

## 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)