



## The Beatitudes

### MEETING AIM

To explore what the kingdom of heaven is according to Jesus' words.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 5:1-12

### BACKGROUND

This session is designed to work both face to face and online in a group video call (on something like FaceTime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

In this session, Jesus begins to teach what is traditionally known as 'The Sermon on the Mount'. This teaching can appear to suggest a way of living beyond the ability of any mere mortal. However, God sees things differently and things are starting to change with Jesus. That is what Jesus is talking about, that is what blesses people, that is where happiness is to be found; in the God space, both in our lives now and in the future. The Beatitudes are, to paraphrase Tom Wright, a call to live in the present in a way that makes sense of the future God promises.

### JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Start a conversation about fashion trends or trends in general. What are the latest fashions or trends? Do they know where and when they started, or by whom? Have they got involved and joined in?

### INTRO ACTIVITY 5 MINS

**You will need:** pictures of crowds (such as from a large sporting event or royal wedding) from different moments in history

Show the images to the group and ask them to guess what year they were taken. Point out that the way the people are dressed are a clue.

Reveal the answers, and then chat about how fashions come and go. When people look back on 2021, what fashions and trends will they see?

Explain that today's session is all about some sayings of Jesus where he tells those

listening about the kingdom of heaven. However, Jesus' view of the kingdom seems to go against the trends of his time and also, as we will see, our own culture today.

### BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

#### **You will need:** Bibles

Read Matthew 5:1-2 to the group and explain that this is the beginning of some teaching Jesus gave. It's all about what the kingdom of heaven is like.

Go on to read out verses 4 to 10 in turn, then invite the group to give an example, or describe what each 'category', such as 'poor in spirit', 'mourn' or 'meek' might mean.

Ask someone to read verse 11. Now invite the group to share whether any of them have been, or seen, someone persecuted (using the definition from the previous verse) because of their views about Jesus.

Explain that Jesus is saying, despite what the world thinks, despite what the current culture suggests about the reasons for being happy, the kingdom of heaven shows that even in the darkest times or for those with very little, true happiness / being blessed is to be found.

### CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Ask the group a series of discussion questions to unpack the Beatitudes in more depth:

- When do you think Jesus is suggesting that these blessings, or state of happiness, will come about? Now? Later? In heaven?
- What do these verses show us about the way we live?
- What practical actions of living do they suggest?
- Do the young people think Jesus is suggesting that heaven is anywhere that God is?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

#### **You will need:** paper; felt-tip pens, or other art materials

Make sure each group member has a piece of paper and art materials. They could also use any image creation software they have available.

Ask them to think about how the words in the Beatitudes go against what many people think and believe. With this in mind, create an image of something that illustrates going against the current culture. Some examples would be a different-coloured sheep, a fish swimming the opposite way to the rest of the shoal, or a bird flying in a different direction to the rest of the flock. Ask them to choose their favourite Beatitude and add it to their image. Encourage them to rewrite it in their own words.

As an optional extra you could play 'Happy' by Pharrell Williams while the group are being creative. Explain that another way to translate 'blessed' is to use the word 'happy'. His song talks about being happy even when other people aren't and negative things happen.

### PRAYER 5 MINS

Lead the group on a guided meditation, using the Beatitudes as a guide.

Use the following text:

Father God, your kingdom is here within us and our community.

We are blessed; we are happy.

When we feel low and down, we know that God is with us.

We are blessed; we are happy.

When we lose someone or something, we are comforted.

We are blessed; we are happy.

When we give to others and let them go first, we know the world is ours.

We are blessed; we are happy.

When we look for God's space, we find it.

We are blessed; we are happy.

When we forgive others, we are forgiven.

We are blessed; we are happy.

When we give God space in our lives, God is there with us.

We are blessed; we are happy.

When we show peace to others, we show we are part of God's family.

We are blessed; we are happy.

When we are laughed at for loving God, God holds us closer.

We are blessed; we are happy.

We are blessed; we are happy.

In God's space.

### DARREN HILL

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# Prayer

## MEETING AIM

To learn how to pray as Jesus taught.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:5-15

## BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do in a meeting or online in a group video call. Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

In this session, Jesus points out that prayer has nothing to do with outward appearance but, like so much of the Sermon on the Mount, it is about our attitude. Jesus then gives a simple idea of how we should pray. One thing to point out to your group is that the prayer starts with God. Because of Jesus and the arrival of the kingdom of heaven, we can approach and talk to God. God is with us, that is why we can pray.

## JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past seven days. Chat about any concerns they might have. How are their families, friends? What has caught their attention in the news, either local or nationally?

## INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

Invite the group to write down some simple step-by-step instructions, eg how to make some toast or how to boil an egg. Explain that you want every step detailed, so that someone who has never cooked before could follow the instructions. When they seem confident, add that the instructions must not use the words bread or egg.

Finally, read out the instructions and see if any of them work and make sense.

## BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

**You will need:** Bibles

Prepare two leaders or group members to read and then perform the following:

**Gabriel**, a senior and very important angel  
**Harriel**, a junior, innocent and naive angel

**Gabriel:** Ah, Harriel, thanks for coming to see me.

**Harriel:** No problem, Gabriel. What can I do for you?

**Gabriel:** It just so happens we have an opening in our PPD.

**Harriel:** PPD?

**Gabriel:** Yes, our Prayer Processing Department. You know. God is quite busy so only prayers that meet the official standard get through. The PPD do all the sorting.

**Harriel:** Oh, I see, that sounds interesting and makes a lot of sense. I mean, God can't do everything, can...*He trails off.*

**Gabriel:** Exactly, answering all and sundry isn't the best use of resources. And that's where the PPD and your new role comes in.

**Harriel:** OK, so how do we decide what prayers get through to God?

**Gabriel:** Well, it all works on a simple rating points system. Once a prayer reaches the PPD we give it points and if it gets enough, then we let it on through.

**Harriel:** Right, I've got it. So, what prayers get good points?

**Gabriel:** Well, obviously the right words are important. You get extra points for using "thee" or "thou".

**Harriel:** Ah yes, you don't want humans talking the way they normally talk, all natural and stuff, just like a normal conversation.

**Gabriel:** Exactly, but it isn't just the words. Wearing the right clothes is important.

**Harriel:** Yeah, some of today's fashions are quite ridiculous.

**Gabriel:** Oh, and there are extra points for incense.

**Harriel:** Got to smell right.

**Gabriel:** And be washed and clean.

**Harriel:** Yes, as I said, got to smell right.

**Gabriel:** That is just the beginning... it starts with words, clothes, smells and cleanliness. But it also involves posture, tone of voice, excessive use of "just wanna", the correct diet, facial expression, direction of stance, nose-picking, nail-biting and adjusting items of clothing while praying. The list is endless.

**Harriel:** Well, it does seem almost endless, but I think I have all that listed.

**Gabriel:** No, the list is, in fact, endless. Anything you can think of is on the list and basically it means that the PPD stop all but the most holy of prayers getting to God. Actually, only the ones I say.

**Harriel:** What? Is that true?

**Gabriel:** No, you silly angel. When was the last time you read Matthew 6:5-15? Jesus points out that prayer is one of the simplest, basic things we can do. It's a

simple conversation with God. God is God, and never too busy to listen and join in.

**Harriel:** I think I'd best go and read Matthew 6:5-15 now. Oh, what did you want to speak to me about?

**Gabriel:** Can you stop leaving your heavenly chariot in my parking space? Next, read Matthew 6:5-15.

## CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Ask the group these questions to help with your discussion:

- How close is Jesus' description of prayer what happens in your church?
- Should there be a difference to individual and group prayer?
- How can group prayer be more personal?
- When does prayer seem more formal?
- Do you see any structure in the prayer Jesus gives the disciples?

## CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

**You will need:** art materials

Encourage the young people to choose one of the encounters with the Holy Spirit from 'Bible exploration' and create a representation of it. It needn't be a realistic portrayal. Alternatively, they could write a short story or poem about. Continue your discussion from 'Chatting together' as you do so.

Once everyone has finished, share the images and writing. What has God been saying to the young people? What more have the discovered about the work of the Spirit, or the Spirit in their own lives?

## PRAYER 5 MINS

Lead a prayer session. Begin each section and allow time for the group to respond, either out loud or silently. Throughout, remember the concerns raised at the very beginning of the session. Bring those things to God now during this time:

1. Let us praise God...
2. Let us ask God for what we need...
3. Let us ask God to forgive us and others...
4. Let us ask God for protection...
5. Let us thank God for listening and being here with us...

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## Worry

### MEETING AIM

To realise that seeking the kingdom of heaven is better than worrying.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:25-34

### BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do in a normal meeting or online in a group video call. Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

Don't worry, follow God and everything else will flow from that. Is this the point of the Sermon on the Mount? We all try to be 'normal', and this can cause a lot of worry. But being 'normal' changes, as we have seen from COVID-19. 'Normal' changes, but God still loves us as a caring parent or guardian.

Be aware that this might bring out real deep concerns among your group. Be prepared and ready to deal with any pastoral issues that may arise. You could have one or two extra trusted helpers on hand.

### JOINING THE SESSION 5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share about their week. Chat about things that they have had to struggle to learn. Encourage them to share anything they have learned with the group. How did they find out what they needed to know?

### INTRO ACTIVITY 10 MINS

**You will need:** pens; paper

Invite the group to write down three things that people worry about. Two should be things that they see other people worrying about, but one is something that does concern them. Be aware of any issues young people in your group may be facing and be sensitive to them. Explain that we all worry; you should also join in with this activity.

Ask the group to share what they have written and ask the others to guess which is the real concern! Point out that you will return to these worries in your prayers later.

### BIBLE EXPLORATION 10 MINS

**You will need:** Bibles

Invite a strong reader, group member or leader, to share the following story:

Once there were two birds. Let's call them Cecil and Cecilia. Each morning as the sun waited patiently beyond the horizon and then slid gently over it, both Cecil and Cecelia would join in with all the other birds as part of the dawn chorus. Together they would sing and chirp and herald the new day. Now, despite Cecil and Cecelia being the same sort of birds – sparrows – they were quite different. And I don't mean just because one was male and the other female. Their temperaments and outlook on life itself was quite different. Every day as the dawn chorus came to an end, Cecelia waited for Cecil to begin. And this day was no different. As the singing and chirping died down, Cecil began:

"Oh dear, did you notice? It didn't rain last night. You know what that means, don't you? It's always the same. If it doesn't rain, the worms won't come to the surface. I'll starve. And not just me, the missus at home with the hatchlings. They'll be crying out for a nice juicy worm and there won't be any. I can hear their chirps now: 'What sort of a daddy bird are you? You can't even bring us our morning worm!' And that's nothing compared to what my wife will say: 'I let you go out to get the dinner and you come back with nothing! Is it really too much to ask for a nice worm every now and then?' Oh no, what am I going to do? It's enough to make a bird pluck out his feathers."

Cecelia looked at Cecil. He was a worrier. Every day he was the same. If it wasn't the lack of rain, it would be too much rain. If not the rain, then something else – a bigger bird taking all the best worms, or a smaller bird able to fit in the nooks and crannies where the juiciest worms would be. He worried constantly. Cecelia knew that worrying would make little difference. They always found enough food to eat and support those they loved back home in the nests.

"Look, Cecil, you don't need to worry about the rain. In fact, no rain is very good for us today. The past few days have been sunny; it is summer, after all. And do you know what that means?" Cecil looked puzzled and was about to complain about the excessive heat of the summer months when Cecelia continued: "It means that the bugs are hatching. The field will be swarming with flies and buzzing insects of all sorts. It will be a feast. For me, for you and the family back in the nest. Whatever the weather, we always have what we need. There may not have been any rain, but we

have been provided with all we need. Now, come on, stop worrying and let's get going. After all, you know what they say, it's the early bird that catches the flies."

Ask the group to read Matthew 6:25-34. As they do, ask them to consider whether they are more like Cecil or Cecilia.

### CHATTING TOGETHER 5 MINS

Ask the group a series of discussion questions to unpack the story in more depth:

- What worries in the Bible passage are the same for us today?
- How can modern life cause us to worry?
- Do you worry about different things now compared to when you were younger?
- What does worrying stop us from doing?
- Without worry, what would life be like?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE 10 MINS

**You will need:** paper; art materials

Make sure each group member has a piece of paper and access to art materials.

Ask them to draw a bird, flower or an item of clothing, or all three if they want. Inside these images add words like 'find', 'want', 'would like' and then list the things that we want or need in our lives.

Then write 'God' in block lettering over the whole image and colour the word in. This should cover up what they have written.

Explain that God knows what we want and need. We might not have everything and there will be things that we worry about. However, worrying won't help us, but trusting in God will help us feel a whole lot better.

### PRAYER 5 MINS

**You will need:** 'Creative response' artwork

Return to the real worries from the intro activity. Close with a time of open or silent prayer.

Use the artwork from 'Creative response' as a stimulus. Include all the causes of worry before closing with the following prayer:

Dear Father, you have provided the plants and the animals the resources to live. And as we seek your kingdom, your God space in our lives, we know that you will be with us. We thank you for all you have provided and all that you will provide in the future. Amen.

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## Ask, seek, knock

### MEETING AIM

To realise that being in the kingdom of heaven is both life-changing and enabling.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 7:7-12

### BACKGROUND

This session is designed for you to do together or online in a group video call (on something like FaceTime or Zoom). Make sure you have parental permission to do this, as well as following your church's safeguarding procedure.

In this session, Jesus talks about what is traditionally known as the 'golden rule'. Many other religions and religious leaders have said similar things. It is often seen as the cornerstone of how Christians should live. Like so much of the Sermon on the Mount, it is unfortunately difficult to live out. However, the difference is how Jesus relates the rule to the kingdom of heaven. It is more than just a way to treat others. Just before we get to treating others the way we would like to be treated, Jesus makes an important point about God. If we ask, if we seek and if we knock, God will be there. We will be in God's space; being there can change everything.

### JOINING THE SESSION

5 MINS

As people join you online, ask them to share what they have been doing during the past week. Chat about the worst or most over-the-top piece of advertising they have seen. Encourage the group to think about how advertisers are not allowed to lie, but they can exaggerate at times.

### INTRO ACTIVITY

10 MINS

**You will need:** a set of product logos and slogans

Prepare a set of ten product logos and their slogans (for example, Nike and 'Just do it'; Coca-Cola and 'It's the real thing'). Mix up the logos and slogans.

Challenge the group to 'unmix' the products. You can do this as an individual race or let them write their answers and submit them as a quiz, to see who has guessed them correctly.

We know what slogans go with what logo. In today's passage, Jesus shares

examples of completely inappropriate responses, just like the inappropriate slogans earlier.

### BIBLE EXPLORATION

10 MINS

**You will need:** Bibles

Ask someone to read Matthew 7:7-12 and then ask them to repeat the beginning of verse 12. Explain that this is often called the 'golden rule'.

Share this link and let the group read it through. Are they surprised that so many other faiths have similar sayings? What are the main differences in the sayings and the one said by Jesus?

Now looking at the rest of passage in Matthew. How does Jesus link the 'golden rule' to:

- The kingdom of heaven?
- The Old Testament?
- The Law?

If you were discussing following Jesus with someone from one of the other faiths listed in the Wikipedia entry, ask the young people: "How would you talk to them?" In pairs, role-play one person explaining what Jesus means to someone who isn't a Christian. By understanding how other religions and faiths apply and use the 'golden rule', we can become more confident when we explain what we believe.

### CHATTING TOGETHER

5 MINS

Ask the group a series of discussion questions to unpack the Bible passage.

- Does Jesus mean we should ask for absolutely anything? Why? Why not?
- What ways can we seek to know the kingdom of heaven? (See how many spiritual disciplines can be listed: journal writing, Bible reading, fasting etc)
- Does Jesus mean that the whole of the Old Testament is no longer important when he says the 'golden rule' sums it up? Why?

### CREATIVE RESPONSE

10 MINS

**You will need:** paper; felt-tip pens

Make sure each group member has a piece of paper. Ask them to close their hand as though they are about to knock on a door and then draw around their hands

on the paper.

Once they have the shape, encourage them to decorate it and add the words:

"I knock on the door, and I am invited into God's space."

As they decorate their 'spiritual art', encourage them to think about how being in God's space, the kingdom of heaven, means that God is always with them and wanting to hear their needs.

### PRAYER

5 MINS

Lead the group on a guided meditation, using their imaginations to place them on the mountainside listening to Jesus speak. Encourage the group to close their eyes and sit or lie down comfortably as you read out the following:

You have been listening to Jesus talk for some time. His words have been challenging, asking you not to worry, to pray in a different way and to see happiness in places where it isn't usually found. The sun is warm on your face and nearby you can hear the mumbles of others listening. You sense that Jesus is nearing the end of his talk. This could be important.

You hear Jesus telling you to ask...what do you want to ask for? *Leave a little space before continuing.*

You hear Jesus telling you to seek... what do you seek – do you really want to seek and find God's space? *Leave a little space before continuing.*

You hear Jesus telling you to knock... do you want to knock on the door to the kingdom of heaven and be let in? *Leave a little space before continuing.*

Jesus explains that God will give good gifts to those who ask. He also tells you that you should treat everyone else the way you would like to be treated. Jesus explains that this is what the whole of the Old Testament was about. And now God's space is here.

How do you respond?

After a few moments, tell the group that the meditation is over and they are no longer listening to Jesus. However, they can still talk to God.

Close with a quick prayer of thanks.

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