

Session 1: The Mountain of Happiness

What We Found

Jesus went up the mountain as the new Moses and gave the law of the new covenant: eight statements about who is truly happy. "Blessed" (*makarios*) declares someone genuinely well off in God's judgment, and Jesus' list contradicts the world's list on nearly every line. The first and eighth beatitudes share one present-tense promise, "theirs is the kingdom of heaven," framing all eight as a single composition; at verse 11 the sermon turns and addresses you. We tested the strongest rival theory (happiness is pleasure plus good fortune) and found it cannot explain the unhappiness of the people who have everything.

MY GUESS (SEAL IT AND HAND IT IN)

Before the closing prayer tonight, finish this sentence in your own words, seal it in the envelope, sign the flap, and hand it in. It will come back to you, unopened, in Session 5.

"I think what it takes to be truly happy is..."

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.

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.

Memory Verse · Matthew 5:12a

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

Catechism References

CCC 1716-1719, 1721

Before Next Session

Read Matthew 5:1-12 once, slowly, and notice which beatitude comes first.

Session 2: Poor in Spirit

What We Found

The first beatitude is the foundation the rest are built on. Behind "poor in spirit" stands the Old Testament's *anawim*: the humble and lowly who, having nothing else, lean entirely on God (Zephaniah 2:3; Psalm 34:18). Jesus announced his whole mission from Isaiah 61 in the Nazareth synagogue: good news to the poor, fulfilled "today." Matthew's "poor in spirit" and Luke's "you poor" guard each other: dependence, not destitution, is the blessing, and the kingdom already belongs to the emptied, its fullness still to come. We also tested the prosperity reading at full strength and found it breaks on Calvary.

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.

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.

Memory Verse · Matthew 5:3

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

Catechism References

CCC 544, 2544-2547

Before Next Session

Read Matthew 5:4-5 and notice which two beatitudes Session 3 will hold together.

Session 3: Those Who Mourn and the Meek

What We Found

Mourning and meekness travel as a pair, both rooted in the *anawim* texts. Blessed mourning has three circles (the dead, our sin, the world's evil), and Jesus wept at a tomb he was about to empty: hope accompanies grief rather than canceling it. We discovered that Matthew 5:5 quotes Psalm 37:11 nearly verbatim, and we let Moses (Numbers 12:3) and Jesus (Matthew 11:29) define meekness: strength under governance, power that declines to avenge itself, never submission to abuse. The promised Comforter shares his name with the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.

Voices of the Church

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA · HOMILIES ON THE BEATITUDES

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.

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.

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."

Catechism References

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

Before Next Session

Read Matthew 5:6 before Session 4, and come hungry.

Session 4: Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness

What We Found

The fourth beatitude blesses an appetite: the hunger for righteousness, which in Matthew's Gospel means righteousness that exceeds (5:20), is lived (6:1), and is sought first (6:33). The Old Testament prayed this hunger as thirst (Psalm 42), heard God's invitation to the thirsty (Isaiah 55), and named the deadliest famine: no appetite for God's word at all (Amos 8:11). St. Augustine's restless heart and St. Gregory's paradox (this food enlarges the hunger it satisfies) frame the promise, and the satisfaction has an address: the Bread of Life (John 6:35; CCC 1391). Grace does not merely credit righteousness; it confers it (CCC 2017).

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.

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.

Memory Verse · Matthew 5:6

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

Catechism References

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

Before Next Session

Read Matthew 5:7 before Session 5. The sealed envelopes from Session 1 open next week.

Session 5: The Merciful

What We Found

The fifth beatitude is the ladder's hinge, turning from postures toward God to the neighbor, and it is the only beatitude where gift and reward are the same substance: the merciful obtain mercy (sharpened in Matthew 6:14-15 and the unforgiving servant of Matthew 18). We discovered that Hosea 6:6 ("I desire mercy, and not sacrifice") is a verse Jesus quotes twice in Matthew, both times defending mercy against rulekeeping, and we heard God name himself merciful at Sinai (Exodus 34:6). Matthew 25 gives mercy its final-exam list and its secret: the least of these carry Christ's face. Our sealed guesses from Session 1 met the ladder tonight; forgiveness releases the debt, and it never means staying in danger.

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.

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.

Memory Verse · Matthew 5:7

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

Catechism References

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

If you handed your slip back in, the leader keeps it for one last look in Session 8.

Before Next Session

Read Matthew 5:8 before Session 6: the promise the whole ascent aims at.

Session 6: The Pure in Heart

What We Found

The sixth beatitude carries the promise the whole ascent aims at. The heart in Scripture is the control room of the person, so purity of heart is undividedness: one throne, one occupant, in the three arenas of CCC 2518 (charity, chastity, love of the truth). We climbed Psalm 24's hill of the LORD ("clean hands and a pure heart") and felt the shock of the promise: the vision Moses was refused (Exodus 33:20) is pledged to the pure, with a real foretaste now and the beatific vision itself face to face in glory (1 Corinthians 13:12; 1 John 3:2-3). Purity is not achieved but created ("create in me a clean heart," Psalm 51:10): God does not merely excuse hearts; he re-creates them, and the saints are the proof.

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.

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.

Memory Verse · Matthew 5:8

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

Catechism References

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

Before Next Session

Read Matthew 5:9 before Session 7: the ascent continues and turns outward: peacemakers.

Session 7: The Peacemakers

What We Found

Peacemakers, not peace-lovers: *shalom* is wholeness and right order, not quiet (a cemetery is quiet), and St. Augustine's definition anchors the Church's: peace is the tranquility of order (CCC 2304). Peacemakers are called sons of God because peacemaking is the family business: the Son is our peace, making peace by the blood of his cross (Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 1:20), so it costs. We faced Matthew 10:34 squarely: Jesus renounces the false peace of suppressed truth while giving the peace the world cannot (John 14:27); the peacemaker refuses both silence and contempt. And the work starts small: reconciliation outranks worship in the queue (Matthew 5:23-24), within the scope of Romans 12:18.

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.

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.

Memory Verse · Matthew 5:9

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

Catechism References

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

Before Next Session

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

Session 8: Persecuted for Righteousness: Rejoice and Be Glad

What We Found

The frame closed: 5:10 repeats 5:3's present-tense promise, sealing the eight Beatitudes as one kingdom-bracketed composition, and 5:11-12 turns to you: reviled "on my account" (Jesus quietly aligning himself with righteousness), enrolled in the prophets' file, commanded to rejoice. Then the reveal we built for seven weeks, sealed by CCC 1717: the Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ. He lived every line: became poor, wept, gentle and lowly, hungered for the Father's will, forgave his executioners, kept guile from his lips, made peace by his blood, was persecuted from cradle to cross. The Beatitudes are a portrait before they are a program, and the program is becoming what you are looking at (2 Corinthians 3:18). Commissioned as salt and light (statements, not commands), we opened our Session 1 slips one last time beside the finished portrait, and each of us named a beatitude of the month. Rejoice and be glad.

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.

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.

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."

Catechism References

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

Before Next Session

The study is complete. Recite Matthew 5:3-12 each morning this month, and practice your beatitude of the month; your leader will check in. The Catholic Armory catalog has more trails up the mountain.