

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



"Innocent Heart" by Belinda Nadwie

Prayer of Illumination

Lord God,
What are we without you? As we approach your Word,
Give us purity of heart—the sincerity and clarity
to receive and enact your understanding and illumination.
Give our intellect the wisdom to comprehend what is
the one thing—to be holy as God is holy. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 5:8 (NRSVue) The Sixth Beatitude

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – Blessed Are the Pure in Heart

What do you really want?

Philosophers and anthropologists and pop singers debate what sets human beings apart from the animal kingdom: rationality, language, awareness of mortality, self-consciousness, the ability to blush. But might some other traits of us homo sapiens be: Indecisiveness? Conflicting desires? Uncertainty? The struggle to find meaning?

Russian film director Andrei Tarkovski tackles this theme in his movie *Stalker*, considered by many to be a cinematic masterpiece. Set in what seems to be a post-apocalyptic future, the story focuses on the title character Stalker who is a guide to two characters known only as The Writer (who seeks a story) and The Scientist (who seeks a discovery). They make a dangerous journey into a mysterious region called The Zone. This journey into the center of The Zone is filmed as a long odyssey, almost a spiritual pilgrimage.

It's rumored that there's a room found in The Zone that will grant your deepest, innermost desires. Your heart's desire will come true in the Zone. In this Room, you'll get exactly what you want. The three finally make it to the threshold of the Room. But before venturing in, The Writer asks his guide:

"What if I don't know what I want?"

The Room will decide for you. The Room reveals what you truly want in life—even if you yourself are unconscious of it. The Room reveals all. Not what you think you want, but what you actually want.

Like The Scientist and The Writer, each of us has to ask ourselves some pretty tough questions before we cross the threshold of The Room:

- What do I really want in life?
- What's most important to me?
- What do I do if I don't know what I want to do?

Carl Jung once said, "*Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.*"

This morning's beatitude "*Blessed are the pure in heart*" helps us to make the unconscious conscious. Jesus challenges us to some self-examination here. You see, our actions bubble up from what we desire in our heart of hearts. What we value. Sometimes we're aware of these desires and other times we're totally oblivious to them or in denial of them.

Soren Kierkegaard explored this in his book *Purity of Heart*. He makes the case that we human beings naturally have distracted minds and divided hearts. Christ, in his mercy, summons us to a life of self-examination. He argues that the opposite of purity of heart is double mindedness, a wavering heart tossed to and fro by the winds of opinions, and dulled by people pleasing and appeasing. Double mindedness is a life lulled to sleep by pleasure, and a soul numbed not to feel suffering or remorse. Double-mindedness glosses over the tough questions. It's a distracted

mind that goes in a million directions at one time—everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Basically, it's living an unchallenged life. An unlived life.

Then Kierkegaard, the Philosopher Prophet of Copenhagen says:

"Purify your hearts of double-mindedness; let your heart in truth will only one thing, for therein is the heart's purity, to will the Good."

Kierkegaard tells us what it means to will the one thing:

- To respond to Christ's summons to take up your cross.
- To respond to Christ's offer of abundant life.
- To live wholeheartedly—not out of duplicity or hypocrisy.

To will one thing is to hold fast to God. To love with all your love. To have the sum of your life be proof of your convictions. To will to be holy, as God is holy. To will God's will.

And this is what Jesus calls us to. What does the Lord's Prayer say? Thy what... be done?

"Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

And then we pray: *"Lead us not into what?... temptation."* An impure life succumbs to a selfie life. But a pure life is a godly life—undivided allegiance to God.

What are you willing to die for? What are you willing to live for? That's your one thing. Blessed are you if it's God.

In Costa Rica they call it *pura vida* "the pure life." The free life. Your motives are unmixed. There's no guile in you. There's a consistency—we're unwavering disciples, not fair-weather friends of Jesus. We pay attention to our motives and desires—why do we do what we do? The pure in heart are set free by the Spirit, but they're also Spirit-led and Spirit-controlled. We're bound and we're free. The Spirit is invited to sift and refine our motives.

The pure in heart have a clear conscience—nothing to hide. We're honest in our personal and business dealings. We have healthy and appropriate boundaries. In other words, we have sexual character—we don't exploit others for our own purposes or pleasure.

So purity of heart means you guard your heart, for it's the wellspring of life as Proverbs tell us. We protect our hearts from the contaminations of hatred, lust, judgmentalism, resentment, and fear. We have a dependent, wonder-filled childlike trust. We're wise as serpents and innocent as doves. To be pure in heart isn't to be naive. Rather, you're single-minded. Genuine. Authentic. There's a simplicity and a real depth to the pure in heart. A spiritual minimalism. We're grounded and rooted. Rather than being fragmented, we are in union with Christ. We know without Christ our righteousness is just like filthy rags. The heart is very important in the Scriptures. It has a different meaning than what we think of the heart today. For us, the heart is our emotions and passions. In the Bible, the heart is the center of your being— not only your emotions, but your will, your thoughts, your understanding. The core of your being.

"Where your treasure is," says Jesus, "there your heart will be also."

Purity of heart is treasuring the right things, the lasting things, the eternal things, the invisible things—that only the mind’s eye can see. *The Little Prince* is the fourth most-translated book in the world and has sold nearly 200 million copies. There’s a famous scene where a fox meets the young prince during his travels on Earth. At this point, the Little Prince is lost in the desert—exhausted, defeated, and feeling insignificant. He scales a large mountain and sees the vast landscape before him. He cries out and hears only the echo of his voice. The Little Prince finally lays down and weeps—bitterly crying tears of hopelessness and loneliness. But then a fox comes along and the two strike up a friendship. The fox’s presence and wise words are a great source of comfort for the Little Prince. But eventually the two part ways. Before saying good-bye, the fox offered the gift of a secret to the boy. The essence of the story can be found in the words uttered by the fox:

“One sees clearly only with the heart. What is essential is invisible to the eyes.”

That’s exactly what the Scriptures teach us—see with the heart.

Faith is the assurance of things unseen. And so faith helps us see what is invisible to the eyes. The pure in heart desire to see the invisible, wise God. But they know their true heart condition, too. King David says in Psalm 51, *“Create in me a clean – what O God? – heart.”*

“Create in me a clean heart O God.”

Blow the dust off my heart, O Spirit of God. Burn the dross, O Consuming Fire. Boil away the germs, O Holy God. Baptize me in the Jordan River, O Living Water. In other words, the pure in heart know they’re not pure in heart. They know purity is a gift. Purity isn’t perfection. It isn’t being puritanical, or prudish. It’s humbly looking to God for purification. “Purification” not perfection.

And also, the pure in heart know grace gives us grit to struggle, to live *into* who we are in Christ. And so we live *into* the beatitudes: being poor in spirit, mourning, being meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, being merciful, peacemakers, suffering for our faith. That’s purity of heart. Purity of heart helps us see God’s character more clearly. Jesus says, *“whoever has seen me, has seen the Father.”* But here’s a really interesting thing: Purity of heart helps us see God in others more clearly.

“Seek God in the miserable, erring, and laboring ones,” wrote Martin Luther, for *“that is where one sees God, there the heart becomes pure, and all arrogance lies down.”*

Purity of heart deepens our relationships with God, with others, with ourselves. The pure of heart are blessed because they receive the gift of God’s very presence.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:12—

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”

On earth, dark glass. In heaven, face to face. On earth, we know in part. In heaven, we will know in full.

I'd like to close with a line from Anglican priest and poet John Donne's sermon on the pure in heart.

"This world and the next world are 'the Same House' to the pure in heart: "so the joy...which the pure in heart have here, is not a joy severed from the joy of heaven, but a joy that begins in us here, and continues, and accompanies us thither, there flows on."

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

Amen.

Sermon Art: "Innocent Heart," [Belinda Nadwie](#), an Australian Artist (2019)

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