

# *Learning Cycles*

## **THE BEATITUDES**

Written by Tracey E. Herzer



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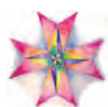
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# About LearningCycles

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## What is LearningCycles?

LearningCycles is an innovative approach to faith formation. It takes seriously the spiritual development of children while providing creative and exciting activities that engage children in a whole new level of learning and retention. The rotation-style model means that children work on the same story or concept for several weeks, using different learning approaches in each workshop room they visit.

### ***Ideas for possible workshops:***

Art  
Storytelling  
Music  
Group Activities  
Cooking

Science Experiments  
Games  
Drama or Puppets  
Movies  
Geography or Map Excursions

## Easy to Adapt

You can use the activities in this resource for shorter learning center events, normal classroom use, intergenerational gatherings, and more. Adapt what you find here to best suit your faith formation situation.



# Recruiting LearningCycles Leaders

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*LearningCycles make it VERY easy to increase your number of volunteers, by dividing jobs into manageable parts. Here are some ways that parishioners of ALL ages can be involved:*

**CYCLE LEADERS** sign up as part of a team of 2 or 3 adults who will teach one 4-6 week cycle. Teachers remain in the same workshop room each week of the cycle and teach the same lesson plan to different classes each week. Workshop rooms may use skills in areas as music, dance, cooking, quilting, gardening or painting, but you don't have to have a special skill in order to help. Teachers can sign up to help read stories, turn on computers, make popcorn, hand out art supplies, etc.

**SHEPHERDS** commit for the entire school year, but they never have to prepare or teach a lesson! Shepherds work in teams and travel with their class through each of the different workshops. Shepherds are the essential relationship part of this program, learning the children's names, providing continuity of leadership and being a friendly, safe presence in the classroom each week.

**CYCLE COORDINATORS** are needed for each different cycle. These people manage the details of a cycle, contacting all the volunteer teachers for that cycle, distributing the lesson plans, making sure supplies are purchased, etc.

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## Some churches have also used:

**DECORATING TEAM** A resourceful group of people is needed to create and plan new and evolving learning spaces. These folks might be interior designers, or they may be people who are just addicted to home improvement shows or have a knack for decorating inexpensively! Churches who share space or don't have the budget for large-scale renovations will need a group of creative thinkers to come up with props or posters that can be used on Sunday, but safely stored away during the week.

**RESOURCE TEAM** This "big picture" group can be comprised of all your cycle coordinators, as well as interested parents. Together the group handles trouble-shooting, long-range plans and communication to the entire church. For churches that already have a catechist or formation team, that committee can provide the functions of a Resource Team.



# General Class Structure

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- 1. OPENING ACTIVITY** (10-15 minutes, as children arrive)  
Welcome students and make sure everyone has a nametag. Opening activities give early arrivers something to start on immediately and provide a warm, busy room for children to enter. The activity could be simply drawing or decorating your nametag. It could also be coloring sheets or simple games. Check the “Filler Activities” of your lesson plan for ideas or ask your Cycle Coordinator.
- 2. INTRODUCTIONS** (approximately 10 minutes)
  - a. Introduce yourself:** Tell students about you – your family, how long you have been at this church, what kind of work you do, what your hobbies are, why you signed up to help teach, etc.
  - b. Introduce the cycle story or theme:** Ask children what they’ve been studying or have done in other rooms on other weeks. Talk about the basic theme or season (see the Overview p. 6 for some ideas). Read the story to children.
  - c. Introduce your activity:** Tell the children which part of the story your room is focusing on, and perhaps ask them to re-tell you that part of the story in their own words.
- 3. WORKSHOP ACTIVITY AND REFLECTION** (approximately 25-30 minutes)  
See attached lesson plans for specific instructions about the main activity. Supplies should be in your classroom, but if you need help, ask your cycle coordinator. If you run low on supplies, please tell your coordinator so they can plan accordingly.

If children finish early, you can use any of the “Filler Activities” provided in each lesson plan. In addition, you may use activity sheets (see “Suggested Resources for this Cycle”) as “quiet work” for the early finishers while they wait for everyone to complete the task.

Try to plan your time so that children finish the activity and still have a few minutes to process the class by journaling or drawing. Encourage them to take their work seriously, and try to foster a semi-quiet atmosphere that allows children to think about what they have heard, seen and experienced. Ask questions like “What did you learn today?” or “How did you feel while doing this activity?” Connect your activity back to the story. Studies show us that quiet reflection time is what helps move items from short-term memory into long-term memory so this piece is VERY important!

- 4. CLEAN UP** (approximately 5 minutes)  
Have children help clean up and make sure everyone has their papers, jackets, etc. If parents come to the classroom to pick up their children, this is a good time to praise children in front of their parents. This is also a good time to discuss any concerns or questions quietly with parents. Tell the children goodbye. Thank them for coming.



# Theological Overview of this Cycle

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Some of the most well-known words of Jesus can be found in the “Sermon on the Mount” recorded in Matthew 5:1-7:27. The words are also echoed in Luke’s gospel (6:20-49) in a similar, although shortened, version that is sometimes called the “Sermon on the Plain”. Luke’s account may be of the same occasion or it may be just a similar teaching given on a separate occasion. In addition, some theologians believe the teachings found in Matthew chapters 5-7 may have been a compilation of Jesus’ teachings, not a traditional “sermon” given on one specific occasion.

Whatever the case, the themes laid out by Jesus outline a whole new way of thinking about God and about each other. Jesus spoke to a crowd that was probably mostly made up of the Jewish working poor. These people didn’t have much say-so in what their lives looked like and were unhappy with the government systems. They knew the ancient teachings of the prophets and weren’t quite sure where Jesus fit since his teachings took the ancient laws to another level. In Matthew 5:17-48, Jesus says several times, “You have heard it said...” but then goes on to redefine the religious law in broader terms, with new interpretations.

Jesus tells his listeners that although the law says “You shall not murder”, we also place ourselves outside the realm of God’s perfect communion when we are “angry with a brother or sister.” Jesus says that when the law tells us “You shall not commit adultery”, that also includes looking at someone with lust in your heart. Over and over again, Jesus seems to be saying, it’s not enough to live your life strictly by the letter of the law if you miss the spirit that the law is meant to embody.

When we focus specifically on the passage of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10) we can see that Jesus brings his radical reinterpretation to this passage as well. When we think about who is “blessed” and why, we may be surprised by the statements of Jesus. Given the trends we see in human nature, we might expect the rich and powerful to be the ones who are blessed, but Jesus turns our expectations upside down... Blessed are the poor, the powerless, the sad, the down-trodden, the people who work for peace.

This unit gives us a unique opportunity to talk with children about the difference between God’s values and the values commonly illustrated in our society. To talk about being meek and poor in spirit and merciful and pure in heart are not attributes generally thought to be important or valuable in today’s world. We tend to value strength and power and wealth and cleverness, but by taking a closer look at the Beatitudes, we can remind ourselves once again that the Kingdom of God we are called to build in the here and now doesn’t often look like the kingdoms of this world.

Blessings on all of you -

Tracey E. Herzer



# Letter to the Parents for this Cycle

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*(We suggest you mail this letter to all parents with a copy of the cycle story – you may also want to send copies of the Theological Overview)*

Dear Parents –

We are currently working on a unit to help children learn The Beatitudes that Jesus gave at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. These eight “Blessed Are...” statements proclaim God’s favor towards those who aspire to live according to God’s kingdom.

We don’t often hear the word “beatitude” in modern conversation, but Webster’s Dictionary defines it as “supreme blessedness”. When we talk about being blessed, we often translate “blessed” as “happy”, which doesn’t really express the same thing. Maybe it would be more accurate to say that being blessed has more to do with being divinely favored than it has to do with being blissfully happy, although sometimes it encompasses that too.

As you have time over the next several weeks, please try to discuss these concepts with your children. The more that you can reinforce at home the principles we are teaching at church, the better the chances are that your child will retain more long-term knowledge.

Here are the Beatitudes as given in Matthew 5:3-10

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

With these words, Jesus gives us a very different way of thinking about things. These are not the people we might immediately think of being “supremely blessed”, but discussing these attributes gives us a great opportunity to talk with your child about the differences between God’s kingdom and the kingdoms of this world and how we are called to build God’s Kingdom here and now. We hope you will help us in this endeavor by talking about these things with your children at home.

God’s Blessing to all of you –  
Tracey E. Herzer





# Story: The Beatitudes

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*To be read each week of the cycle*

Wherever Jesus went, people followed him to hear his words and see what he might do next. One day, a large group of people followed Jesus up onto a hill. Jesus saw them and he sat down and began to teach them. He said:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Being “blessed” means having God’s favor. Blessings are special gifts from God that remind us of how very much we are loved. However, being blessed doesn’t always mean we are happy or that everything goes perfectly. God understands how much it hurts to be sad or to “mourn”, but God promises that we will be comforted and strengthened, especially in those times. God knows how hard it is to work for peace, but promises that when we do, we are acting as part of God’s Kingdom.

Some of these words may be hard to understand, but we will spend this time learning what each of these statements mean and how they might affect the way we treat each other. We will see what we can discover about the things that Jesus says will be blessed. There are many adults who struggle to figure out what Jesus is talking about in this story, but we are going to work on it too... and as we do this work, we are “hungering and thirsting for righteousness”... so we are blessed!

Story re-told by Tracey Herzer



# Suggested Resources for Cycle

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## VIDEOS

For this cycle on The Beatitudes we recommend using **How to Get Blessed Without Sneezing: Rediscovering the Beatitudes**. This 28-minute video (or DVD) features 8 short vignettes, each inspired by one of the 8 beatitudes. This video was produced by Trinity Wall Street and is available online at <http://episcopalmarketplace.org/Products/Trinity-Television-and-New-Media/How-to-Get-Blessed-Without-Sneezing-Rediscovering-the-Beatitudes>

Nest Family Videos is often one of our favorite resources because their 30-minute animated stories come with a 64-page activity book, filled with word games and puzzles, as well as coloring pages, that can be copied and distributed to all your students. They have a video called **Built Upon the Rock** that teaches forgiveness and the parable of the house built on the rock. It also mentions the Beatitudes, although not as directly or extensively as the resource named above. It can be purchased online at [https://www.nestlearning.com/built-upon-the-rock-video-on-interactive-dvd\\_p43413.aspx](https://www.nestlearning.com/built-upon-the-rock-video-on-interactive-dvd_p43413.aspx)

The Bible Project has a video overview of the Gospel According to Matthew, and it speaks of the Beatitudes (3:10-4:35). There might be some helpful information or visuals in this video for the older students and/or cycle leaders. The video can be found at <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/matthew/>

Saddleback Kids YouTube channel also has a few video resources that could be helpful for this cycle. The first is a song that lists all the Beatitudes and includes hand motions, found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kzpO4GVZ6Bw> . This could be a great way for the children to learn the Beatitudes and would be a good resource for the Music Workshop.

## BOOKS

There is a wonderful book called **The Blessing Cup: Prayer Rituals for Families and Groups** by Rock Travnikar; published by St. Anthony Press, 1993 (and revised in 2002). This book was the inspiration for the Art workshop in this cycle and I encourage you to go ahead and spend the \$7 or so to purchase this book. You'll find many, many times it comes in handy. I use it frequently to begin or end a meeting, to honor a particular volunteer, to commemorate a special occasion or church season and for many other things.



# Activities Overview for This Cycle

WORKSHOP	SUMMARY OF PLANS	FOCUS
ART	Create and Use A Blessing Cup	How can we share blessings?
PUBLISHING	Communicating the Beatitudes in Today's World	What do the Beatitudes look like today?
DRAMA	Acting out scenarios of Blessing	What does it mean to be blessed?
MOVIE	Watch "How to Get Blessed Without Sneezing" and discuss	The Beatitudes in Modern Language and Situations
STORY	Stories & Creating a Beatitude Book	Learning about the Beatitudes
KITCHEN	Fortune Cookies	Blessings Vs. Good Luck
MUSIC	Songs of Blessing	Blessing as part of our Christian Heritage



# The Beatitudes: Publishing Workshop

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## **Bible Reference for the Cycle:**

Matthew 5:3-10 – Jesus shares the Beatitudes during the Sermon on the Mount

## **Main Verse for the Cycle:**

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled (Matthew 5:6)  
*(New Revised Standard Version of the Bible)*

## **Key Concepts and Life Application:**

- The word “beatitude” means “supremely or divinely blessed”
- When we live according to the beatitudes, we are living out God’s kingdom
- Learning about the Beatitudes (or other things about God) is one way that we “hunger and thirst for righteousness”. By doing this study, we are living one of the beatitudes!

## **Summary of Class Plans:**

In this workshop, children will divide into teams and brainstorm a modern interpretation of the Beatitudes and how they might be communicated in today’s world.

## **Materials Needed:**

- Printed copies of “The Beatitudes – Modern Style” worksheet from page 21. Enough for each student to have one.
- Paper
- Pens or Pencils
- Poster board or large paper
- Markers or crayons
- Scissors
- Masking tape – if you have painted walls, use blue painter’s tape! 😊
- Bibles



## Workshop Lesson Plans:

- **BEFORE CLASS** - Take some time to fill out "The Beatitudes: Modern Style" yourself so that you are already thinking of modern day examples of those about, for and with whom Jesus might be preaching today. Are there good modern day parallels? This will prepare your heart and mind to talk about these things with the children.
- You can refer to "A General Schedule for Class Structure" (included in the Introductory Materials) for ideas on how to introduce yourself and the story, as well as how to plan your class time appropriately.
- Welcome children and read the cycle story from page 8 to the class. After the story, discuss what was read, using the following questions or some of your own:
  - What does the word "beatitude" mean? What does it mean to be blessed?
  - Who in our society might we consider to be blessed?
  - Is this the same or different from the people Jesus talks about in the Beatitudes?
- First, have students spend a few minutes brainstorming individually and filling out the Modern Beatitudes worksheet. Have leaders walk around the room and engage the kids one-on-one to really get them thinking about the communities of people Jesus names in the Sermon on the Mount. What are some concrete examples of people / communities going through those things today?
- Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students. Ask each group to put together their brainstorm about new ways to interpret the beatitudes in our modern world. Have them come up with a way to "advertise" or spread the Good News of these beatitudes to many communities of people. Below are some possible ideas / examples to get started.
  - If the Beatitudes were on the worldwide web, what would the website address be? (Our class of 5<sup>th</sup> Graders created a whole design for a mythical website called "[www.GetBlessed.com](http://www.GetBlessed.com)" – see what your group might come up with.)
  - Other ideas: a game show, a billboard, a t-shirt or ball cap, a bumper sticker, a comic strip, a television commercial. Ask the groups how information gets shared in today's world and see what they come up with.
  - Once the group has an idea, have them illustrate it on the poster board provided. Our "GetBlessed.com" group drew a picture of what the website would look like, including buttons that said "Get blessed here" and "Peacemakers in the News" and a "Contact God" button with a picture of praying hands. We were amazed at everything they came up with!



- After about 10 minutes of discussion, bring poster board and art supplies to each group and remind them to go ahead and start creating their posters so there will be time to share their group's ideas with the rest of the class.
- After groups finish, have everyone help clean up the room and then gather the whole class together. Have each group take turns putting up their poster and sharing with the rest of the class what the group came up with and how they illustrated it.
- If possible, try to leave at least 10 minutes of quiet at the end of class for students to write or draw in their journals, focusing on what the beatitudes mean to them.

**Filler Activities:**

- You could have each student write a prayer intention for the peacemakers of our world and end class by sharing / praying these prayers together.



## The Beatitudes - Modern Style

“Beatitude” means “supremely blessed”. If we were to look around in the world, who looks like they are “supremely blessed”? Would our modern day beatitudes be things like “Blessed are those who drive Mercedes” or “Blessed are those who go to private schools”? Try to think about it more like Jesus did. Who did he say was blessed? Who are those in our modern world who are the poor, the pure in heart, the thirsty, the peacemakers?

Try to write 8 of your own modern beatitudes:

1. **Blessed are**
2. **Blessed are**
3. **Blessed are**
4. **Blessed are**
5. **Blessed are**
6. **Blessed are**
7. **Blessed are**
8. **Blessed are**



# The Beatitudes: Kitchen Workshop

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## Bible Reference for the Cycle:

Matthew 5:3-10 – Jesus shares the Beatitudes during the Sermon on the Mount

## Main Verse for the Cycle:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled  
(Matthew 5:6) *(New Revised Standard Version of the Bible)*

## Key Concepts and Life Application:

- The word “beatitude” means “supremely or divinely blessed”
- When we live according to the beatitudes, we are living out God’s kingdom
- Learning about the Beatitudes (or other things about God) is one way that we “hunger and thirst for righteousness”. By doing this study, we are living one of the beatitudes!

## Summary of Class Plans:

Children will create “beatitude cookies” (which look suspiciously like fortune cookies!) and talk about the difference between blessings and good luck.

## Materials Needed:

- Newspaper or disposable tablecloths to protect tables
- Ingredients for making “Beatitude Cookies” (fortune cookies)
  - 1 cup sifted cake flour
  - 8 tablespoons sugar
  - 4 tablespoons cornstarch
  - 1/8 teaspoon salt
  - 7 tablespoons oil
  - 4 egg whites
  - 4 tablespoons water
  - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Small slips of paper for “fortunes”
- Pencils or pens for writing “fortunes” (beatitudes)
- Electric skillet (Bring 2 if you can – it will make things go faster)
- Bowl for shaping cookies
- Milk (to serve with cookies – optional)

## Workshop Lesson Plans:

- **BEFORE CLASS** – If you are planning to use your church kitchen, make sure you clear it with the right people and are familiar with the policies for kitchen use.
- **BEFORE CLASS** – Teacher will need to arrive 15-20 minutes before class begins to get everything set out and ready. Cover the tables with newspaper or disposable tablecloths to keep the mess at a minimum.





- As children arrive, welcome them and have them wash their hands!
- You can refer to “A General Schedule for Class Structure” (included in the Introductory Materials) for ideas on how to introduce yourself and the story, as well as how to plan your class time appropriately.
- Begin by reading the story and talking about the Beatitudes. Here are some questions to help guide your discussion:
  - What do you think Jesus meant when he said “Blessed are...”?
  - How do you think the people listening to Jesus felt?
  - Do you think the things Jesus said were surprising to them?
  - How would you have felt if you had heard Jesus that day? What if you were someone who was mourning? How would Jesus’ words make you feel?
  - Is being blessed the same thing as being happy?
  - Is being blessed the same thing as having “good luck”?
- Explain to children that having blessings from God doesn’t automatically make you happy all the time, nor does it mean that everything in your life is perfect. But blessings are reminders of how much God loves us.
- Tell the class you will be baking fortune cookies, but since we’ve just learned that blessings aren’t the same thing as good luck (or good fortune) we are going to call our cookies Beatitude Cookies (or Blessing Cookies, if you prefer)
- Have each child write out a couple of beatitudes on the small slips of paper provided. These will become the “fortunes”
- **DIRECTIONS FOR MAKING COOKIES:**
  1. Stir together the dry ingredients.
  2. Add oil and egg white and stir until smooth.
  3. Add water and mix thoroughly.
  4. Lightly grease the electric skillet. Pour 1 tablespoon of the batter into the skillet and spread into a 3 1/2 inch circle, using the back of a spoon.
  5. Cook over low heat until lightly brown (about 3-4 minutes). Flip over and cook for one minute more.
  6. Remove the cookie from the pan and place on a paper towel.
  7. Place the slip of paper with the beatitude written on it in the middle of the circle and fold the cookie in half over it.
  8. Fold the cookie in half again by placing it over the edge of a bowl.
  9. Cool cookies in a muffin tin to hold their shape. Makes 32 cookies.
- After cookies are cool, allow children to eat a couple. Wrap remaining cookies in napkins for children to take home to share with family or friends.
- After all the cooking is done, have children help you clean up the room. Have them wipe down their tables and sweep the floor of cookie crumbs!



