



SESSION 1 of 4

The Beatitudes

MEETING AIM

To think about how God wants us to have a heart more like his.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 5:1-12

BACKGROUND

Jesus' heart flows through the Sermon on the Mount. He wants people to connect with God, and it's like he's flinging his arms open wide, welcoming us into his kingdom and inviting us to be more like him. The standards he sets are crazy high, but that's the point. We can't do it in our own power. It's an invitation into relationship, and it's possible because of God's grace. The Beatitudes passage is wordy and can be quite hard for little ones to understand, so it's worth reading it through beforehand and asking God to speak to you on behalf of the children in your session.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Invite the children to sit together in a circle and encourage them to share stories from their week. Celebrate any birthdays or special events. It may be helpful to have an object or cuddly toy to pass around for the children to hold as they speak. Ask them: "Can you think of something that has made your heart feel happy today?" Thank God that he is with you all and ask him to help you learn more about him today.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: ways you can change your appearance (for example hats, glasses, masks, fake moustaches and beards)

Jesus loved speaking to people and teaching them how to know God more and have a heart like his. What he told the people was different from what people had taught before, and Jesus was different from any of the teachers the people had listened to before. Explain that you're going to play a game of 'spot the difference'. Ask the children to look at you for a moment, then tell them you're going to leave the room and change something about your appearance. When you come back in, get them to tell you what's different. Make the first few easy and let the children have a go too, helping them make the change if they need help.

If you can get a copy of *Hermie: A Common Caterpillar* by Max Lucado (Thomas Nelson, 2001), reading this would also work well as part of the 'Intro activity'. God's response to Hermie – that he is making his heart more like his – provides a great way in to the Beatitudes.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a picnic blanket, an eight-piece jigsaw puzzle in the shape of a big heart (make this from card before the session)

Tell the children that people loved listening to Jesus. He travelled around from place to place teaching people all about God. Then tell this story:

One day, Jesus was travelling and huge crowds of people were following him. Jesus might have been tired and hungry, but when he saw all the people he sat down and started talking to them. Jesus loved the people. He wanted them to know how much God loved them and how they could connect with him.

When people listened to Jesus they sat at his feet. *Lay out a picnic blanket and invite the children to sit down on it.* Imagine that we're all sitting at Jesus' feet listening to him. Everyone is amazed at how he speaks. He's different from all the other people who teach about God!

Jesus started to tell the people what it looked like to follow God, to be a Christian. What Jesus taught them was kind of topsy-turvy. It was different from what the people had heard before. He told them how they could be happy in ways they wouldn't have expected because they could have a heart more like God's.

Jesus said: "Happy are those who know they need God's help." ("Blessed are the poor in spirit.") *As you say each beatitude, add another piece to your heart puzzle.*

"Happy are those who know they make mistakes." ("Blessed are those who mourn.")

"Happy are those who put others first." ("Blessed are the meek.")

"Happy are those who try to know God better." ("Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.")

"Happy are those who forgive others." ("Blessed are the merciful.")

"Happy are those who love the way God does." ("Blessed are the pure in heart.")

"Happy are those who are kind and make peace with other people." ("Blessed are the peacemakers.")

"Happy are those who stand up for God." ("Blessed are those who are persecuted.")

When we follow God and choose to live our lives for him our hearts become more like his. It's as though we have added pieces to our puzzle so that our hearts become more

and more like his. *Invite the children to have a go at the puzzle as you reread the Beatitudes.*

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- What was your favourite part of the story?
- What do you think it felt like to hear Jesus talk?
- What makes you happy?
- How can we be more like God?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: heart shapes drawn on paper; crayons or felt-tip pens; child-safe scissors

Invite each child to make their own jigsaw puzzle by decorating a heart. As you work, chat about everything you have discovered today. Help the children cut the heart up to make a jigsaw puzzle. Can they remember any of the beatitudes as you put the jigsaws back together

5 PRAYER

Gather the children together and say this prayer:

"Thank you, God, that you want us to connect our hearts with yours, and that you teach us how to know you more."

Choose a beatitude or two, or invite the children to choose, then spend some time asking God to help you in that specific area. For example: "God, we pray that, by your Holy Spirit, you would show us when we need your help, and that we would ask you this week when we need help."

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SESSION 2 of 4

Salt and light

MEETING AIM

To think about how having Jesus living in us can change the world.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 5:13-16

BACKGROUND

In Jesus' day, salt would have been used for flavouring and preserving, and people also used small clay lamps to burn olive oil, so his analogy would have really spoken to them. Shining our light so that others praise God, or so that we can 'change the world', can seem huge, so it's important to emphasise to the children that this is about shining their light in all the places they go, in their world. There is an opportunity to share a story of someone you know who has done this. The more 'ordinary' the story the better!

5 CIRCLE TIME

Invite the children to sit together in a circle and encourage them to share stories from their week. Celebrate any birthdays or special events. It may be helpful to have an object or cuddly toy to pass around for the children to hold as they speak. Ask them: "What was the best thing you did this week?" Thank God that he is with you and ask him to help you learn more about him today.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: lots of different types of light, for example a candle, torch, lamp and headtorch

Turn off or dim your main lights and show the children all the different kinds of light you have brought. Light is powerful. It helps us find our way and gets rid of darkness. Let the children play with any lights provided that it is safe for them to do so. Say that we're going to hear today about how Jesus says we can shine his light everywhere we go.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a picnic blanket; a light and bucket; a saltshaker; a torch

Lay out your picnic blanket and invite everyone to sit down. Then tell this story:

Jesus loved speaking to people. One day he was teaching a huge crowd all about how they could become more like God. They sat down on a mountainside to listen.

Jesus told the people: "You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world." *Hold up a saltshaker.*

A long time ago, before people had fridges and freezers, it was hard to keep food fresh. People would cover their food in salt and this would help to stop it getting yucky and rotten. Jesus calling us the salt of the earth was like him saying that we help to keep things fresh. By loving God and helping others we help to bring goodness in the world.

Jesus also said: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. People don't light a lamp and hide it under a bowl. Instead, they let it shine so people can see. When you shine God's light, others will know God too." *Switch on a lamp and cover it with a bucket.*

Imagine turning on a light so that you can eat your dinner or do some colouring, then covering it up and sitting in the dark instead. Wouldn't that be silly?

That's what Jesus was saying. His light is so bright and God's love is such good news that it would be silly to hide it. When we choose to ask Jesus to live in our hearts and ask him to help us shine his light, we can change the world. We change the places around us. *Hold up a torch and turn it on as you talk about Jesus' light.*

It's as though Jesus' light is a torch ready for us to turn on. We just have to ask him to shine his light so we can show other people how bright and powerful he is. When we don't know where to go in the dark we can shine a torch to light the way. When we're connected to God we can show other people how to find him. We can share with them how much God loves them and help them to connect with him. We'll stand out like a bright light!

There are lots of amazing stories about people who shone God's light and changed the world around them. Find one to share with your children of someone who let their light shine, and explain the impact it had. It would be great to share an example of someone in your church or to invite someone to come in and share the story themselves.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to answer:

- What was your favourite bit in today's story?
- Changing the world can feel big, but Jesus says we can change our world, so that means all the different places we go. Which places do you go where you can shine your light?
- Who do you know who is really good at sharing God's love with people around them?
- What was your favourite bit of [name's] story?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: glow sticks or battery-powered tea lights; paper bags; scissors, felt-tip pens or crayons; items to decorate bags

Make paper bag lanterns. Give each child a bag and help them cut out patterns in it. Then let them colour the bags in and decorate them however they would like to. Give each child a light so they can put it inside their bag. Chat together about how we can shine God's light wherever we go to help others know God.

5 PRAYER

You will need: worship music (this could be someone leading, a video or just the music, whatever works best in your setting)

Sing 'City on a hill' by Nick and Becky Drake or another light-themed song. Tell the children that Jesus said we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. He said we can help others and teach them about God.

As you sing: "Let your light shine", sing this as a prayer over each other, using your hands to signal shining light on everyone. Thank God that having Jesus living in each one of you can change the world.

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SESSION 3 of 4

Giving

MEETING AIM

To think about how we can do something kind for others and share God's love.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:1-4

BACKGROUND

When people gave money in the temple, they used to put it into a box that made a loud noise, so it literally announced their giving. Some children will have the opportunity to give their own money, but some under-5s won't have experienced that yet. Some may also find it hard to do anything in secret, so this session provides an opportunity to think overall about sharing, helping others in need and not boasting about it.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Invite the children to sit together in a circle and encourage them to share stories from their week. Celebrate any birthdays or special events. It may be helpful to have an object or cuddly toy to pass around for the children to hold as they speak. Ask the children: "How can we be kind to others?"

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: toy money; shopping play equipment

Show the children the shopping play equipment and let them play freely. Join in with the children's play and let yourself be directed by them.

Use the money to practise counting together. Chat together about the different things you can use money for.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a picnic blanket; a picture of the temple; money; a piggy bank or jar
Lay out your picnic blanket and invite the children to sit down. Tell this story:

Jesus loved speaking to people. One day he was teaching a huge crowd of people about how they could be more like God. They all sat down on a mountainside to listen.

Jesus told the people how important it was not to show off and to do things just for God, not other people. He said: "If you give to people who need it you don't need

to tell everyone. God sees what you do and knows why you do it."

You see, in those days people would go to the temple to give money to God. *Show your picture of a temple.* The people would go to the temple to worship and hear about God, just like at our church.

Look at this money. *Show the children some money.* Do you any of you have pocket money? Or have you ever used coins to buy something...maybe an ice cream or something in a shop? *Hand out the money so each child has some to hold.*

In the temple there was a place for people to put money in as a gift for God. *Hold up your piggy bank.*

Jesus told another story in the Bible about giving. We're going to use our coins as we hear that story. Jesus sat down opposite the place where people were giving their money and watched the crowd as they gave their offerings. *Point to the piggy bank and invite the children to come and put their coins in.*

Jesus saw lots of rich people throwing lots of money in. But then he saw a lady who didn't have much money, and she put in just two very small coins. Jesus told his friends: "That lady has given more than anyone else. They all had lots to give but she didn't. She gave everything she had."

She gave her best. She loved God so much that she gave all she had. Sometimes it can be hard to share and give to others. It would have been hard for the lady to give her money as she didn't have much. She trusted that God would care for her, and she loved God so much that she wanted to give her money.

Jesus told the people that it isn't how much you give that is important. It's your heart that matters. Even if we have very little we can share it and love other people by giving. God loves it when we do that.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- What was your favourite bit in the story?
- What do you love to share?
- How do you think God feels when you give?
- What can you do when you see someone who needs help?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: biscuits; icing; other decorations; paper plates; food wrap
Give each child two biscuits to decorate and show them all the decorations you have brought. (Be aware of food hygiene and allergy issues during this activity.)

Make sure you provide alternatives for any children who might need them.) Explain that they have two biscuits so they can share one with someone else after the session. Don't let them eat either biscuit during the session.

Encourage the children to decorate their biscuits. As you work, chat about the Bible story and discuss any times the children have shared or given something away. If appropriate, share a story from your own life, perhaps of a time when someone unexpectedly shared something with you.

Explain to the children that as they leave they might like to ask God who they could share the extra biscuit with and see if he pops anyone into their heads. Or perhaps they might meet someone after church or on their way home that they think would feel loved by them sharing the biscuit. Put the biscuits on paper plates and wrap them up to keep them safe.

5 PRAYER

You will need: biscuits from 'Creative response'

Encourage the children to hold their plates of biscuits and say this prayer:

"Thank you, God, that you help us share and give to people who need help. We pray that you would help us share this week and show us people who need our kindness."

Ask the children what they think they might like to share this week and pray that God would help them do so.

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SESSION 4 of 4

Worry

MEETING AIM

To know that God loves and cares for each of us, and that we are special to him.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Matthew 6:25-34

BACKGROUND

This session focuses on how God loves and cares for each one of us, and how we can choose to trust him instead of worrying. Worry can be a difficult feeling for young children to talk about as they may not have learned to describe how it feels for them yet. Using other words around feelings can be helpful and will allow them to explore what worry might feel like for them. However, rather than focusing on worry, keep drawing back to how much God cares for us and the fact that we can trust him.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Invite the children to sit together in a circle and encourage them to share stories from their week. Celebrate any birthdays or special events. It may be helpful to have an object or cuddly toy to pass around for the children to hold as they speak. Ask them: "Who cares for you?" Thank God that he is with you and ask him to help you learn more about him today.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: cooking oil; water; three clear containers; food colouring

Pour some cooking oil into a container and explain that it represents feeling worried. Worrying is when we feel scared or unsure because we don't know what's going to happen.

Pour some water and a few drops of food colouring into a second container. Explain that this one represents trusting God, remembering that we don't need to be afraid because he is taking care of us.

Ask the children if they think worry and trust mix. Pour some oil and water into the third container together. At first they will seem to mix, but then they will separate. Trusting God with all our hearts and worrying don't mix. We're going to hear today about how Jesus told people that God wants us to trust in him and not worry.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: a picnic blanket; pictures of birds, feathers and flowers; a mirror

Lay out your picnic blanket and invite the children to sit down. Then tell this story:

Jesus loved speaking to people. One day he was teaching a huge crowd of people how they could be more like God. They all sat down on a mountainside to listen.

Jesus talked to the people about worry. Who sometimes feels worried? Sometimes we can feel worried or scared because we don't know what is going to happen, but Jesus told the people not to worry because God cared for them.

"You don't need to worry about your life," said Jesus, "or what you will eat or drink, or your body or the clothes you will wear. Look at the birds. They don't worry and store away food. They don't need to worry. Father God knows what they need and he feeds them. You are even more precious to God than the birds. Worrying doesn't help. It won't change the situation." *Show the children pictures of birds and feathers. Chat about which are the children's favourites and what their feathers might feel like.*

"And you don't need to worry about clothes," continued Jesus. "Look at the beautiful flowers in the field. They don't go to work every day trying to earn money to buy lovely clothes. Has anyone ever seen a flower putting on clothes?! Even a king in his finest robe still wouldn't look as beautiful as one of the flowers. If God cares for them that much, think about how much he cares for you." *Show your pictures of flowers. Chat about which ones are the children's favourites and what they might smell like.*

Jesus carried on: "You are more important than the birds and the flowers. God looks after the birds and the flowers, and he also loves to care for you. God doesn't want you to worry. He made you and he loves you. Trust in him and connect your heart with his. Learn to be more like him and he will look after you."

Pass the mirror around. As each child looks at their reflection, tell them: "God made you. He loves you and will take care of you."

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Ask the children these questions, encouraging everyone to take turns to contribute:

- What was your favourite part of the story?
- Do you have a favourite bird or flower?
- What makes you feel worried?
- How do you feel knowing that God loves you even more than the birds or flowers?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: pictures of birds and flowers; collage materials including feathers, petals and dried flowers

Invite the children to choose a bird or flower picture and collage it. As you work, chat about how God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers. Remind the group that God also looks after us and cares for us even more. What does this say about what God thinks of the children?

5 PRAYER

You will need: a feather for each child

Invite each of the children to hold a feather. Explain that we're going to take it in turns to say something we're worried about if the children are happy to do so. Then we're going to think about how we can choose to trust in God because he cares for us.

After everyone has had a chance to speak, invite the children to blow the feather away and thank God for caring for them.

"God, thank you that you look after us and that you love to hear what we're thinking about and feeling."

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