

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)