

BLESSED

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Copies of the downloadable “Litany” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader’s notes
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: SUPERLATIVES

As the teens arrive, break them into small groups of six or less. Each person must complete the following three statements (below): two of them with true answers and one with a false answer. The others in the group must guess which answer is false.

- The thing I like best about myself is...
- The thing I am best at is...
- I am more likely than my peers to become...

THE LITANY: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson (below) by saying together the Litany, leaving off the Grace (which can be said at the close of the lesson).

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK’S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: THE GOOD LIFE

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- What do you think people mean when they talk about “the good life”?
- What sorts of things do your friends want for themselves when they get older?
- Do you want the same things as your friends or are your goals different?

A few things worth pointing out (if they don’t otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *When people speak about “the good life” they generally mean a life filled with things that contribute to happiness – often specifically meaning material wealth, success, physical health, love, admiration and so on.*
- *Chances are your teens and their friends hope to some degree to experience a good life: to avoid negative experience, to have many positive experiences and relationships, and to achieve success.*
- *Hopefully, as believers, our ambitions for our own comfort and happiness are tempered by a desire to follow Jesus faithfully.*

THE LESSON: MATTHEW 5

The first part of the lesson (below) can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

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*To bless the people of our Country and the Commonwealth... the Judges and Magistrates...
the Queen's forces... all who serve mankind by their labour and learning... all thy people:
We beseech thee, good Lord.*

There's a lot of blessing going on in the Litany – had you noticed? We ask God to bless all manner of people with whom we rub shoulders each day. Have you ever stopped to wonder what “blessing” actually means? When scripture speaks about “blessing” it generally means conferring wellbeing or happiness – a state God intended our lives to be characterized by.

When God created human beings, he blessed them. Then, after the fall, he called the Patriarch Abraham and said this: “I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will *be* a blessing” (Genesis 12:2). God blesses us, and we're meant to bless others.

But before we get carried away with misconceptions about “the blessed life” we need to further explore what scripture considers the blessed life to be. What brings about true happiness, fulfillment, and peace? The Psalms tell us that those who put their trust in the Lord, living in a right relationship with him, are the ones who deserve to be called “blessed”. Jesus, in his famous Sermon on the Mount, gives us a similar lesson.

Refer to Matthew 5:1-12.

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS' NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE).

Read through the text. Then ask the teens to respond to what they've just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- How would you sum up the attitude of the blessed as described in Matthew 5?
- How would you sum up the reward of the blessed as described in Matthew 5?
- How is this description of blessing different from the world's idea of “the good life”?
- Does this change how you understand the sort of blessings that we should seek for ourselves, and others?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *In Jesus' famous sermon (often referred to as “the beatitudes”, from the Latin word “beatus”, meaning “blessed”), he explores what true righteousness looks like, correcting some of the misconceptions of that day (such as the prideful legalism of the Pharisees). In his summary of the beatitudes, Jesus underlines the attitudes his people ought to have about themselves, others and God. The list begins with a humble and a repentant posture, then points to other virtues that we may associate with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22): mercy, peace, holiness, and faithfulness.*
- *The rewards of the blessed are all tied to their relationship with God. They shall be called sons of God and inherit the earth. They shall receive mercy and be comforted. They will see God and belong to the kingdom of heaven. So the blessed life is one characterized by attitudes that lead us to a right relationship with God.*
- *Those who are preoccupied with “the good life” – or with what they can get out of life for themselves – are likely to have the opposite attitudes to what Jesus described: selfish rather than meek, humble, and merciful. Moreover, the goals that people set when they are focussed on “the good life” are rarely centred on being right with God, walking in obedience to him and living in expectant hope of his kingdom! So we're talking about totally different attitudes and goals.*
- *The beatitudes can be a great wake-up call for us if we've drifted into worldly attitudes and goals. We can seek to reorient our lives towards that right relationship with God – which is the source of all blessing. When we seek God's blessing for others, Jesus' words remind us that material comforts and success are not the wellspring of true happiness, so our prayers for them seek a deeper good that will pull them into that right relationship with God.*

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DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON'T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU'LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY "AT-HOME CHALLENGE" IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Give your teens a moment to think of a person or group in the community that they'd like to pray for God's blessing on, then ask them to share that one name with the group. (If you have more than ten teens, you'll want to break into smaller groups.) Each person in the group should write all the names mentioned on their lesson paper so they can remember them.

During this unit, we're going to focus our prayers on specific people in our world.

Each day this week, take time to pray for each of those named on your group's list. Ask God to bless them with wellbeing and happiness, but most of all with a right relationship with him.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this prayer.

Almighty and merciful God, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift: Bless, we beseech thee, the labours of thy people, and cause the earth to bring forth her fruits abundantly in their season, that we may with grateful hearts give thanks to thee for the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(COLLECT FOR THE ROGATIONS DAYS BEFORE ASCENSION, BCP PAGE 199)

CLOSING PRAYERS

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE "PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS" SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-62, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU'RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the "Grace", printed at the end of the Litany booklet.

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MATTHEW 5: **THE BLESSED LIFE**

¹Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

²And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.