own logic in 1 John 3:3?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What changed is the Son: "the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." Even now, purity lets us see according to God (CCC 2519), a real foretaste mediated through Christ, the sacraments, and the neighbor of Matthew 25; the beatific vision proper, the immediate sight of God, is completed face to face in glory (CCC 1023): "we shall see him as he is." And John attaches this beatitude's exact logic: "every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure." The vision is the destination; purity is the packing. The Church calls the destination the beatific vision (CCC 1023): not a metaphor, the point of everything.

Build 6. Gregory's mirror: the purified heart sees God the way a polished mirror holds the sun. Test the claim in miniature: what do pure-hearted people notice that divided hearts miss? Give real examples.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let them work. Real examples: the saint sees Christ in the beggar the rest of us step around (Matthew 25 again); the person free of envy can enjoy a friend's success; the chaste heart sees a person where the lustful one sees parts; the truthful heart hears facts without spin. "Even now purity of heart enables us to see according to God" (CCC 2519). Purity is not subtraction from experience; it is the repair of perception.

Steelman: an impossible standard, designed to break you

At full strength, in its sharpest theological form: be honest about your own heart for one hour and the sixth beatitude becomes a death sentence. Nobody's control room is clean; Jesus himself raises the bar past behavior into thought (5:28) and crowns the chapter with "be perfect" (5:48). Therefore, argues a serious Protestant tradition, this sermon's function is not prescription but diagnosis: a standard set deliberately out of reach so that we despair of self-righteousness and flee to Christ alone. Rome's talk of actually becoming pure keeps souls on a treadmill of works; the honest reading admits no one is pure in heart, and thank God the Gospel is for the impure. Notice the steelman's strength: it takes both sin and grace with total seriousness.

Press: the diagnosis reading gets something right; name it. Then find what it cannot explain, using 1 John 3:3, tonight's Voices, and the existence of the saints.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

What it gets right: measured against this beatitude, every honest heart despairs of itself, and any purity we have is grace, not achievement (Psalm 51:10 prays "create," not "assist"). But the diagnosis-only reading cannot explain three things. First, the grammar: the Beatitudes are pronounced blessings on real people (Jesus says the pure in heart ARE blessed, not "would be, if any existed"), and 1 John 3:3 treats purification

as an actual ongoing project of hope, not a proof of its impossibility. Second, the promise: if no one can be pure in heart, then no one shall see God, and heaven is empty; the tradition instead teaches that grace really purifies, in this life incrementally and, where needed, completed in the purification the Church calls purgatory (CCC 1030-1031), precisely so that the promise can be kept. Third, the saints: the Church does not canonize legal fictions. A Thérèse or a Francis is not imputed pure while remaining privately foul; grace made something new, visibly (Ezekiel 36:26 delivered). Hold both truths, as the Church does: no one purifies himself by himself, and God does not merely excuse hearts; he re-creates them. The treadmill fear mistakes surgery for exercise.

DIG DEEPER

The liturgy prays in this beatitude's key again and again. Before the Gospel the priest prays quietly, "Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God"; at the *Lavabo* the priest asks to be washed of iniquity and cleansed of sin (Psalm 51; the older form of the rite used the psalter's clean-hands verses directly); and the whole Mass aims at the day when the veil lifts. One of the Church's earliest Eucharistic texts, the Didache (10.6), cries *Maranatha*, "Come, Lord": the assembly of the impure-being-purified, rehearsing for the vision.

Send: Down the Mountain

Send 1. Name one rival currently sharing the throne of your heart with God (an ambition, a habit, a grievance, a screen). What would eviction look like this week?

Send 2. "Even now purity of heart enables us to see according to God." Whom have you been seeing as parts, a project, or an obstacle rather than a person? What changes tomorrow?

Live It This Week

- Memorize Matthew 5:8; recite 5:3-8 each morning.
- Make a throne-room inventory in prayer this week: fifteen unhurried minutes asking, "Lord, what shares your chair?" Write down what surfaces.
- Go to confession this month; take the inventory with you. If it has been years, say exactly that to the priest; he has heard it before and will help.
- Read Matthew 5:9 before Session 7: the ascent continues and turns outward: peacemakers.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Beauty ever ancient, ever new, we have loved you late and loved you divided. Create in us clean hearts; polish the mirror until it holds your face. We ask for nothing less than the vision you promised. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MATTHEW 5:8

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 6, in order:

- Matthew 5:8
- Matthew 15:18-19
- Psalm 24:3-6 (discovery)
- Matthew 5:27-28
- Psalm 51:10
- Ezekiel 36:25-26
- Exodus 33:18-23
- John 1:18
- 1 Corinthians 13:12
- 1 John 3:2-3
- Matthew 5:48 (steelman)
- 1 Peter 2:22; John 8:29 (leader thread, unread)

Session 7: The Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers what biblical *shalom* is, why peacemakers are called sons of God (family resemblance), and how to hold this beatitude honestly next to the Jesus who said he came bringing a sword.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 2304-2305: peace is the tranquility of order, the work of justice and the effect of charity; earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ.

What You Need to Know

The seventh beatitude blesses makers, not just lovers, of peace. The Greek *eirenopoios* is an active, constructive word: peace in this beatitude is something built, at cost, by somebody. Behind the Greek stands the Hebrew *shalom*, which never meant mere absence of conflict: *shalom* is wholeness, right relationship in every direction (with God, neighbor, creation, self), things set in their proper order. A cemetery is quiet; it is not *shalom*. This is why St. Augustine's definition became the Church's: peace is the tranquility of order (City of God XIX.13; CCC 2304 adopts it). Where order is broken, quiet is not peace, and making peace can require disturbing a false quiet.

The reward is family identification: "they shall be called sons of God." In Hebrew idiom, a "son of" something shares its character (sons of thunder, son of encouragement); to be called a son of God is to be recognized as bearing the family resemblance. And peacemaking is the family business: the Father "was pleased... to reconcile to himself all things, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:19-20); the Son "is our peace" who "has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14). Note carefully what those verses reveal: God's peacemaking was not conflict avoidance; it cost blood. Whoever makes peace at personal cost is doing the most Godlike thing a creature can do, and heaven says so out loud: they shall be CALLED sons.

Tonight must also face the hard text honestly: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). No dodging. The resolution is in the definitions: Jesus renounces the false peace purchased by abandoning the truth (his very presence divides households, 10:35-36, because truth forces a decision), while giving the real peace the world cannot give (John 14:27). Peacemakers, likewise, are not appeasers: they refuse both the false peace of silence and the false war of hatred, and build the costly middle: truth spoken in love, wrongs addressed, persons reconciled.

Scope the applications concretely: the family estrangement nobody names at Thanksgiving; the parish feud; the workplace cold war; the parish's witness in a polarized country; and the Church's teaching on war and peace (CCC 2302-2317), which begins disarmament in the heart, at anger (5:21-22 will make the same move). Peacemaking starts at the smallest broken order within reach.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Isaiah 9:6-7 names the coming king "Prince of Peace" and promises that "of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end": *shalom* is the Messiah's regime, not a mood. The group discovers this text tonight and should feel its Advent familiarity turn strange and political: peace is what his government produces.

Isaiah 52:7 blesses the feet of the herald "who publishes peace," and Psalm 85:10 gives the program in one line: "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other." Biblical peace never floats free of righteousness; the two kiss or neither shows up.

Voices of the Church

ST. AUGUSTINE · CITY OF GOD XIX.13

"The peace of all things is the tranquility of order." St. Augustine's definition, forged while Rome's order was collapsing around him, is quoted by the Catechism itself (CCC 2304). Order here is not rigidity but rightness: each thing in its proper place and relation, God first. From this definition everything tonight follows: quiet without rightness is not peace, and restoring rightness sometimes breaks a quiet.

Application (ours, not the saint's): before asking "how do I stop this conflict?", the Augustinian question is "what order is broken here, and what would rightness look like?"

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA · HER LIFE AND LETTERS

St. Catherine of Siena, Doctor of the Church, spent the last years of her short life as a peacemaker in act: writing letter after letter to popes, princes, and feuding Italian cities, traveling to Avignon in 1376 to urge Pope Gregory XI to return to Rome, and laboring for peace between Florence and the papacy. She teaches, in substance, that peace among Christians is won by speaking the truth with boldness and with love together: never by flattery, and never by hatred.

A woman with no office and no army moved the politics of Europe by refusing both the false peace of silence and the false war of contempt. That is this beatitude with a pen in its hand.

ST. JOHN PAUL II · MESSAGE FOR THE WORLD DAY OF PEACE, 2002

St. John Paul II, addressing the world months after September 11, built his message on a double thesis that gives this beatitude its adult form: no peace without justice, no justice without forgiveness. He teaches in substance that justice pursued without forgiveness curdles into cycles of retribution, and that forgiveness, far from opposing or canceling justice, is what keeps the demand for justice human; real peace requires both, and forgiveness is not weakness but the choice of a strong soul refusing to let evil set the terms.

A pope who lived under both Nazism and Communism, and who forgave the man who shot him, had the standing to say it.

Catechism Connection · CCC 2302-2306; on Christ our peace, 2305; context on legitimate defense and war, 2307-2317

CCC 2302-2303 begins peacemaking where the Sermon does: in the heart, with anger and hatred. CCC 2304 defines the goal (peace is not merely the absence of war... it is the tranquility of order, the work of justice and the effect of charity) and 2305 names its source: earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ, who "is our peace," reconciling us by the blood of his cross. CCC 2307-2317 (leader background) sets the Church's sober framework on war: the strict conditions of legitimate defense, and the arms race and hatred as threats the Church condemns. Peacemaking scales from the examination of conscience to the family table to the nations.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

FACE OF CHRIST (final development, do not reveal): tonight's lines are almost too loud to hide: "he is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14), "making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:20). If someone in the group says it out loud ("these all describe Jesus"), smile and say: hold that thought exactly one more week.

ANAWIM ROOTS (develop): Isaiah 9, Isaiah 52, and Psalm 85 join the root system.

LADDER (descent begins): frame it tonight: Sessions 1-6 climbed to the vision; Sessions 7-8 are the summit

sending us back down, first as builders (peacemakers), then as witnesses (the persecuted). SEALED GUESS: slips in reserve for next week's final ritual.

Session Goals

1. Participants can define *shalom* and Augustine's tranquility of order, and distinguish peace from quiet.
2. Participants can explain "sons of God" as family resemblance, grounded in Ephesians 2:14 and Colossians 1:20.
3. Participants resolve Matthew 5:9 and Matthew 10:34 honestly, without softening either text.
4. Each participant identifies one concrete broken order within reach and a first peacemaking step.

Time Note

90 minutes: Win 10, Read 5, Build 45, Steelman 12, Send 8, Live It + Closing 10. If running short: compress Build 5's CCC survey to the leader summarizing 2304-2305; do not cut Build 4 (the sword text), the group needs to see it faced.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, your Son is our peace. We come from houses, parishes, and feeds full of broken order. Disarm our hearts first; then make us instruments, at whatever cost, of the peace you make by the blood of the cross. Amen.

Win: Opening the Circle

Win 1. Describe a place or moment where you have experienced real peace. What made it peace and not just quiet?

Win 2. Where do you tend to keep a false peace: staying silent to avoid conflict? And where do you tend to make war: winning arguments at the cost of persons?

Build: Into the Text

Build 1. Read Matthew 5:9. Jesus blesses peace-MAKERS: an active, constructive word. Behind it stands the Hebrew *shalom*. Build the definition: what is *shalom*, and what is it not?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Shalom is wholeness: right relationship with God, neighbor, creation, and self; things set in proper order. It is not mere absence of conflict (a cemetery is quiet), not appeasement, not conflict-avoidance. St. Augustine's definition, adopted by CCC 2304: peace is the tranquility of order. Where order is broken, quiet is a painted-over crack, and making peace may first require disturbing it.

Build 2. DISCOVERY. Read Isaiah 9:6-7. What is peace's relationship to government and to justice in this text? What does that do to a purely private, inner-calm definition of peace?

Leader cue: Live discovery: the Prince of Peace text they know from Advent, read with adult eyes.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The child is named Prince of Peace, and peace INCREASES with his government, established "with justice and with righteousness." Peace here is a regime, the fruit of right rule, not a private mood. Psalm 85:10 compresses it: righteousness and peace kiss. Biblical peace is inseparable from things being made right, which is why peacemaking is work.

Build 3. The reward: "they shall be called sons of God." In Hebrew idiom, what does "son of" mean (recall sons of thunder, son of encouragement)? Then read Ephesians 2:13-16 and Colossians 1:19-20: why does THIS activity earn THIS title?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

A "son of" something shares its character; the title recognizes family resemblance. And peacemaking is the family business: the Son "is our peace," who broke down the dividing wall and made peace "by the blood of his cross." Notice the cost in both texts: God's peacemaking ran through Calvary, not around conflict. Whoever builds peace at personal cost is doing the most recognizably Godlike thing a creature can do, and heaven says so: they shall be CALLED sons. (Romans 8:15-16: in Christ, by the Spirit, the title is not honorary; we cry Abba because we are children in the Son.)

Build 4. Now the hard text. Read Matthew 10:34-36 next to 5:9 and John 14:27. Both are Jesus. Resolve the tension without filing either verse down.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Jesus renounces one peace and gives another. The peace he did NOT come to bring: the false peace purchased by suppressing the truth; his presence forces a decision, and decisions divide households (10:35-36). The peace he gives: "not as the world gives" (John 14:27), the *shalom* of right relationship with God, which survives even persecution (next week's session). So the peacemaker's rule: never purchase quiet with truth, never purchase truth with hatred. Refuse the false peace of silence AND the false war of contempt; build the costly third thing.

Build 5. Where does the Church say peacemaking starts? Read Matthew 5:21-24 (just ahead in the sermon) and hear CCC 2302-2305 summarized. Then scale it up: what does the Church say about war (2307-2317, leader summary)?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

It starts in the heart, at anger: the sermon itself moves straight from the Beatitudes to "every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment," and commands leaving your gift at the altar to be reconciled first: reconciliation outranks worship in the queue. The Catechism follows the same path: disarm the heart (2302-2303), define peace as ordered rightness flowing from Christ (2304-2305), and only then treat war, where the Church permits legitimate defense under strict conditions while condemning hatred and the arms race (2307-2317). The scale runs unbroken from your examination of conscience to the family table to the nations.

Build 6. Get concrete. Around this circle: name (without gossip; no surnames, no identifying detail) one broken order within your actual reach: an estrangement, a feud, a cold war. What would a first peacemaking step, costing you something, look like there?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

No key; protect honesty and concreteness. Leader's toolkit for weak answers: the first step is usually one of four: go (initiate contact, Matthew 5:24), own (confess your share first, and only yours), hear (listen before litigating), or bless (pray for them by name daily, which disarms you). Warn against step one being a demand that the other person change. And name the limit honestly: some orders cannot be restored by you (the other party may refuse; some contact is unsafe, see Session 5's steelman); Romans 12:18 gives the scope: "If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all."

Steelman: religion is the problem, not the peace

At full strength, in the voice of its best advocates, because your coworkers hold some version of it: look at the record. Crusades, inquisitions, the Thirty Years' War, Catholics and Protestants burning each other, 9/11 itself: history's bloodiest fault lines run along religious borders. Religion divides humanity into saved and damned, sanctifies tribal hatred with eternal stakes, and makes compromise blasphemy; John Lennon's imagination (no religion, nothing to kill or die for) is just the observation that removing absolute claims removes absolute conflicts. If Christians are blessed peacemakers, why has Christendom fought so much? A serious answer must not begin by minimizing the record.

Press: no whataboutism as a first move, and no pretending the record away. Grant what must be granted; then find what the objection cannot explain.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

First, grant it without flinching: Christians have waged unjust wars, blessed hatreds, and betrayed this beatitude, sometimes with crosses on their banners; St. John Paul II publicly asked God's pardon for the sins of the Church's children for exactly these reasons, and honesty about it is Catholic, not disloyal. Then examine the thesis. Its causal claim fails the twentieth century: the century's largest slaughters (the Nazi and Communist regimes' wars, camps, and engineered famines) were driven by explicitly anti-religious or neo-pagan ideologies, so removing God demonstrably does not remove the killing; humans weaponize whatever absolute they hold, including race, class, and nation. Second, the objection quietly borrows its own standard from the Gospel: the conviction that peace is normative and holy wars are scandalous is itself the Sermon on the Mount's legacy; pre-Christian antiquity mostly celebrated conquest. Third, the record has a second column the objection omits: the ones who lived this beatitude. Every century of Christian violence also produced Christian peacemakers (a Francis walking unarmed to the sultan; the countless anonymous reconcilers of parishes and families), and the Church's own teaching (CCC 2302-2317) condemns the abuses committed under her name. The honest verdict: the beatitude has been betrayed by Christians and vindicated by saints, and the betrayals are measured, and condemned, by the beatitude itself.

DIG DEEPER

In the Communion Rite the Church prays: "Lord Jesus Christ, who said to your Apostles: Peace I leave you, my peace I give you...", and then, when the invitation is given, the faithful exchange a sign of peace before Communion. Its placement can remind us (the connection is ours to draw, not the Missal's stated rationale) of Matthew 5:23-24: seek reconciliation as you approach communion. Next time you exchange the sign of peace, mean it toward the person in your life it would cost the most to offer it to.

DIG DEEPER

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love." A word of honesty about a beloved text: this prayer first appears in France around 1912 and is not found in the writings of St. Francis of Assisi; the attribution grew up later, and the familiar English is one rendering of the anonymous French original. We tell you this because this catalog does not launder citations, and the truth takes nothing from the prayer: it is a profoundly Franciscan-hearted summary of tonight's beatitude, worth memorizing on its own merits. Instrument is the load-bearing word: the peacemaker is not the source of peace but a tool in better hands.

Send: Down the Mountain

Send 1. Which false peace in your life (a silence, an avoidance, a painted-over crack) is this beatitude calling you to disturb, gently, for the sake of real order?

Send 2. Who would be most surprised to receive a peacemaking step from you this week?

Live It This Week

- Memorize Matthew 5:9; recite 5:3-9 each morning.
- Take one concrete step toward one broken order this week: go, own, hear, or bless (see Build 6). If contact is unsafe or impossible, take the fourth: pray for them by name, daily.
- At Mass this Sunday, offer the sign of peace deliberately, holding in mind the person it would cost you most to offer it to.

· Read Matthew 5:10-16 before Session 8: the final session, and the reveal of the thread we have been tracking since night one.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you said to your Apostles, peace I leave you, my peace I give you. Look not on our sins but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity. Make us builders of the order your blood purchased. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MATTHEW 5:9

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 7, in order:

- Matthew 5:9
- Isaiah 9:6-7 (discovery)
- Psalm 85:10
- Isaiah 52:7 (leader background)
- Ephesians 2:13-16
- Colossians 1:19-20
- Romans 8:15-16
- Matthew 10:34-36
- John 14:27
- Matthew 5:21-24
- Romans 12:18
- Matthew 5:44-45 (leader background, returns in Session 8)

Session 8: Persecuted for Righteousness: Rejoice and Be Glad

Matthew 5:10-16

Part 1: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group closes the frame (the eighth beatitude returns to the first's promise), stands in the prophets' company, receives the study's great reveal (the Beatitudes are the portrait of Christ himself, CCC 1717), and is commissioned as salt and light.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 1717: the Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ. CCC 2473: martyrdom is the supreme witness to the truth of the faith.

What You Need to Know

The eighth beatitude closes the frame the group found in Session 1: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," the identical present-tense promise as 5:3, sealing the eight as one composition that begins and ends with the kingdom. Then verses 11-12 do two things at once: they turn to direct address ("Blessed are YOU when men revile you and persecute you") and they escalate to the imperative that titles this study: "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you." That last clause is an astonishing promotion: to be persecuted for Jesus' sake is to be filed in the prophets' personnel records. Note also the quiet Christological bombshell: 5:10 says "for righteousness' sake" and 5:11 says "on my account." Jesus quietly aligns the two, an implicit Christological claim of staggering size: righteousness, in this sermon, has his face.

Precision matters pastorally: the beatitude blesses those persecuted FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, not for obnoxiousness. Christians who are merely rude and then claim persecution empty the beatitude; Peter draws the line himself: suffer for righteousness' sake and answer with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3:14-17), but never suffer as a wrongdoer or a mischief-maker (1 Peter 4:15-16). The genuine article, meanwhile, is not a museum piece: by widely cited (though contested) estimates, and in St. John Paul II's own telling, the twentieth century was a century of martyrs on a scale hard to parallel, and quiet costs (mockery, career friction, family contempt) are the ordinary tax believers in this room have already paid. Both must be named: no persecution complex, no naivety.

TONIGHT IS THE REVEAL. The Face of Christ thread, logged silently since Session 1, comes into the open at Build 4, and the group should experience it as discovery, not lecture: they assemble the portrait themselves from texts they have already read, then the leader reads CCC 1717 aloud: the Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ. Before the Beatitudes are a program they are a portrait (CCC 1717 holds both: they depict Christ's countenance AND express our vocation), and the program is: become what you are looking at. This is the study's summit moment; give it room, and let silence do its work before anyone speaks.

Then the commissioning. The sermon itself refuses to end at blessing: "You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world." Indicatives, not imperatives: Jesus does not say become salt; he says you ARE, so do not go flat, and do not hide. The study ends by sending: the final ritual (see Thread Watch) has each participant name their beatitude of the month, and the group walks down the mountain.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

The prophets' file, which 5:12 opens: Jeremiah beaten and put in the stocks (Jeremiah 20:1-2) and lamenting the word that made him "a laughingstock all the day" (20:7-8); Zechariah the priest's son stoned in the temple court (2 Chronicles 24:20-21), traditionally identified with the Zechariah of Matthew 23:35 (Matthew's "son of Barachiah" patronymic is a well-known crux the Church has not settled), as Jesus indicts a prophet-killing

history: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets" (23:37). The pattern was set long before Calvary: the word of God draws fire.

Isaiah 61 completes the circle it opened in Session 2: the Anointed One brings good tidings to the afflicted, and (the typological application is ours) the reviled and slandered of the final beatitude stand among Isaiah's afflicted, heirs of the same consolation: garland for ashes, the oil of gladness, the year of the LORD's favor. The root system planted across eight sessions is one tree.

Voices of the Church

ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH · LETTER TO THE ROMANS 4 (ROBERTS-DONALDSON TRANSLATION)

"I am the wheat of God, and let me be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ." St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, wrote these words to the church in Rome, traditionally around the year 107, while being transported under guard to his execution, begging the Roman Christians not to intervene. A man within living memory of the apostles read his own martyrdom through the Eucharist: his death, a becoming-bread.

Application (ours, not the saint's): Ignatius took "rejoice and be glad" at face value, under the only circumstances that fully test it.

TERTULLIAN · APOLOGY, CHAPTER 50

"The blood of Christians is seed." Tertullian, the fiery North African writer of the early Church (an early Christian author the Church reads with profit, though he is not among the canonized saints), closed his defense of Christianity to Rome's magistrates with this taunt: kill us and we multiply. History gave his claim real weight: the martyrs' witness became one of the great engines (not the only one) of the Church's growth inside the empire that killed them.

The eighth beatitude's promise has receipts: the kingdom really did belong to the persecuted.

ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE · HIS LIFE; AUSCHWITZ, 1941

In the summer of 1941 at Auschwitz, after an escape, the camp selected ten men to die by starvation. When one of them, Franciszek Gajowniczek, cried out for his wife and children, a Polish Franciscan priest, St. Maximilian Kolbe, stepped forward and asked to take his place. He led the condemned in prayer and hymns from the starvation bunker for two weeks and was finally killed by lethal injection on August 14, 1941. Gajowniczek survived the war and was present in Rome when Kolbe was canonized.

The century so often called a century of martyrs was also among the brightest with this beatitude. Kolbe did not merely endure his persecutors; inside the machinery of hatred, he out-loved it.

Catechism Connection · CCC 1716-1717 (the reveal), 1967, 2473; on the Church and the cross, 769

CCC 1716 sets the Beatitudes at the heart of Jesus' preaching. CCC 1717, read aloud at the reveal: the Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity; they express the vocation of the faithful; they are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in tribulation. CCC 1967: the Law of the Gospel fulfills the promises, and the Beatitudes carry them to the kingdom of heaven. CCC 2473 defines martyrdom as the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: a witness borne even unto death. CCC 769 (leader background): the Church will enter the glory of the kingdom only through the final Passover, following her Lord; the Church advances through persecution and consolation together.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

FACE OF CHRIST: RESOLVES TONIGHT at Build 4. Bring your log from all seven sessions in case the group stalls: became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9; Matthew 8:20), wept (John 11:35), gentle and lowly (Matthew 11:29), hungered for the Father's will (John 4:34; with Matthew 4:2 and John 19:28 as its lived icon), sat at table with sinners and forgave executioners (Matthew 9:10-13; Luke 23:34), pure and guileless (1 Peter 2:22; John 8:29), is our peace by the blood of his cross (Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 1:20), persecuted from Matthew 2 to the cross. Let THEM assemble it; you hold the net.

LADDER: resolves. St. Gregory of Nyssa's eight homilies climb all the way through the eighth beatitude: his ascent does not stop at the vision but continues through peacemaking and persecution. Name the shape aloud tonight (the framing is this study's): the promise of seeing God crowns the climb, and the last steps send the climber into the world; the top of the Beatitudes turns out to be a sending.

SEALED GUESS (final voluntary use): in the closing ritual, offer participants their Session 1 slips back one last time. Invitation, never pressure: "Would anyone like to read their old definition of happiness and say what they would write tonight?" Then each participant states their beatitude of the month (see Send 2). Collect nothing; the slips go home with their authors.

Session Goals

1. Participants identify the closed frame (5:3 / 5:10) and the significance of "for righteousness' sake" = "on my account".
2. Participants can distinguish persecution for righteousness from persecution for obnoxiousness (1 Peter 3:14-16).
3. The Face of Christ reveal lands as the group's own discovery, sealed by CCC 1717.
4. Each participant leaves commissioned: salt and light named, a beatitude of the month chosen aloud.

Time Note

90 minutes, with hard timeboxes: the reveal (Build 4) must begin by minute 55 and the commissioning (Build 5) by minute 75; protect 12 minutes for the reveal itself. Win 8, Read 5, Builds 1-3 done by minute 50, reveal 12, Builds 5-6 15, Steelman 8, Send + closing ritual 12. Pre-chosen cuts, in order: the Dig Deeper, Build 2's second Jeremiah reading, then compress the steelman to its first and last movements. The reveal and the closing ritual are untouchable. If the room still runs long, salt and light can become a spoken Send coda; leaders wanting the full weight of both may split this into two meetings.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you finished the Beatitudes with a command to rejoice under fire, and then you obeyed it all the way to the cross. Tonight, finish what you began in us on the first night. Show us your face; then send us down the mountain. Amen.

Win: Opening the Circle

Win 1. Have you ever paid a real cost, however small, for doing the right thing or for being a Christian? What did it cost, and what did it feel like afterward?

Win 2. Why do you think goodness sometimes provokes hostility rather than admiration?

Build: Into the Text

Build 1. Read Matthew 5:10 and compare its promise, word for word, with 5:3. What did we predict about this in Session 1, and what does the completed frame mean?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Identical, present tense: "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The *inclusio* the group spotted on night one closes: the eight Beatitudes are one composition, bracketed by the kingdom, and it belongs NOW to the emptied (5:3) and the persecuted (5:10): the two conditions the world pities most. The kingdom is the first word, the last word, and the point.

Build 2. Read 5:11-12 slowly. Find every shift from verse 10: person, tense, and one quiet substitution between "for righteousness' sake" (v.10) and the phrase in v.11. What does the substitution claim?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Third person becomes second ("blessed are YOU"); description becomes command ("Rejoice and be glad"); and "for righteousness' sake" becomes "on my account." Jesus swaps himself in for righteousness without comment: to suffer for the right is to suffer for HIM; the wider New Testament will say why: righteousness is fulfilled personally in Christ. It is one of the sermon's most staggering implicit claims, and it sets up tonight's reveal.

Build 3. DISCOVERY. "For so men persecuted the prophets who were before you." Open the file: read Jeremiah 20:1-2 and 20:7-9, then 2 Chronicles 24:20-21, then Matthew 23:35, 37. What company does verse 12 enroll you in, and why does the word of God draw fire?

Leader cue: Live discovery: the prophets' personnel file. Let them feel the promotion in being added to it.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Jeremiah beaten and put in the stocks, made a daily laughingstock by the word he could not hold in; Zechariah stoned in the temple court; and Jesus himself naming the pattern over Jerusalem, the city "killing the prophets." The word of God draws fire because it tells the truth to power and to comfort, and both bite back. Verse 12's logic: persecution for Jesus' sake is not a malfunction of discipleship; it is the prophets' job description, and the pay grade ("your reward is great in heaven") matches.

Build 4. THE REVEAL. One final discovery, the one we have been building for seven weeks. Around the circle, one beatitude each: from the texts THIS STUDY has already read, show that Jesus himself lived that beatitude. Then the leader reads CCC 1717 aloud.

Leader cue: The Face of Christ resolves. Assign each participant a beatitude; let them mine their memories and Take-Homes; supply from the leader log only what they cannot find. Then read CCC 1717, then hold silence before Build 5.

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

The portrait, from texts already on the table: poor in spirit: though rich, he became poor (2 Corinthians 8:9), nowhere to lay his head (Matthew 8:20). Mourning: Jesus wept (John 11:35). Meek: gentle and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29), riding a donkey. Hungering for righteousness: his food was to do the Father's will (John 4:34); his bodily fasting and thirst (Matthew 4:2; John 19:28) are the lived icon of that deeper appetite. Merciful: at table with sinners (Matthew 9:10-13), forgiving from the cross (Luke 23:34). Pure in heart: no guile on his lips (1 Peter 2:22); "I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:29). Peacemaker: he IS our peace (Ephesians 2:14), making peace by the blood of his cross (Colossians 1:20). Persecuted: from Herod's cradle-hunt (Matthew 2:13-18) to Calvary. Then CCC 1717: "The Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ." Before they are a program, the Beatitudes are a portrait; and they remain our vocation (CCC 1717 holds both), so the Christian life is becoming what you are looking at (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Build 5. Read Matthew 5:13-16. Notice the grammar: are "salt" and "light" commands or statements? What are the two failure modes, and what is the strange final destination of our good works?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Statements: "You ARE the salt of the earth... you ARE the light of the world." Not become: are. The failure modes are flatness (salt losing its taste: a Christianity indistinguishable from the world preserves nothing) and hiding (the lamp under the bushel: discipleship kept private on purpose). And the destination of visible good works is not our reputation: "that they may see your good works and give glory to your FATHER who is in heaven." Salt is tasted, not seen; light is seen, not credited. The commissioned life points past itself.

Build 6. The last word of the Beatitudes proper is a summons to joy: "Rejoice and be glad" (5:12), spoken to the reviled, persecuted, and falsely accused on Christ's account. After eight sessions: is that summons sane? Answer from the whole ladder. (And say clearly: this is hope's joy; it can coexist with grief, fear, and lament, and the beatitude never accuses the suffering of disobedience for weeping.)

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Only if the ladder is true. If happiness is pleasure plus fortune (Session 1's steelman), the command is insanity. But if the kingdom is real and present (S1-2), if comfort is coming (S3), if righteousness satisfies (S4), if mercy returns mercy (S5), if the pure will SEE GOD (S6), if peacemakers are sons (S7), then persecution can confiscate nothing that beatitude is made of, and joy under fire is simply accurate accounting: "your reward is great in heaven." The martyrs sang because the math worked. That is the study's final claim, and every participant now has to decide whether to live as if it is true.

Steelman: persecution proves abandonment

At full strength, because someone in the room has felt it: if God loves his faithful, their suffering for his sake is inexplicable. A good father does not watch his children beaten for bearing his name and call it blessing from a safe distance; promising pie in the sky ("great is your reward in heaven") is exactly what a religion would invent to keep the abused loyal. The martyrs' courage is real, but courage proves conviction, not truth; people have died

bravely for contradictory faiths. If anything, twenty centuries of persecuted Christians is evidence that no one is minding the store. This objection deserves a grave answer, not a chipper one.

Press: the answer must come from inside tonight's texts and the study's reveal. Where is God while his faithful suffer? Do not accept "it builds character."

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Begin where the reveal ended: the Christian claim is not that God watches persecution from a safe distance; it is that God did not remain distant: the eternal Son became man and moved into the target zone, the Father giving the Son and united with him in the whole saving mission. The face the Beatitudes depict is a persecuted face; the eighth beatitude was Christ's before it was anyone's, and his Passion is not one brave death among the prophets' but the redemptive center they all leaned toward. That changes the geometry of the objection: a God who sent comfort from afar might be accused of distance; the God who entered the suffering himself cannot. Second, the reward language is not an IOU for the abused; it is the claim, tested across seven sessions, that the goods of beatitude are real and guaranteed in Christ: the kingdom already present in mystery, the vision of God pledged for glory, and neither confiscatable by any persecutor, which is why Ignatius wrote like a man en route to a wedding and Kolbe out-loved Auschwitz from inside it. Courage alone proves conviction, granted; but the specific SHAPE of Christian martyrdom (forgiving the executioners, Luke 23:34 and Acts 7:60, joy rather than defiance) is itself part of the evidence, a family resemblance to a crucified Lord who commanded exactly this. (Others too have died bravely, some even forgivingly; the Church simply sets that shape at the center, because her Lord did.) And the objection's honest core deserves honoring: Scripture itself files protests (the martyrs in heaven themselves cry out "how long" before God judges, Revelation 6:10), so the faith has room for the groan. What it does not have room for is the premise that suffering for Christ means abandonment by him: the entire Gospel is the refutation, and Session 8's portrait is its face.

DIG DEEPER

The Roman liturgy hears the Beatitudes as the saints' group portrait: they are the Gospel for the Solemnity of All Saints (November 1), the day the Church celebrates the uncounted multitude who lived them. Read Revelation 7:9-17 alongside Matthew 5:3-12 sometime this week and watch the promises pay out: the hungering satisfied, the mourners' tears wiped away, the persecuted before the throne. The Beatitudes are the itinerary; All Saints is the arrivals board.

Send: Down the Mountain

Send 1. Where in your actual life (workplace, family, feed) is faithfulness currently taxed, and what would it look like to pay the tax with 1 Peter 3:15-16's gentleness and reverence rather than with either silence or spite?

Send 2. CLOSING RITUAL: your beatitude of the month. Each person states aloud: which one beatitude will you deliberately practice for the next thirty days, and what is your first concrete act? (Leaders: write these down and check in with each person in a month; the study ends but the ladder does not.)

Live It This Week

- Complete the set: memorize Matthew 5:10-12 and recite all of 5:3-12 each morning this month, until the portrait is memorized into you.
- Practice your beatitude of the month, beginning with the first concrete act you named tonight.
- Read Revelation 7:9-17 beside Matthew 5:3-12 once this week (see Dig Deeper).
- Consider where this group goes next; the leader has the Catholic Armory catalog. The mountain has more trails.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we climbed the mountain and you showed us your face. You are the poverty that owns the kingdom, the mourning that will be comforted, the meekness inheriting the earth; you are our righteousness, our mercy, the pure vision of the Father, our peace; and you were persecuted so that our persecutions would find us in your company. Seal your portrait in us. Make us salt that keeps its taste and light that is not hidden, until we see you face to face and our joy is complete. And now send us down the mountain: rejoicing, and glad. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

MATTHEW 5:16

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 8, in order:

- Matthew 5:10-12
- Matthew 5:3 (frame comparison)
- Matthew 5:13-16
- Jeremiah 20:1-2, 7-9 (discovery)
- 2 Chronicles 24:20-21 (discovery)
- Matthew 23:35, 37 (discovery)
- 1 Peter 3:14-16
- 2 Corinthians 8:9; Matthew 8:20 (reveal)
- John 11:35 (reveal)
- Matthew 11:29 (reveal)
- John 4:34; Matthew 4:2; John 19:28 (reveal)
- 1 Peter 2:22; John 8:29 (reveal)
- Matthew 2:13-18 (reveal)
- Matthew 9:10-13; Luke 23:34 (reveal)
- Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 1:20 (reveal)
- 2 Corinthians 3:18
- Acts 7:60 (steelman)
- Revelation 6:10 (steelman)
- Revelation 7:9-17 (Dig Deeper)