

Jer. 17:5–10

Ps. 1

1 Cor. 15:12–20

Luke 6:17–26

Blessings and Troubles

Goal for the Session

Youth will gain new perspectives on the meaning of blessings and woes as they examine Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Plain.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 6:17–26

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Gay L. Byron

Jesus focuses his eyes (*ophthalmoi*) on the disciples after the healing excursion in verses 18–19. The reference to eyes in this passage (v. 20) should not be glossed over as insignificant. It is not so much that the people are able to see God in this encounter with Jesus. The subtle undercurrent and the word of hope in this passage is how the disciples (and presumably all those would-be followers of Jesus) are seen by God! So the raising of the eyes by Jesus is a symbolic metaphor for the watchful eyes of God, who is ultimately responsible for the blessings and curses that are at the heart of this sermon.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," David L. Ostendorf

This is the raw, unvarnished, faith-rattling declaration of the realm of God. The realm of God rests among those who have nothing but God. Jesus' Sermon on the Plain—these wondrous yet stark beatitudes—jar us out of our faithful complacency. The God Jesus speaks of is not always the God we proclaim. Our human inclination is to fit God into our own small definitions, cultures, and places. But God is always breaking down the barriers we construct to keep God in or out. Here, once again, God is calling us back.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Howard K. Gregory

The sermon seems to be addressed not to the people in general who have gathered around him, but to the disciples—to the church. Pastorally this highlights the fact that the very nature of the sermon, the values and ethics that it expresses, are apparently not intended to be a moral code binding on the society in its widest sense. Rather, it is for those who have made a commitment to follow Christ. At the same time, the fulfillment of the demands of this sermon will not be the outcome of personal effort and resources, but of divine grace. The good news is that our fulfillment of the demands of the sermon is the enabling work of the gift of grace, the gift of the Spirit.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Peter Eaton

[Jesus] is speaking not just "on the plain," but *plainly*. We can trust Jesus to be absolutely "on the level" with us every step of the way, telling us the truth of our lives as he sees us. We hear this truth only through our participation in a community—the community of lifelong partnerships and families, the community of the eucharistic fellowship, the community of those who pray and discuss the Scriptures together, the community of service, the community of mutually committed members.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 6:17–26

YOU WILL NEED

- newsprint
- markers
- map of Palestine in Jesus' day
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- pencils
- hymnals or songbooks (optional)

For Responding

- option 1: paper, pens or pencils
- option 2: poster board, magazines, scissors, glue sticks, markers
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2, paper, pens

For Music Video Connection

- Internet-connected device

The mention of specific cities and regions in Luke 6:17 indicates that there were both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) in the crowd. It also indicates how news about Jesus was spreading.

Focus on Your Teaching

Young people can be quick to notice injustices and passionate about wanting to do something about them. They will probably resonate with Jesus' teaching about how God's realm turns the world and its values upside down! His message about lifting up and affirming those who are disadvantaged, vulnerable, and powerless is a powerful one for youth who live in a society where those who are privileged and powerful are usually the ones considered blessed. You can help youth to re-examine what it means to be blessed by God and to see their lives and the lives of others from a different perspective.

O God, may my words be guided by Jesus' vision of blessings and the enabling work of the Spirit. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, print HAPPY in the center of a sheet of newsprint and MISERABLE in the center of a second sheet. Bring a map of Palestine in Jesus' day in a study Bible or Bible atlas.

Greet youth as they arrive. Invite them to think of words that come to mind when they hear the word "happy." Distribute markers and have them add their words around the word "HAPPY" on the newsprint. Do the same for words associated with "MISERABLE." Spend a few moments looking at the sheets and talking about some of the happy and miserable moments experienced by group members during the past week. Challenge them to listen for what Jesus says about these two words in the Bible reading today. Pray aloud:

O God, bless our time together as we learn more about the vision offered in Jesus' teaching about your realm. Amen.

EXPLORING

Introduce participants to the reading summarizing the following information: Last week's story was about Jesus' invitation to Simon Peter and others to leave their fishing business and follow Jesus (Luke 5:1–11). The rest of Luke 5 describes Jesus' increasing popularity as a teacher and a healer. The beginning of Luke 6 describes some of Jesus' controversies with the religious leaders of his day. Just before this week's verses, Jesus has chosen twelve men to be his inner circle of disciples (Luke 6:12–16).

Distribute Bibles and ask youth to turn to Luke 6:17. Invite a volunteer to read aloud Luke 6:17–19. Locate the place names on a map of Palestine in Jesus' day. Ask:

✪ What were people in the crowd expecting from Jesus that day?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Blessings and Troubles) and pencils. Ask four volunteers to each read one section of verses from the resource sheet. After each section

of verses, pause for a quiet moment for youth to underline what they think is the most important phrase or word in that section and to circle any words or phrases they have questions about. Before moving on to the next set of verses, invite youth to tell what they underlined and to discuss the questions they have.

Apostle: “messenger” or “one who represents the sender.”

Read aloud Luke 6:13, noticing that Jesus designates these twelve as “apostles.” Point out that even though there was a whole crowd of people listening to his words, in verse 20 Luke says Jesus was speaking directly to these twelve. Ask:

✧ Why do you think Jesus focused his teaching on the disciples?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Blessed, Then and Now) and ask a volunteer to read aloud the information at the top of the sheet about who was considered blessed in biblical times. (The remainder of the sheet is for Responding option 3.) Discuss:

✧ What standards does society use today to judge whether someone “has it good” (is blessed by God)?

✧ What does Jesus say in Luke 6:20–26 about whom God blesses?

✧ How did Jesus’ teaching turn things upside down for people who had wealth, power, and privilege—the ones society considered to be blessed by God? How do you think these individuals responded?

✧ How did Jesus’ teaching turn things upside down for people who were poor and living on the margins of society—the ones society considered to be lacking God’s favor or blessing?

Ask the group to read verse 26 from Resource Sheet 1 in unison. Discuss:

✧ What does it mean to be “true” instead of “popular”?

✧ What do you think Jesus is teaching us about our role as disciples today?

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. Be-Attitudes Youth will chart their understanding of Jesus’ teachings. Say that Jesus’ words in the focus reading are sometimes referred to as the “Beatitudes” (from a Latin word meaning “perfect happiness”). Distribute sheets of paper and ask youth to divide their papers into two columns. Have them write BE at the top of the left column and ATTITUDE at the top of the right column. Offer the following instructions: Think about the kind of person you would like to be for God and write some of those characteristics in the left-hand column. Then think about what kinds of attitudes and actions you think are necessary to become that kind of person and write those down in the right-hand column. Form groups of three to talk about what they have written.

2. Upside-down Blessings Youth will create a visual summary of Jesus’ teaching about what it means to be blessed. In his sermon, Jesus spoke of God’s great reversal of expectation. Draw a line to divide a piece of poster board in half. Invite youth to work together to make a two-part collage of magazine images, phrases, and words: on one side, have them create a collage of things that our society would consider to be signs

or indications of blessings in someone's life. Then create a collage on the other half of things that Jesus teaches are signs or indications of being blessed. How might they indicate which half summarizes Jesus' teaching?

- 3. Spoken Word Art** Youth will create rhythm poems to express their understanding of what Jesus taught. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Blessed, Then and Now) and pens. Read in unison the rhythm poem at the bottom of the page. Invite youth to work individually or with a partner to compose a rhythm poem based on what Jesus might say to groups of people today. Allow time for youth to perform their poems for the entire group.

Option: With the permission of the group, arrange for youth to present their rhythm poems during a worship service.

CLOSING

Gather the group and ask: What is one thought or idea you will take with you from today's discussions?

As your closing prayer, read aloud the following stanzas from the hymn "God of Grace and God of Glory" (Text by Harry E. Fosdick, 1878-1969):

Cure your children's warring madness; bend our pride to your control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss your kingdom's goal, lest we miss
your kingdom's goal.

Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore;
Let the gift of your salvation be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving you whom we adore, serving you
whom we adore.

Offer the following blessing: *You have been blessed by God to be a blessing in the world. May it be so!*

Option: Distribute hymnals or songbooks that include the hymn of "God of Grace and God of Glory" and sing it together or read it aloud in unison.

■ E N H A N C E M E N T

MUSIC/VIDEO CONNECTION

On World Humanitarian Day, August 19, 2012, Beyoncé gave a live performance of her song "I Was Here" at The United Nations in New York City. The theme of the event was to inspire people around the world to do something good for someone else. Invite youth to watch the music video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=i41qWJ6QjPI. Discuss:

- ✿ Beyoncé says, "I will leave my mark...and this world will see I was here." How did the projected images in the video illustrate people "leaving their mark" in a positive way?
- ✿ Essentially, Beyoncé's song speaks of wanting to make the world better. To what extent does this echo Jesus' teaching about God's reign?

Blessings and Troubles



You're Blessed

¹⁷⁻²¹Coming down off the mountain with them, he stood on a plain surrounded by disciples, and was soon joined by a huge congregation from all over Judea and Jerusalem, even from the seaside towns of Tyre and Sidon. They had come both to hear him and to be cured of their ailments. Those disturbed by evil spirits were healed. Everyone was trying to touch him—so much energy surging from him, so many people healed! Then he spoke:

You're blessed when you've lost it all.

God's kingdom is there for the finding.

You're blessed when you're ravenously hungry.

Then you're ready for the Messianic meal.

You're blessed when the tears flow freely.

Joy comes with the morning.

²²⁻²³"Count yourself blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out, every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that that person is uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—skip like a lamb, if you like!—for even though they don't like it, I do . . . and all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company; my preachers and witnesses have always been treated like this.

Give Away Your Life

²⁴But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made.

What you have is all you'll ever get.

²⁵And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself.

Your self will not satisfy you for long.

And it's trouble ahead if you think life's all fun and games.

There's suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it.

²⁶"There's trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests—look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular.

Luke 6:17-26. *The Message* by Eugene H. Peterson, copyright (c) 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group. All rights reserved.

Blessed, Then and Now

In Jesus' time, people were considered to be blessed by God, or divinely favored, if they were well-off, worked hard, followed the religious laws strictly, worshiped regularly in the temple or synagogue, obeyed the religious authorities, were physically and mentally healthy, gave generously to the poor, were male (not female), were married (not single, divorced, or widowed), had many healthy children (especially boys), and lived to an old age. So, one way of looking at those who were considered "blessed" would be to say, "Blessed are you if you are healthy, wealthy, married..." And, if these circumstances didn't apply to you, it was assumed that God did not bless or approve of you. Some even considered a lack of these outward signs to be an indication of being cursed by God. Jesus' teaching to the disciples turns this kind of understanding upside down.

Using this information and Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:17–26, write a summary of what it means to be blessed in the style of a rhythm poem.

Sample rhythm poem

(create a beat by clapping or snapping fingers on the bolded words)

Hey **you!** You who **care** about the **earth!**
Blessings for **you** 'cause **you're** God's **people!**
And **you!** You who **risk** your lives for **Justice!**
Blessings for **you** 'cause **you're** in **synch** with **God!**
But **you!** You who **have** it **all!**
Misery for **you** if you didn't **share.**
And **you!** You who **made** selfish **decisions!**
Misery for **you** if you didn't **care.**

