

TEACHER / FACILITATOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Sermon on the Mount – Session 1

What Does Successful Living Look Like?

Matthew 5:1–12 (with overview of Matthew 5–7)

SESSION OVERVIEW (FOR THE TEACHER)

Big Idea

Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount by redefining what it means to live a successful life. Instead of power, comfort, or outward achievement, He describes a life shaped by humility, dependence on God, and inner transformation. True success, according to Jesus, is becoming the kind of person who lives under God's reign and reflects His character.

Teaching Goal

By the end of this session, participants should:

- Understand that Jesus challenges common cultural definitions of success
- Recognize the Beatitudes as descriptions of character, not instructions to earn God's favor
- Begin reflecting on how their own definition of "success" aligns—or conflicts—with Jesus' vision of the good life

Time Guide (Suggested – 60–75 minutes)

- Opening & prayer: 10 minutes
 - Scripture reading & teaching: 35–45 minutes
 - Group discussion & reflection: 15–20 minutes
 - Closing prayer: 5 minutes
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OPENING (10 MINUTES)

Opening Question (Icebreaker)

"When you hear the word *successful*, what comes to mind? How does our culture usually define success?"

Teacher Notes

- Allow a wide range of answers (career, money, happiness, influence, family, security).
- Do **not** correct answers yet. This session is about surfacing assumptions before challenging them.
- Affirm participation and curiosity rather than "right" responses.



Opening Prayer

Ask God to open hearts and minds, and to help the group listen carefully to Jesus—even when His words challenge deeply held beliefs.

SCRIPTURE CONTEXT (FOR THE TEACHER)

Before reading, briefly explain:

- The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' longest recorded teaching.
- It describes life in God's kingdom—not how to earn salvation, but how transformed people live.
- Jesus begins not with commands, but with **blessings**.

Explain that the Beatitudes describe **who is blessed**, not **who is impressive** by worldly standards.

Read **Matthew 5:1–12** aloud (or assign readers).

TEACHING MOVEMENT 1: JESUS REDEFINES SUCCESS (Matthew 5:1–3)

Key Teaching Point

Jesus starts by blessing those the world often overlooks.

Teacher Explanation

- “Blessed” means deeply favored, flourishing, or approved by God—not simply happy.
- The first Beatitude (“poor in spirit”) sets the foundation for all the others.
- To be poor in spirit is to recognize one's spiritual need and dependence on God.

Emphasize:

Success in God's kingdom begins with humility, not self-sufficiency.

Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Jesus begins His sermon this way?
- How does being “poor in spirit” conflict with modern ideas of confidence and success?
- What might spiritual poverty look like in everyday life?

Teacher Notes

- Watch for misunderstandings: this is not about low self-esteem.
 - Emphasize dependence on God, not self-loathing.
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TEACHING MOVEMENT 2: THE VALUES OF GOD'S KINGDOM (Matthew 5:4–9)

Key Teaching Point

The Beatitudes describe inner character shaped by God's kingdom.

Teacher Explanation

Briefly walk through these Beatitudes as a group:

- Mourning: grief over sin and brokenness
- Meekness: strength under God's control
- Hunger and thirst for righteousness: deep desire for God's ways
- Mercy: extending grace to others
- Purity of heart: integrity and single-minded devotion
- Peacemaking: actively restoring relationships

Stress that these are **descriptions**, not a checklist.

Discussion Questions

- Which Beatitude surprises you the most? Why?
- Which one do you find most challenging?
- How do these qualities contrast with what our culture rewards?

Teacher Notes

- Keep the focus on **formation**, not performance.
- Avoid turning this into moral pressure.
- Remind the group that growth takes time.

TEACHING MOVEMENT 3: SUCCESS THAT LASTS (Matthew 5:10–12)

Key Teaching Point

Faithfulness to Jesus may bring opposition, but it leads to lasting reward.

Teacher Explanation

- Jesus ends the Beatitudes by acknowledging suffering and rejection.
- This does not mean believers seek persecution, but that faithfulness sometimes carries a cost.
- Success in God's kingdom is measured by faithfulness, not ease.



Discussion Questions

- Why do you think Jesus includes persecution in His description of blessing?
- How does this reshape our expectations of the Christian life?
- What kind of “reward” do you think Jesus is pointing to?

Teacher Notes

- Be sensitive: some may have personal experiences with hardship.
 - Emphasize hope and God’s presence, not fear.
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PERSONAL REFLECTION (10–15 MINUTES)

Invite quiet reflection. You may read aloud:

“Jesus does not describe the successful life we admire, but the life God transforms.”

Reflection Prompts:

- How do I currently define success?
- Which of Jesus’ values challenge my assumptions the most?
- What might God be inviting me to reconsider or surrender?

Allow silence. Encourage honesty.

CLOSING (PRAYER & CHALLENGE)

Closing Prayer

Pray for:

- Open hearts to Jesus’ teaching
- Willingness to be shaped by God’s values
- Trust that God’s definition of success leads to true life

Optional Take-Home Practice

Encourage participants to:

- Read Matthew 5–7 over the coming weeks
- Pay attention to moments when cultural definitions of success influence their choices
- Pray daily: “Jesus, teach me what it means to live well in Your kingdom.”



FINAL TEACHER REMINDER

This first session sets the tone for the entire Sermon on the Mount.

Resist the urge to explain everything. Let Jesus' words create curiosity and holy discomfort.

The invitation of the Sermon is not to *try harder*, but to *live differently*—from the inside out.

