



Beatitudes

MEETING AIM

To explore the topsy-turvy teaching of Jesus in the Beatitudes.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 5:1-12

BACKGROUND

This session plan is designed to be used either in person or online. Adapt it to fit your own situation.

Many of us may be able to recite the words of this passage, we may have heard or read it so many times before, but the truth is that this teaching would have shocked the crowds listening to Jesus that day, and his message has lost none of its power or controversy today. We live in a world where success wins, popularity wins, wealth wins, happiness wins. Jesus turned that teaching upside down, telling the crowds that we're blessed when we face every kind of hardship because it is in that place that we know God with us. This session explores Jesus' topsy-turvy teaching of life in his upside-down kingdom and how God promises to bless us in the hardest of times.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if possible) and ask the children to share about the week they have had; what happy, good things have happened? Any times that were sad that they want to talk about? What helped them then? Is there anything we can do to help? Can we pray about those things?

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: some props for simple races such as cones to run around, eggs and spoons, sacks to jump in etc

Run a series of races. Each time, congratulate the winner but make a point of consoling the person who comes in last place, perhaps awarding them a small prize each time. Continue with further races, continuing to console or reward the final-placed runner each time, allowing the children to notice that this is 'wrong' or unexpected, rather upside down!

If you're online, play some challenges that can be done onscreen, such as

throwing a ball the furthest or remembering all the words to a song.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: some heart shapes cut from paper or card, enough for one for each child

Gather the children together, perhaps sitting together in a circle. Tell this story: When Jesus was on earth, as he was going about doing his work, healing people and making them well, a crowd of people gathered together, wanting to hear what he had to say to them. He sat down in front of them and began to teach.

Jesus said things like:

- "You're blessed when you feel empty because God's kingdom is for you."
- "You're blessed when you're sad because God will comfort you."
- "You're blessed when you're not greedy because God gives you everything."
- "You're blessed when you work for what is right because God is with you."
- "You're blessed when you care because God cares for you."
- "You're blessed when you get your heart right because then you see what God is doing."
- "You're blessed when you work with others because you are in God's family."
- "You're blessed when you go through hard things for me because God's kingdom is for you."
- "Heaven cheers when you do what is right, even when it's hard. That is what my kingdom is about."

These weren't the sorts of things teachers usually said. Jesus surprised the crowd with his teaching. Jesus' kingdom turns the world upside down.

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Help your children to think about the story more by chatting about these questions:

- What's your favourite part of this story?
- Which of Jesus' messages did you like and why?
- Which of Jesus' messages are hard to understand and why?
- How do you feel about what Jesus had to say?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: paper or card hearts and a selection of art and craft materials

Distribute paper or card hearts and ask the children to think about some of the ways God promises to bless us. Invite the children to decorate their hearts with pens, paints or collage materials. They may want to represent one of the promises of God on their heart as most stands out to them, or perhaps to think about some of the different sentences you shared from the story. Children may want to draw a simple image which represents the promise or reflect more on how they feel about this.

As you work together, continue to talk about these promises of God and more about how we might experience these things in our own lives. When they are complete, display the hearts together for a moment and reflect on all these promises of blessing from God.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: BSL sign for bless (visit www.signbsl.com)

Teach the children the BSL sign for bless. Remind the children that Jesus taught the crowds that God blesses us even in the hardest of times because he is with us and he promises us his kingdom.

Pray for the children, thanking God for his blessing over our lives. You may want to invite the children to pray for particular situations they are facing or things they have discovered during this session, or perhaps lead the children in a prayer, thanking God for the promise of his blessing in each of these areas.

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Prayer

MEETING AIM

To explore Jesus' teaching on prayer.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:5-15

BACKGROUND

This session plan is designed to be used either in person or online. Adapt it to fit your own situation.

In Luke's Gospel, we find Jesus' teaching on prayer when his disciples ask him how they should pray; Here in Matthew's Gospel we find it in the preaching to the crowds on the mountainside. In either case, Jesus talks about the intimacy of prayer, the personal nature of communication with Almighty God before providing a template for prayer we continue to learn and recite today. This session explores the themes in that prayer, not necessarily needing the children to recite it but rather to begin to understand the different elements of prayer, as Jesus taught each of us to do.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if possible) and chat about who we enjoy talking to – do we like talking to grandparents on the phone or by video call, perhaps? What do we like talking to our parents about? Who do we enjoy listening to? Perhaps someone who tells good stories?

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: old telephone or mobile phone handsets; old laptops or keyboards; paper; pens

Set out all your play equipment and encourage the children to play as they wish. Encourage them to take the lead. They could 'make calls' to each other or to someone outside the group, send an email on the laptop, or write a note or card. If you're online, encourage the children to pretend to call people, or to make phones out of whatever they have to hand.

As you play, talk about what it means to talk to people we love.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: a basket; the word 'God' cut from shiny paper; a small crown; a globe; a bread roll; a cross

Put the props in the basket. Gather the children together in a circle with a space in the centre for you to spread out the props, when you share the words of the Lord's Prayer, as you tell the story. If you're online, show the props as you talk about them.

Jesus was teaching a crowd of people all about God and his kingdom. He started to teach them about prayer. He said: "When you pray, you don't need to do it in front of the crowd to get lots of attention. You don't need big, fancy words either. Praying is your time to talk to Father God and to hear what he wants to say to you. Pray about all kinds of things. Praise God for who he is. Thank him for what he has done for you. Ask him for help. Say sorry when you do things wrong. Ask him to guide you.

"When you pray, say something like this:

"Father God, your name is holy.

May your kingdom come,

and your will be done on earth as in

heaven.

Give us what we need this day.

Forgive us when we do wrong and help us to forgive others.

Help us not to fall into the trap of doing what is wrong, but to follow your ways always.

Amen."

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Help your children to think about the story more by chatting about these questions:

- How do you feel about this story?
- What does this story tell us about prayer?
- What does this story tell us about God?
- What would you like to pray about?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: paper; pencils; pens; envelopes

Give each child some paper and an envelope and access to a selection of pencils and pens. Invite them to find a space where they can be alone and quiet and to draw on their paper something that they want to say to God at this time, their prayer. Explain that if they prefer, they can

say the words quietly or in their heads and use the paper to doodle on while they talk to God. Encourage them to take some time to be quiet and to listen to what God may be saying too.

If they do not want to pray at this time, they may want to use their paper and pens to express further how they feel about the story shared, or to record some of the things they remember from the story.

When they are ready, invite the children to put their paper into an envelope and seal it, reminding them that prayer can sometimes be said all together, but sometimes it can be just between us and God.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: the Lord's Prayer action video - (visit <https://bit.ly/3cXCNLc>)

Gather the children together and remind them that in this session you have explored how Jesus taught about prayer, and taken some time to pray by ourselves; now you are going to pray together.

If the children in your group are already familiar with the Lord's Prayer, you can pray it together now. Alternatively, you may wish to pray the words over them while they listen, and pray "Amen". You could teach the children the actions in the video to help them to engage with the words of the prayer.

Alternatively, you could use the prayer as a model for your own time of prayer, praising God for who he is and what he has done, saying sorry for the wrong we have done, asking God to meet our needs and help us to follow him.

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Worry

MEETING AIM

To explore how Jesus teaches us not to worry.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:25-34

BACKGROUND

This session plan is designed to be used either in person or online. Adapt it to fit your own situation.

We have probably heard this teaching so many times we can recite it in our sleep! But it doesn't stop us worrying, does it? It's often said that "Do not worry" appears 365 times in the Bible, one for every day of the year. That isn't strictly true, but the numbers aren't wildly out. Many people have spoken of the joy they have found through recent lockdowns, simply by walking in the fresh air in the countryside. Jesus pointed his audience to clues in that environment: birds flying and flowers blooming free from worry or anxiety. It is his promise and instruction that we too should notice their life free from worry, and put our trust in him.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if possible) and chat about how the children are feeling. Gently, and if appropriate, ask the children what things they might worry about. This could be things on their mind or phobias that we may have.

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: small plastic eggs; shredded paper for nests; toy birds or plant pots and artificial flowers

Set out all your free play equipment perhaps as a garden centre or eggs in nests ready to hatch, and encourage the children to play with it. Encourage them to take the lead, involving you as they wish and let the play develop freely.

If you're online, show some plants onscreen and chat about gardens and gardening. Encourage children to mime digging and planting, smelling flowers and spotting birds.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: BSL signs for worry, bird and flower (visit www.signbsl.com)

Teach the children the signs for 'worry', 'bird' and 'flower' as per the videos and explain that these words will come up in the story where children should be encouraged to join in with them. Tell the story:

A lot of people wanted to hear Jesus teach, so he had gone up onto a mountainside where they could all see and hear what he had to say. He was teaching them about God and his kingdom.

Jesus said: "Do not worry! Don't worry about your life, about what you will eat or drink or wear, there is more to life than this! Worrying doesn't make things better.

"Look at the birds; they fly around in the skies above, they never worry about where their food will come from. The birds live as if they have not a care in the world, and they don't go hungry. God feeds the birds of the air and you are more precious than the birds.

"Take a look at the flowers and how they grow, with their beautiful petals on show for everyone to see. They don't worry about how they look, and they are more beautiful than the finest clothes. God clothes the flowers in beautiful colours and you are more precious than the flowers.

"I tell you, do not worry about tomorrow. Live one day at a time. Do not worry."

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Help your children to think about the story more by chatting about these questions:

- What's your favourite part of this story?
- What does this story tell us about Jesus?
- How do you feel about what he said about worrying?
- What would you like to say to God?

CREATIVE TIME

10 MINS

You will need: access to the outdoors or some praise music; ribbons and scarves

If you have access to a suitable outdoor area, take the children outside. You could go looking for wild flowers or go bird-spotting. You could take some paper

and paints outside for the children to paint the things they see in the natural world, or a camera for the children to take photos of the things they notice, to put together in a presentation to share later. If space allows, encourage the children to run freely through the space, enjoying carefree time in nature, perhaps even going barefoot, or encouraging them to run their hands through long grass.

Alternatively, if you are indoors or online, play some worship music, provide colourful scarves and ribbons, and invite the children to dance and jump around and express themselves in total freedom, free from all worries and concerns.

PRAYER

5 MINS

You will need: flower shapes cut from sheets of paper (a simple circle centre with curved petals around the edge); pens or pencils; a pool or bowl of water

Gather the children together and remind them that Jesus said we should not worry. Instead we can give him all our worries and concerns. Give each child a paper flower and invite them to draw something they might be worried about, or hold their flower as they think about what may be worrying them, if they prefer. Show the children how to fold the petals over the centre of the flower one at a time, going around the flower so that they are all folded over each other.

When the children are ready, invite them to drop their flower into the water and watch as the petals open up to reveal the flower. As they open up, you may want to say a prayer over the children, or simply let their prayers rise to God.

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Ask, seek, knock

MEETING AIM

To explore Jesus' teaching about God's gifts.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 7:7-12

BACKGROUND

This session plan is designed to be used either in person or online. Adapt it to fit your own situation.

Who doesn't like a present? In this passage, Jesus teaches that the presents God gives are always good. Sometimes the teaching in this passage is taken out of context and we begin to understand God as some kind of giant slot machine where we give him our wishes, and he dishes up the goods. God promises good gifts, not always the things we may ask for but things which are good. Jesus continues, challenging the crowd that we should also give well to other people, treating them as we would want to be treated. God's kingdom is not for grabbing, it's for giving. In this session, we explore the familiar theme of gifts, how God is the best present-giver and how we can replicate his generosity.

STARTING OUT

5 MINS

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if possible) and chat about the children's experience of presents; what is the best present you ever received? What is the best present you ever gave someone else? What would you like to have as a present for an upcoming birthday, perhaps?

PLAY

10 MINS

You will need: boxes wrapped in gift wrap; gift bags; letter box or playhouse etc.

Set out all your free play equipment and invite the children to play with it. Encourage them to take the lead, involving you as they wish. Depending on the equipment you have available, you may want to set up a post-office scenario or playhouses where you can deliver presents. You could model giving and receiving presents, using the words 'please' and 'thank you' as appropriate. If you're online you can still do post-office play, and maybe wrap packages, if parents or carers have the materials.

BIBLE STORY

10 MINS

You will need: a present, perhaps some individually wrapped sweets in a box wrapped in gift wrap, hidden somewhere in the venue

Challenge them to find a present hidden somewhere in the room. When it is found, gather the children together and ask them what they think could be in the present. If you're online, hide the present somewhere in your background and challenge the children to spot it. Hold on to the present, opening it at the appropriate point in the story and sharing the contents:

Crowds of people had gathered around Jesus, wanting to hear him teach, so he went up on a mountainside so that everyone could see and hear him.

Jesus said: "If someone asked you for food to eat, would you give them a rock or a snake instead? Even though you do things wrong and hurt and upset each other, you still know how to give good gifts. How much more do you think God, who is a good Father, would give good gifts?"

"Ask and God will give it to you. Look, and you will find it. Knock and the door will be opened. God will give you whatever you need, and more besides.

"And remember, however you want to be treated, treat other people that way first."

CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Help your children to think about the story more by chatting about these questions:

- What's your favourite part of this story?
- What does this story tell us about God?
- Why do you think Jesus told this story?
- What would you like to ask God for?

CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

You will need: some playdough or modelling clay (provide paper and pens for those who do not like the sensory experience)

Make sure each child has a lump of modelling clay or playdough. Remind them that in the story, Jesus promises that God gives good gifts. Ask the children to think about some of the things God has given us or perhaps to think about something they want to ask God for, and to create

a model to express this. Some children may be uncomfortable with the sensory qualities of playdough or modelling clay, so have paper and pens available for those children instead.

When the children are ready, you could gather their models together, perhaps in a large, shallow gift box as a visual representation of the good gifts God gives. Alternatively, encourage everyone to hold their model or picture up to their camera. Children may wish to talk about the things they have made but this is not a requirement.

PRAYER

5 MINS

Remind the group that you have explored what Jesus said about the good gifts God promises to give us. You may want to take a little more time to talk about some of the things it is good to ask for, and how God is not like a genie granting wishes. Take some time to pray together, giving children the opportunity to ask God for some of those good gifts.

Pause for a moment and remind the children that Jesus also taught that we should give other people the things we would want and treat them as we would want to be treated. Allow a moment of silence for the children to think about what they can do to treat someone well, perhaps asking God what they can do.

Close by praying for all these things, committing them to God.

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