



SESSION 1 of 4

The Beatitudes

MEETING AIM

To explore what Jesus' teaching means for our life and faith.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 5:1-12

BACKGROUND

This is the first session in a series that explores the Sermon on the Mount. In many ways it is easy to read the Beatitudes as about us being good people, but when we really take time to look at them and reflect on what Jesus is saying they're very radical! In a sense, Jesus is talking about those who are his people: laying out something of a manifesto. He is not interested in those who are playing the system well and coming out on top; his heart is for the outliers on the margins.

What a message of hope and challenge this is to us today! Those who are broken and in need of a saviour are welcomed into his gang, already belonging without needing to be anything more than they are. Those who are invested in winning in the ways of the world are challenged here that maybe what they are chasing amounts to very little in the community of Christ. This session looks at exploring the radical message Jesus preached 2,000 years ago, but still speaks to us today with words of comfort and challenge.

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people to the session with any refreshments you have brought. You might want to incorporate 'Intro activity' as part of the welcome, otherwise use this time to settle in and catch up.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: a large sheet of paper or whiteboard; marker pens

Ask the group to think of the people in the world they would consider 'winners' in life? Write a list on your paper or whiteboard. Ask the group to think about the attributes that have made these people 'winners'.

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: printouts of the Bible passage; highlighter pens in different colours
Give everybody a copy of Matthew 5:1-12 and two different highlighter pens. Read through the passage together. Ask for a volunteer to read it or prime a leader to do so before the session.

As you read the passage, ask everyone to use one colour to highlight the characteristic a person might have and the other to highlight what the consequences of these attributes might be. Ask the group to think about and write down what those hearing Jesus' words might typically have thought the consequences of having these characteristics would be.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Building on the Bible reading activity, continue your discussions around the passage using these questions as a guide:

- What kind of people are described by Jesus in this passage?
- Why are the consequences surprising?
- Why does Jesus want to bless these people?
- How do you think they will be blessed?
- Why do you think this passage is so powerful for Christians?
- What does it say about who Jesus is?
- Can you relate to any of these attributes in particular?

15 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: examples of propaganda posters; large sheets of paper; art materials
Explain what a propaganda poster is. Propaganda is usually used to spread ideas, often with a political agenda. Many famous ones in UK history were produced during the wars, where posters and art with particular messages were created, such as slogans to recruit members to the army, to increase compliance with rationing or to avoid sharing secrets that might be spread to spies ("Loose lips sink ships!"). A while ago, the 'Keep Calm and Carry On' poster gained considerable popularity after it was rediscovered.

At this stage, show the group some examples of propaganda posters. It would be really helpful to have a large number. Show them on a laptop or tablet, or print them off to share around.

Chat about how what Jesus was saying in what we call the Beatitudes, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, is quite a different way to influence people! He is trying to raise a different kind of commu-

nity: one that celebrates and protects the vulnerable, those who love deeply and those who know that they need help.

Invite the group to make their own posters. Suggest that they take one of the lines in the Beatitudes – maybe the one that speaks to them most – and turn it into a poster. Would they want to use a slogan with it? What kind of image would they put on the poster? Provide materials that will help them, and again, giving examples of similar posters would be really helpful. Maybe you could provide examples of typography or stamps to help. If you have a laminator available you could laminate the posters.

Give the group a good amount of time to work on their posters. As they work, chat about what the young people have discovered today. If you've got space to display them where you meet you could put them up.

5 PRAYER

You will need: printouts of Matthew 5:1-12; scissors

Ask the group to read through the Bible passage again in reflective silence. Then encourage them to pick one of the verses they would like to use as an encouragement for prayer that week. Pass the scissors around and invite them to cut their verse out as a strip to take away and put somewhere that they will carry with them. They could put it in their purse, stick it in a homework planner or put it somewhere in their bedroom.

Once everyone has cut out their verse, pray together:

"Jesus, you bless those who live close to your heart. Sometimes following you is a scary road that takes us to the margins, but remind us that we find you there. Jesus, we give you the verses that you spoke those 2,000 years ago and still speak to us today. Encourage us when we need your blessing in the hard or lonely places, and remind us that you are there with us. Keep us humble and remind us that you are the treasure worth chasing. Amen".

BECCA DEAN

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SESSION 2 of 4

Salt and light

MEETING AIM

To reflect on how we should be salt and light in our world.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 5:13-16

BACKGROUND

This week we're looking at the call in the Sermon on the Mount to be like salt and light. These are two simple metaphors Jesus used to make it clear that his people were to be known. In some ways this has always been a difficult challenge in a world where it is sometimes easier to be like everyone else. In this sense it is a particularly pertinent challenge to teenagers in an age of identity formation, where what their peers think of them is felt so keenly.

This session looks at these metaphors and tries to explore what they might mean still today. Towards the end we seek to find ways to put these concepts into practical use in our lives.

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome everyone as they join you, by name if possible. If you normally have refreshments, you may want to save these until you've played the game in 'Intro activity'.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: paper cups (or lots of identical ceramic or glass cups); water; salt; prizes (sweets)

Before the session, fill two-thirds of your cups with tap water and one-third with tap water mixed with salt.

Explain the game to the group. Give a volunteer three cups of water: two plain and one salty. They have to take a sip each of the cups and keep a straight face, even when drinking the salty water. The rest of the group has to watch them carefully to see whether they can work out which is the salty water by the drinker's reaction. They have to vote for the cup they think it was, and if the drinker manages to fool them he or she wins a sweet!

Use a new set of cups for each volunteer. It would be kind to have a refreshing drink available for everyone who plays the game!

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: salty snacks (such as pretzels) in bowls; a small bowl of salt; tea lights (real or battery-operated); matches (if using real tea lights)

Lay out your salty snacks and invite everyone to eat them. Put out a small bowl of salt as well to act as a visual aid. Display some tea light candles on an appropriate surface and invite everyone to take a turn at lighting one with matches or at switching them on (being very careful with safety and mindful of fire alarms).

Ask the group if they can guess what the passage you are going to look at today might be. Open up your Bibles to read Matthew 5:13-16. Ask a couple of volunteers to read the passage out, with one person reading the 'salty' part in verse 13 and another the 'light' part in verses 14-16.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to generate discussion and unpack deeper meaning about the passage:

- What are the qualities of the salt and light Jesus uses as metaphors?
- Do you think they are still good metaphors today?
- What do you think Jesus is trying to say to those who are listening?
- How do you think Christians should be distinctive in the world today?
- What do you think Jesus meant about salt losing its saltiness?
- Do you find this message challenging or encouraging?
- How can we be salt and light in our world today?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: paper; felt-tip pens or gel pens in different colours

Ask the group to think practically about ways that they can be like salt and light in the world. What places do they find themselves in each week? Where is it easier or harder to see where they can be like salt and light? What are the things they already do where they are being like salt and light? Prompt the group to encourage each other in the ways they think their friends are like salt and light. This might be the things they do or aspects of their character.

Draw out a weekly planner, with seven columns and a lot of space for each day. Ask the group to take a dark coloured pen and write in some of the regular things they do during the week. Then ask them to look for opportunities when they might have the

chance to be like salt and light in the places they find themselves. Ask them to annotate their weekly schedules using light-coloured pens over the top as they find ways to take these opportunities to be salt and light.

5 PRAYER

You will need: a string of fairy lights; pegs; pens; small pieces of paper or card; music and the means to play it

Hang the fairy lights up like a washing line, then give each group member a peg, a piece of paper or card, and a pen.

Ask the group to think about a way they could respond to Jesus' call to be like salt and light. What would they want to offer him back? Introduce a time of prayer. Say that you're going to play a piece of music that they might quietly reflect on, then offer something up in prayer. When they're ready they can write a small prayer, or just words or a drawing, that symbolise their response to Jesus on their piece of paper or card.

They can then hang it up on the fairy lights using their peg.

'Build Your kingdom here' by Rend Collective might be an appropriate song to play, or you could use another that is familiar to your group or some reflective instrumental music. At the end of the song you can finish with a simple prayer:

"Jesus, help us to be people who are like salt and light. Help us to be people who grow more and more like you. Amen".

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SESSION 3 of 4

Giving

MEETING AIM

To discover how we should give and ways we can do so.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:1-4

BACKGROUND

This passage is the part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus talks about giving in secret. Today's session looks to take this simple but important passage, to understand why it is important and to have fun while putting it into practice!

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome everyone to the group and share out your refreshments. Catch up on how the young people's weeks have been.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: playing cards

Before the session, take out one king, one queen, two numbered hearts and all the numbered clubs. You should have one card per young person (if you need more cards, use the numbered spades).

Shuffle and deal out cards to everyone in the group, explaining what they mean. The king is the detective, the queen is the doctor, the two numbered hearts are the mafia, the numbered clubs (and spades, if you are using them) are villagers. Everyone should keep their card secret.

Narrate a story with these details, embellishing them according to your own style. It's night-time and everyone should close their eyes. Ask the mafia to wake up and silently choose a victim. Once they've agreed on one, the mafia can go back to sleep. Ask the detective to wake up. They have to guess someone who might be part of the mafia by pointing at them. Confirm if they are right, then ask them to go back to sleep. Finally, ask the doctor to wake up. The doctor now has to choose who they might save from the mafia. If they pick the person the mafia members have chosen to kill off, that person survives. They can choose to save themselves if they wish. Then ask the doctor to go to sleep.

Invite everyone to wake up. Explain what happened during the night: who was killed off by the mafia or saved by the doctor. Then the group needs to start a discussion about who might be part of the mafia. If

someone strongly accuses someone and is seconded by someone else in the group, the accused has to make a defence. After this the group can vote for whether they think the person is guilty or not guilty. If they are voted as guilty they are eliminated, even if they are innocent.

Repeat the night-day cycle until either the mafia have killed everyone else off or the mafia members are caught before everyone is killed off!

Play the game for as many cycles as you have time for. If you are worried about not having enough time at the end you could always suggest playing again at the end if you've got through everything else.

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: Bibles

Ask the group to read the passage quietly in their heads. (If anyone needs help, make sure they have a leader or buddy to read the passage aloud to them). Ask everyone to read it through more than once, taking time to let the message sink in and allowing different things stand out.

Afterwards, ask them about how they find reading the Bible in their heads (or listening to it). What did they think of the passage? Is it one they already knew? Ask them to share the key points Jesus is making here.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions as prompts to discuss the passage, but also allow the group to explore ideas around the topic and to ask their own questions:

- Why do you think Jesus says that we should give in secret?
- What do you think he means about being rewarded by the Father?
- What's the difference between giving publicly and giving secretly?
- How do you think giving changes us?
- How generous do you think we should be?
- Who are the needy in today's world?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: pens; paper

Split the group into pairs and ask them to come up with ways that you can plan to give to needy people in quiet ways. Ask them to think about the people in their community who have needs and to discuss things that you might be able to give them. Ask them to make specific plans with each other as a pair and come up with ways that they might do that. Encourage them to

think about giving in more ways than just offering money. They could give time, do helpful things for people or make things as well as donating money or giving material gifts.

5 PRAYER

You will need: chocolate bars; luggage labels; pens; sticky tape

Ask everyone to take a chocolate bar to give to someone. Explain that you are doing some guerrilla giving! Get them to think of someone they would like to encourage and pray for this week. Get them to write an anonymous message to that person on a luggage label and tape it to the chocolate. Get them to think about who that person might be and whether it's appropriate to tell them they are praying for them. If you're meeting at the same time as a church service you could challenge everyone to think of someone in the church.

Once they have written their messages they need to take their chocolate bar away and stealthily give it to their chosen recipient: putting it in the person's pocket, in their bag, among their stuff, on their car windscreen or through their letterbox. Or you could ask someone else to give it to that person on your behalf to keep it extra stealthy!

Ask the group to commit to praying for that person in the week ahead, and end the time by praying the following prayer:

"Jesus, you told us to be people who give, not for show but to be like you. We pray for ourselves, that you would help us be more giving, and for the people we're giving chocolate bars to, that you would be with them. Amen".

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SESSION 4 of 4

Worry

MEETING AIM

To explore Jesus' teaching on worry and what that means for us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:25-34

BACKGROUND

We all have our preconceived ideas, sometimes subconsciously, about who might make a 'suitable' follower of Jesus. Peter certainly did, and we are no different! Allow God to speak during your preparation for this session and to show you his heart for others.

5 GATHERING TIME

As you invite everyone to join you, begin a discussion around the theme by asking everyone: "What's the bravest thing you've ever done?"

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: balloons; chalk or masking tape
Mark a line at either end of your space. Split the group into two teams and line the teams up behind one line. Put a big pile of balloons behind the other.

The first person runs and grabs a balloon. When they get back to the rest of the team they pass the balloon to the next person, who goes with the balloon to get another balloon. When they get back they pass the two balloons to the next person, who has to get another one, and so on!

If anyone drops a balloon the team loses all their balloons and has to start again. At the end of a set time limit, the team with the most balloons in play wins.

5 BIBLE EXPLORATION

If possible, find somewhere outside where you might see some flowers, trees or birds. (If you can't go outside, provide pictures of different nature scenes and play some birdsong in the background.)

Ask the group to look out for these things, letting them point things out and interrupt you. Depending where you hold the group, it might be worth staying outside and reading the passage out there, or it might be better to have a small walk around and then return to where you were meeting. But while you're walking, ask the group to look out for birds and plants.

Read the passage out to the group, making a specific point of looking at any interesting nature around you.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Discuss the passage using these questions (stay outside to do this if possible):

- Why do you think it was important to Jesus that his followers didn't worry?
- What do you think Jesus means when he says: "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"
- Why do we worry? What does worrying achieve?
- Do you think Jesus gives us enough reason not to worry?
- Is it easy to stop worrying? How do you do it?
- What might the emotions that replace worry be?
- Jesus uses flowers and birds as examples of things that are taken care of without worrying. Do you have any examples of people or other beings that you find inspirational?
- What would churches be like if Christians worried less than other people?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: A4 card; pens

Give everyone a piece of paper or card and ask them to fold it in half. Encourage them to spend some time reflecting on their own worries and use this as a guide.

Ask the group to write 'My worries' at the top left-hand side of the paper and then list the things they worry about. They might want to talk about what they have written or to keep it more private. Try to create space for gentle conversation for those who want it and space for those who don't. It might help to play some music at the same time.

Next, ask them to write 'My life without worries' on the right-hand side. Invite them to think about what their lives might be like without any worry. What are some of the riskier things they would do? What would they be like? What might be different? Give them time to write and think about these things as well.

After they've written their thoughts you could invite people to share if anyone wants to. Did they find it helpful to think about this? How might you all encourage each other to live more as though you didn't have worries?

10 PRAYER

Explain to the group that you're going to try a really helpful way to pray, using your breath to help you. Ask the group to get comfortable and explain that it would be good to close their eyes so they aren't distracted by other people. Encourage the group to focus on breathing in and out slowly. Explain that we breathe in what we need (oxygen) and breathe out what we need to get rid of (carbon dioxide).

Jesus told his followers that they didn't need to worry. He reassured them that they would be taken care of by his heavenly Father. As you breathe in and out, try to concentrate on breathing out your worry on the out breaths, letting go of the things that stop you living each day fully. And as you breathe in, breathe in faith. Breathe in life to the full. Breathe in the Holy Spirit, who gives us faith and helps us not to fear.

Encourage the group to keep on praying like this for a minute in silence. It might be helpful to tell them it will be a minute so they have a sense of how long they will be doing this for. You could finish this time of silence with the following prayer:

"Jesus, you told us not to worry. Help us to leave our worries in your safe hands, and in exchange give us the faith to believe that all that we need can be found in you. Amen."

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