

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 grievous. 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)