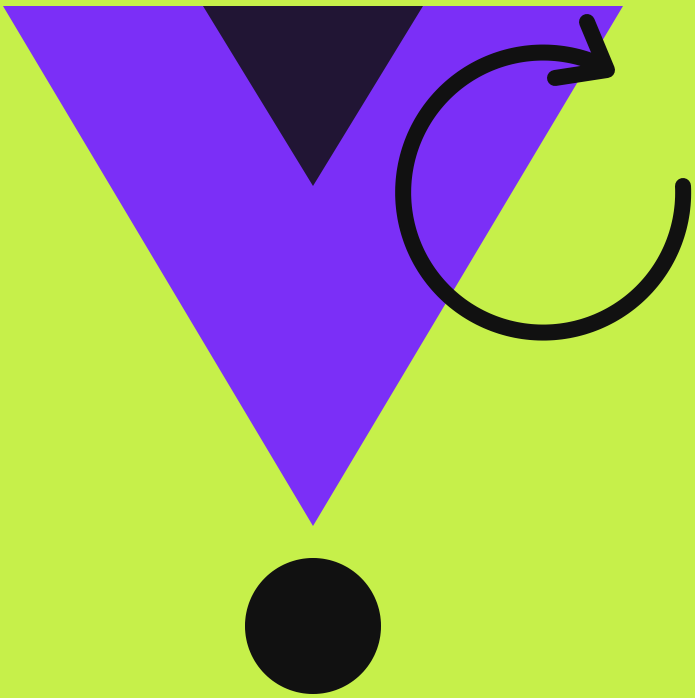
YOUTH GROUP CURRICULUM · AGES 11–18

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT



WEEK 1 OF 6

Blessed Are…

Theme: The upside-down kingdom · Main text: Matthew 5:1–12

UPSIDE DOWN.

Jesus flips everything.

Inside: 45 / 60 / 75-minute plans · word-for-word scripts · 4 game options · response activity · Joys & Concerns · 3 student pages

DAHAM
NEXT GENERATION MINISTRY TOGETHER

WEEK 1 · LEADER GUIDE

Blessed Are...

Theme: The upside-down kingdom · Main text: Matthew 5:1–12 · Memory verse: Matthew 5:3

THE BIG IDEA

Jesus calls blessed the people the world overlooks: the poor in spirit, the grieving, the gentle. His kingdom starts upside down.

The question to carry all night

"What if Jesus' way really is the better way?"

By the end, students will...

- Name who and what our world usually calls "winners"
- Hear Jesus' first words on the mountain and who he calls blessed
- Fill in their first **Flip Card** and take one upside-down step

NIGHT AT A GLANCE · PICK YOUR LENGTH

SEGMENT	WHAT HAPPENS	45 MIN	60 MIN	75 MIN
Welcome	Greet new students by name and grade; your announcements	—	—	5
Game 1	Pick from the Activity Menu (next page)	8	10	10
Game 2	A second game from the menu (optional)	—	—	10
Hook + Message	"The Speech Nobody Expected" · Matthew 5:1–12	10	12	12
Response Activity	The First Flip + Flip Card 1	10	12	12
Small Group Talk	Pick 3–4 questions	—	8	10
Joys & Concerns	"I lift up ___ to God." / "Lord, hear our prayer."	10	10	10
Pastoral Prayer	Leader prays over what was shared + send-off	5	5	5

The series thread: every week students fill in one two-sided **Flip Card**: "The world says..." on the front, "Jesus says..." on the back. Tonight is card 1 of 6. Have a few binder rings or hole-punched cards ready so students can start a set.

Supplies

- Flip Cards: copy the card on student page 2 onto cardstock
- Hole punch and a few binder rings (optional)
- Game A: balloons, paper, dice, small candies
- Game B: Slogan Cards (cut from the list)
- Student pages (last 3 pages) · Bibles · pens · timer

Before students arrive

- Choose your games using the Activity Menu
- Read Matthew 5:1–12 slowly, twice
- Think of one time you felt overlooked, or one sad season when God felt close
- Practice the "Speech Nobody Expected" hook out loud once
- Pray for each student by name, especially anyone new

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CHOOSE WHAT FITS YOUR GROUP

Activity Menu

Every group is different. Some nights you have fifteen students bouncing off the walls; some nights you have four quiet ones and a visitor. Pick one or two games, then finish with the response activity. Every game tonight flips something upside down, and every debrief points back to tonight's question.

ACTIVITY	ENERGY	PREP	BEST WHEN…	MIN
A. Last-Place Olympics Silly team events where the scoring is flipped	High	Balloons, paper, dice, candy	Students need to move and laugh; a big group	10–12
B. Flip the Slogan Pairs talk through "the world says" slogans	Medium	Slogan Cards	You want the strongest link to the message and the Flip Cards	10
C. Guess My Happy Scale Rate things 1–5, partners guess your number	Medium	None	Lots of new students; you want people learning real facts fast	8–10
D. Blessed Remix Trios write funny modern "Blessed are…" lines	Low	Paper, pens	Small or quiet group; creative students	8–10
E. The First Flip Response activity (after message)	Reflective	Flip Cards	Every night: the heart of the week; starts the Flip Card set	12

SUGGESTED COMBINATIONS

Big, high-energy group (10–15)

A. Last-Place Olympics → B. Flip the Slogan → Message → E. The First Flip

Small group (4–6)

D. Blessed Remix (whole group) → Message → E. The First Flip in a circle

Lots of first-time visitors

C. Guess My Happy Scale → A. Last-Place Olympics → Message → E. The First Flip (low-pressure option)

Short on time (45 min)

B. Flip the Slogan → Message → E. The First Flip → Joys & Concerns

GROUND RULES FOR EVERY GAME *Nobody is forced to share. Nobody is the punchline. New students get paired with a regular. Tonight's games celebrate "last place" as a joke about rules, never about people: no student is ever ranked, voted off, or called a loser. If a game starts to single someone out, change the round and keep moving.*

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A. Last-Place Olympics

10–12 min · High energy

Purpose: A loud, silly team competition with one twist: every event is scored upside down. The slowest walker wins. The shortest paper airplane wins. The team that gives the most away wins. Between events, teammates answer a quick "Podium Question" about their real lives. Students laugh, move, and get a feel for tonight's big idea before they ever hear it: in Jesus' kingdom, the scoreboard is flipped.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into teams of 3–4. Mix it up: "Find people you don't usually sit with." New students join a team with a regular.
2. The leader announces an **Event** (see the table). Each team sends one player, or the whole team plays, depending on the event.
3. Run the event fast (30–60 seconds). The "winner" is whoever does the opposite of a normal win. Leaders judge, and arguing is encouraged as long as it's funny.
4. After every event, each team huddles and answers the **Podium Question**. Everyone answers in one sentence (about 45 seconds).
5. Play 5–7 events. Give each "winning" team a point. At the end, the team with the **fewest** points wins the whole thing.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Welcome to the Last-Place Olympics! Everything you know about winning is wrong tonight. The slowest wins. The smallest wins. The one who gives the most away wins. And at the very end, the team with the fewest points takes the gold. Confused? Perfect. That's how you know it's working."
>
> "First event: the Slowest Walk. One person from each team, line up on this wall. When I say go, walk to the other wall as slowly as you can. But your feet can never stop moving. If you freeze, you're out. Last one to touch the wall wins. Go!"
>
> "Okay, huddle up. Podium Question: *What's something you're terrible at, but you love doing anyway?*"

EVENTS + PODIUM QUESTIONS

EVENT (THE "LOSER" WINS)	PODIUM QUESTION (EVERYONE ANSWERS)
Slowest Walk: cross the room as slowly as possible, feet always moving	"What's something you're terrible at, but you love doing anyway?"
Shortest Flight: fold a paper airplane in 30 seconds; the shortest flight that still goes forward wins	"What's a time losing turned out to be funny later?"
Give It Away: each team gets 5 candies and has 30 seconds to give them to other teams; fewest left wins	"Who's the most generous person you know? What do they do?"
Silent Cheer: perform a full team cheer with zero sound; leaders pick the best mime	"Who's someone who cheers for you without making a big deal of it?"

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Lowest Roll: each team rolls one die three times; lowest total wins	"What's something small that made your week better?"
Gentlest Handoff: pass a balloon down the team using only elbows; the team with the softest, slowest pass wins	"Who's the gentlest person you know? How do they treat people?"
Back of the Line: each team lines up in birthday order (January first); the team that finishes last wins	"When has someone let you go first? How did it feel?"
Smallest Brag: each team picks its tiniest, least impressive true accomplishment; leaders pick the smallest	"What's an accomplishment of yours that nobody saw?"
Bridge round: "If you could hand out one award to someone the world never notices, who gets it?"	"Why them?" Lead into the debrief.

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Play as one team against the leader. Everyone does each event together and the whole group answers the Podium Question in a circle.
- **Medal ceremony:** Give the "winning" team paper medals that say "LAST" in huge letters. They have to wear them proudly.
- **Student judges:** Let a quieter student be the official judge of one event. They hold the power tonight.

LEADER NOTE *The joke is the rules, never a person. Never pick a single student to "win last," and skip any event that would show who is slowest or weakest at something they care about. Keep candy allergy-safe or use stickers.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "That felt so weird, right? Every time you tried to win, you lost. And the people who usually come in last were suddenly on top. Tonight we're starting a series called Upside Down, and here's the crazy part: Jesus talks about real life like this. He flips the scoreboard. So here's the question for the whole series: **what if Jesus' way really is the better way?**"

B. Flip the Slogan

10 min · Medium energy

Purpose: A pair-and-swap game built on slogans our world repeats all the time: "Look out for number one," "Never let them see you cry." Pairs rate each slogan, tell where they've heard it, and then try to flip it. Students learn what their friends actually believe, and they're already doing tonight's Flip Card work before the message even starts.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Write each slogan from the list on an index card. Give every student one card. New students pair with a regular for the first round.

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2. Everyone finds a partner. Partner one reads their slogan out loud. Both partners hold up fingers: **1** (totally false) to **5** (totally true).
3. Each partner answers the **talk question** on the card in one or two sentences.
4. Together, they come up with the **flip**: what would the upside-down version of that slogan say? Then partner two reads their card and they repeat.
5. When the leader yells **"Flip!"**, partners trade cards and find someone new. Play 4–6 rounds, then share the best flips with the group.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Everybody gets a card with a slogan on it. These are things our world says all the time: on TV, in sports, on posters, maybe at home. Find a partner. Read your slogan, and both of you rate it with your fingers. One means 'totally false.' Five means 'totally true.' Then answer the question on the card. Last step: flip it. What's the upside-down version? When I yell 'Flip,' trade cards and find somebody new."
>
> "I'll go first. My card says, 'Winning is everything.' I'm a three. I like winning, but some of my best memories came from losing. My flip: 'Who you become matters more than what you win.'"

SLOGAN CARDS

THE WORLD SAYS…	TALK QUESTION ON THE CARD
"Look out for number one."	Who looks out for you?
"Never let them see you cry."	Why do you think people hide when they're sad?
"Winning is everything."	What's the best thing you ever lost at?
"Nice guys finish last."	Who's the nicest person you know? Are they "losing"?
"Go big or go home."	What's something small that you love?
"Fake it till you make it."	Where's one place you feel like you have to pretend?
"Don't get mad, get even."	What do you usually do when someone wrongs you?
"More followers, more fun."	How many real friends does a person actually need?
"Only the strong survive."	When has someone gentle helped you more than someone tough?
"You deserve whatever you can get."	What's the best gift you never earned?

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle. Put the cards face down in the middle. Each person draws one, reads it, and the whole group rates it and builds the flip together.
- **Flip wall:** Write the best flips on sticky notes and put them on a wall. Come back to them during the message.
- **Pick your card:** Spread the cards on a table and let students choose one that they actually hear a lot.

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LEADER NOTE *Some students will rate "Never let them see you cry" a five because that's what home or a team has taught them. Don't correct anyone. Just listen. Tonight's message does the flipping.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "Some of those slogans sound pretty true, right? They're everywhere. But tonight we're going to hear Jesus give the first big speech of his ministry, and he flips almost every one of them. He says the people who cry, the gentle ones, the ones who aren't winning, are blessed. That sounds backwards. So keep this question close: **what if Jesus' way really is the better way?**"

C. Guess My Happy Scale

8–10 min · Medium energy

Purpose: A guessing game about what makes people happy. The leader reads something like "a snow day" or "a long car ride," everyone secretly rates it from 1 to 5, and partners try to guess each other's number. It's fast, funny, and great for new students, because they learn real things about people in the room. It sets up the message: when Jesus says "blessed," he's talking about a deep, God-given kind of happy, and his list surprises everyone.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Students sit or stand in pairs or trios, facing each other. Mix regulars with new students.
2. The leader reads a **Happy Thing** from the list. Everyone hides one hand behind their back and secretly holds up 1–5 fingers: 1 = "meh," 5 = "best thing ever."
3. Before revealing, each partner guesses the other's number out loud.
4. On "Reveal!", everyone shows their fingers. A correct guess earns a point. Each person says **why** in one sentence.
5. Play 8–10 rounds. Switch partners halfway. Finish with the Bridge round.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Find a partner. I'm going to read something, and you rate how happy it makes you from one to five, with your fingers behind your back. One is 'meh.' Five is 'best thing ever.' Before you show it, guess your partner's number. Then reveal and tell why. Ready? Number one: a snow day. Rate it… guess… reveal!"

HAPPY THINGS

- A snow day
- The first bite of pizza
- A long car ride
- Finishing a hard test
- A rainy Saturday with nothing to do
- Getting a handwritten note
- Beating a hard level in a game
- Sleeping in until noon
- A surprise party thrown for you
- Helping someone who didn't expect it
- A really good cry after a sad movie
- A friend who just sits with you when you're down

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Bridge round: "Last one. Rate this: being sad, but someone you love shows up for you." Then ask, "Is that happy? Or something else?" Lead into the debrief.

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Everyone guesses the leader's number first, then go around the circle and each person reveals and explains.
- **Hot seat (volunteers only):** One volunteer rates in secret; the whole group guesses. Rotate only if students want a turn.
- **Student list:** Let each pair add one Happy Thing of their own for the group to rate.

LEADER NOTE *The last two items can hit close to home for a grieving student. Keep your tone light and kind, and let anyone pass. A student who says "a friend sitting with me is a five" might be telling you something. Notice it, and check in later if it seems heavy.*

DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "You learned a lot about each other just now. Some of you are snow-day fives; some of you are pizza fives. Most lists of what makes us happy look pretty similar: fun, comfort, winning. But Jesus has a list too, and it's not what anybody expected. It starts with people who are sad. So ask yourself: **what if Jesus' way really is the better way?**"

D. Blessed Remix

8–10 min · Low energy

Purpose: A calm, creative game for small or quiet groups. Trios finish silly, modern "Blessed are…" lines, the way a teenager might write them, then end with a real round about people who have blessed them. It's funny, it gives quiet students a way in, and it gets the rhythm of Jesus' words into the room before the message.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Sit in trios (or one circle for small groups). Each trio gets paper and a pen.
2. The leader reads a **Remix Starter**. Trios have 60 seconds to finish it with a funny "for they shall…" ending.
3. Each trio reads its line out loud. Everyone laughs; nobody judges.
4. After 4–5 rounds, play the **Real Round**: each person finishes, "Blessed are people like ___, because they ___," about a real person in their life (not in the room).
5. Finish with the Bridge question.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Jesus once gave a speech where every line started with 'Blessed are…' We're going to hear it tonight. But first, let's write our own. I'll read the beginning, you finish it with 'for they shall…' Here's mine: 'Blessed are those whose phone dies at two percent, for they shall finally talk to their family.' Your turn."

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REMIX STARTERS

- Blessed are those who get the last slice of pizza…
- Blessed are those who forget their homework…
- Blessed are those stuck in the back seat…
- Blessed are those who wake up before their alarm…
- Blessed are those who laugh at their own jokes…
- Blessed are those who always get picked to clean up…
- Blessed are the little siblings…
- Blessed are those who say "you too" to the waiter…
- Blessed are those who share their fries…
- **Real Round:** Blessed are people like ___, because they ___

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** One circle. The leader reads a starter and anyone can shout an ending. Then everyone does the Real Round.
- **Write your own starters:** Trios invent a starter and pass it to the next trio to finish.

LEADER NOTE *Keep the remix lines kind: jokes about situations, not about people or groups. In the Real Round, model it first with a simple example from your own life, like a teacher, coach, or neighbor who quietly blessed you.*

DEBRIEF

SAY

"Your lines were hilarious. But listen to your Real Round answers. Nobody said, 'Blessed are the famous.' You named people who are kind, who show up, who notice. Jesus' list sounds a lot more like your Real Round than like the cover of a magazine. So here's tonight's question: **what if Jesus' way really is the better way?**"

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Hook: "The Speech Nobody Expected"

2 min

SAY

"Quick question. Imagine you just became the most famous person in the country. Everybody is talking about you. Thousands of people show up to hear your first big speech. You walk up to the microphone. Who do you talk about first?"

(*Let a few students answer: the fans, the winners, my team, my followers.*) "Right. Usually we start with the winners. The champions. The people who made it. That's how award shows work. That's how school assemblies work."

"Jesus was exactly there. Huge crowds were following him. People were climbing a hill just to hear him. And his first words were about people nobody puts on a stage: people who are sad, people who are gentle, people who feel like they've got nothing. It's like he turned the whole world upside down. For the next six weeks, that's our series: Upside Down. And every week we'll ask one question: **what if Jesus' way really is the better way?**"

Message: Blessed Are the Overlooked

10 min

1. Jesus sits down with the crowd

SAY

"Here's where it starts. Jesus has been healing people all over the place, and the crowds are getting enormous. Matthew tells us what he did next:"

[1] *Seeing the multitudes, he went up onto the mountain. When he had sat down, his disciples*
came to him. [2] *He opened his mouth and taught them, saying,*

MATTHEW 5:1–2 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

"Notice: he sits down. In Jesus' day, a teacher sat down when he was about to say something important. So everybody leans in. This is the start of the most famous speech Jesus ever gave. We call it the Sermon on the Mount. And we're about to hear the very first line."

2. The first line is a surprise

[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 gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

MATTHEW 5:3–5 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

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SAY

"'Blessed' means something like deeply happy, or on the receiving end of God's favor. And look who gets it. 'Poor in spirit' means people who know they don't have it all together. People who come to God with empty hands. 'Those who mourn' means people who are grieving, people who are sad. 'The gentle' means people who don't push their way to the front."

"Now, Jesus is not saying sadness is good, or that being poor is good, or that you should try to feel terrible. He's saying something better: if you're in a hard place, you are not forgotten. God sees you, and his kingdom is open to you. The world says, 'Blessed are the people who have it all together.' Jesus says, 'Blessed are the people who know they need God.'"

LEADER NOTE *If you have a short, honest story about a time you felt overlooked, or a sad season when God felt close, tell it here. Thirty seconds is plenty. Keep it simple and finished; don't share something still raw. Students trust leaders who go first.*

3. Jesus keeps flipping the list

SAY

"And Jesus keeps going. Listen to who else he calls blessed:"

6 *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.* 7 *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* 8 *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* 9 *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.* 10 *Blessed are those who have been persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*

MATTHEW 5:6–10 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

"People who are hungry for things to be right. People who forgive. People whose hearts are real, not fake. People who make peace instead of drama. None of these get you famous. None of them win you a trophy. Some of them might even get you laughed at. But Jesus says these people are the ones who are really living."

"And notice something else. Jesus doesn't say, 'Try harder to become these things, and then I'll bless you.' He says, 'Blessed are…' He's announcing good news to people who already feel like they're at the bottom of the list."

4. Upside down is actually right side up

11 *"Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake.* 12 *Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

MATTHEW 5:11–12 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

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SAY

"At the end, Jesus looks right at his friends and says 'you.' Following me won't always make you popular. But you're in good company, and God sees every bit of it. That doesn't mean you should put up with someone hurting you. If someone is bullying or hurting you, tell a trusted adult. Jesus is saying that when you choose his way and it costs you something, you haven't lost. You've gained."

"So here's the twist. We call this the upside-down kingdom. But what if it's not Jesus' kingdom that's upside down? What if it's our world? What if the slogans and scoreboards are the backwards part, and Jesus is turning things right side up? Our memory verse is the very first line: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.' You don't have to have it all together to belong to God. Hold onto this question all week: **what if Jesus' way really is the better way?**"

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E. Response Activity: The First Flip

12 min

Purpose: Help students notice, privately and without shame, where they are in Jesus' list right now, and hear that God's blessing reaches them there. Tonight they also fill in **Flip Card 1**: a small two-sided card with "The world says…" on the front and "Jesus says…" on the back. One new card every week; by Week 6 they'll have a set of six to keep on a ring or in a phone case.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Hold up a Flip Card. Show the front ("The world says…") and the back ("Jesus says…"). Explain: one card a week, six total, theirs to keep. Nobody grades it.
2. **The Upside-Down List:** On student page 1, students read Jesus' list next to what the world usually says. They privately check the line that sounds most like them right now.
3. **Blessed Pairs:** In pairs, each partner shares one line they checked (only what they want to share). Then each prays one sentence for the other: "God, thank you that ___ is not forgotten. Meet them right there."
4. **Flip Card 1:** On the front, students finish "The world says: Blessed are the ___" with what our world usually celebrates. The back already has Jesus' words; students add one line: "For me, this means ___."
5. **My One Step:** Students fill in "My One Step This Week" and the private "Where I Am" box on student page 2.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY (FLIP CARD)**
>
> "This is your first Flip Card. On the front: 'The world says.' On the back: 'Jesus says.' Every week of this series you'll get a new one. By the end you'll have six of them, and they'll fit on a ring or in your phone case. Think of it as your pocket guide to the upside-down kingdom."
>
> **SAY (UPSIDE-DOWN LIST)**
>
> "On your first page, find the Upside-Down List. On the left is what Jesus said. In the middle is what our world usually says. Read through it, and check the line that sounds most like you right now. Maybe you're grieving something. Maybe you're the gentle one who always gets pushed aside. Maybe you're hungry for something to be made right. This is just between you and God. I'll tell you mine: lately, 'poor in spirit' is me."
>
> **SAY (BLESSED PAIRS)**
>
> "Find a partner. Share the line you checked, only if you want to. Then pray one sentence for each other: 'God, thank you that Sam is not forgotten. Meet him right there.' That's it. One sentence."
>
> **SAY (FLIP CARD + ONE STEP)**
>
> "Now grab your Flip Card. On the front, finish this: 'The world says: Blessed are the ___.' What does our world cheer for? The popular? The rich? The ones who never cry? Flip it over. Jesus' words are already there. Add one line: what does that mean for you? Then on page 2, write your one step for this week, and fill in the 'Where I Am' box. Only you see that one."

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"The world says" ideas (read aloud if stuck)

- Blessed are the popular
- Blessed are the rich
- Blessed are the ones who never cry
- Blessed are the loudest
- Blessed are the winners
- Blessed are the ones with the most followers
- Blessed are the ones who have it all together
- Blessed are the ones who get even

Upside-down step ideas

- Sit with or say hi to someone who usually gets overlooked
- Tell God honestly about one thing I'm sad about
- Let someone else go first once a day
- Say Matthew 5:3 before school every morning
- Make peace with one person instead of adding to drama

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle. Each person reads the "world says" line they wrote (or passes) and prays one sentence for the person on their left.
- **Low-pressure option:** Skip the pairs. Students fill in their card privately, and the leader prays one prayer over everyone: "God, thank you that every person here is seen by you, right where they are."
- **No cardstock?** Students cut the card from student page 2, or take a photo of it and keep it in their phone.

LEADER NOTE *Never collect or look at student pages. A student who checks "those who mourn" may be carrying a fresh loss; don't ask for details in front of others, but check in quietly afterward (see the Care Note). Keep extra blank Flip Cards for students who join in a later week; they can start their set with that week's card.*

DEBRIEF

SAY

"Look at your card. The front is what you hear every day. The back is what Jesus says, and it's way better news. You don't have to win, or look perfect, or have it all together to be blessed. Jesus starts with the people at the bottom of the list. **What if Jesus' way really is the better way?** This week, try living like it is."

Small Group Talk

8–10 min · Optional

Groups of 3–5, with one adult or student leader per group if possible. Pick 3–4 questions that fit your group.

WARM UP

1. If you got to hand out one award at school, what would it be for, and who would you want to win it?
   Follow-up: Would it be an award anybody else would think to give?
2. What's something that made you really happy this week, even if it was small?

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Keep it light. It's a warm-up.

GO DEEPER

3. Which line from Jesus' list surprised you most? Why?
   Is there one that sounds like it can't possibly be true?
4. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." What do you think it means to come to God with empty hands?
   Why might that be hard for people who seem to have it all together?
5. Jesus says people who mourn will be comforted. How have you seen God, or people, comfort someone who was sad?
6. Who does our world overlook? At school, online, in our town? What would it look like to treat them the way Jesus does?

TAKE IT HOME

7. Where is one place this week you could live like Jesus' way is the better way?
8. Who could you ask to remind you of your Flip Card this week?

LEADER NOTE *Silence is okay. Count to seven in your head before rephrasing. If no one answers, answer it yourself briefly and honestly, then ask again. If question 5 brings up a loss, slow down, thank the student, and don't rush to fix it.*

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Joys & Concerns

10 min

Purpose: Students practice praying *for each other*, not just hearing about prayer. Tonight it fits the theme: Jesus said those who mourn will be comforted, and one way God comforts people is through a group that listens and prays.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Sit in a circle if you can. Explain the response: when someone shares, they end with **"I lift up ___ to God."** Everyone responds together: **"Lord, hear our prayer."**
2. Start with **joys** (things to thank God for), then move to **concerns** (things we're worried about or carrying).
3. The leader goes first to model it, with one joy and one concern.
4. Anyone can share, or pass. "Unspoken" requests are welcome, too.
5. Jot down what's shared (first names only) so you can pray for each one in the Pastoral Prayer.

LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Jesus said sad people are not forgotten. They'll be comforted. So let's be part of that right now. What's something good you're thankful for? Or something you're carrying, for you, your family, or a friend?"
>
> "When you share, end with 'I lift up ___ to God.' And all of us will say together, 'Lord, hear our prayer.' Let's practice. I lift up this group to God..." (*All: "Lord, hear our prayer."*)
>
> "I'll go first. My joy is ___. I lift up ___ to God. My concern is ___. I lift up ___ to God."

Joy starters (if students are stuck)

- A great day with friends
- Something I finished or did well this week
- An unexpected kindness
- Someone I love got good news

Concern starters

- A test, a project, or a stressful week
- Someone I miss, or someone who is sick
- A friend who's going through something
- "I have an unspoken request."

VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Go around the circle so everyone gets a turn, and everyone is allowed to pass.
- **Big group (12+):** "Popcorn" style: anyone shares when ready. Cap it at about 8 minutes.
- **Written version:** Students write joys and concerns on slips of paper. The leader reads them (no names) and the group responds.

LEADER NOTE *Say once at the start: "What's shared here stays here, unless someone's safety is at risk." That includes no screenshots, posts, or texts about what someone shared. If a student shares something serious, thank them, pray, and follow up privately afterward (see the Care Note).*

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Pastoral Prayer

3–5 min

Pray this over the group. The **[bracketed]** lines are where you name the joys and concerns students just shared.

Jesus, our King,

Thank you for every person in this room, especially anyone here for the very first time tonight. Thank you that nobody here is overlooked by you.

Thank you for the good things you've given us this week. *[Name the joys shared: "Thank you for Maya's good news, for Chris's great week..."]* Every good gift comes from you.

We bring you what we're carrying. *[Name the concerns: "Comfort Ethan's family. Give Sophia peace about her test on Friday..."]* And hold the things we didn't say out loud too.

Jesus, you told the world that the poor in spirit, the grieving, and the gentle are not forgotten. When we feel empty, meet us there. When we're sad, comfort us. When the world tells us to push to the front, teach us your gentle, upside-down way. Help us notice the people everyone else walks past, and treat them the way you treat us.

Help anyone new here feel at home. And this week, help each of us find out that your way really is the better way.

In Jesus' name, amen.

SEND-OFF

"Take your student pages home. Keep your Flip Card in your phone case, on your mirror, or on a ring. It's card 1 of 6. Next time Jesus tells ordinary people like us what we already are. It's called **'Salt and Light.'** And every week we'll keep asking: **what if Jesus' way really is the better way?** See you then."

Next Week Follow-Up: Open Week 2 with: "If you were here last week, pull out your Flip Card. What did your front say? How did your one step go?" Celebrate any try and laugh about the slips (leaders too). Have blank Flip Cards ready for new students.

Care Note for Leaders

Watch for students who are grieving, under money stress at home, feeling invisible, bullied, or sure they must be perfect to be loved. Respond calmly, never ask for details in front of others, and never call grief or hardship good in itself.

- **Grief:** Listen, skip the clichés, tell parents, keep checking in. **Bullying:** Matthew 5:11 never means putting up with mistreatment; help them tell a trusted adult.
- **Abuse or danger: Don't promise to keep secrets** if someone's safety is at risk. Follow your church's safety policy and mandatory reporting rules, and tell your lead pastor the same day.
- **Connect them to trained help:** parents or guardians, a school counselor, or a licensed counselor. In the U.S., anyone can call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) any time.

You're not expected to be a counselor. Listen well, take it seriously, and connect them to the right people.

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THE FULL SERIES

UPSIDE DOWN · 6 Weeks

Each week stands alone, so new students can jump in any week. Taught in order, the six weeks walk through the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 to 7), where Jesus turns the world's ideas upside down: who is blessed, how to make a difference, how to love hard people, faith that is not for show, judging, and asking a good Father. The question every week: *What if Jesus' way really is the better way?*

#	WEEK	TEXT
1	**Blessed Are...** The upside-down kingdom	Matthew 5:1–12
2	**Salt and Light** Making a difference	Matthew 5:13–16
3	**Love Your Enemies** Loving the hard people	Matthew 5:38–48
4	**In Secret** Faith that is not for show	Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18
5	**Logs and Specks** Judging others	Matthew 7:1–5
6	**Ask, Seek, Knock** A Father who gives good gifts	Matthew 7:7–11

Every week includes

- 45 / 60 / 75-minute schedules
- Activity Menu with 4+ game options
- Word-for-word leader scripts
- Scripture (World English Bible) and one big idea
- Response activity + "One Step" challenge
- A new Flip Card every week
- Tiered discussion questions
- Joys & Concerns prayer time
- Pastoral prayer with space for your group
- Student pages and 5-day devotional
- Next-week follow-up

Built for real youth groups

These weeks are written for a real Wednesday night group: 5 to 15 students, often with a new face or two, led by a pastor or volunteer with limited prep time. Games never single anyone out. Every activity has a small-group version. And every leader script can be read word for word when you're short on time.

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Purchasers may photocopy and share the student pages and leader guide for use within their own church or ministry.
Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (public domain).

Name: _____ Date: _____

TONIGHT'S BIG IDEA

Jesus calls blessed the people the world overlooks. His kingdom starts upside down.

JESUS SAID · MATTHEW 5:3–5

"Blessed are the _____ in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of _____."

"Blessed are those who _____, for they shall be _____."

"Blessed are the _____, for they shall inherit the earth."

THE UPSIDE-DOWN LIST

Private, just you and God. Read what Jesus said next to what the world usually says. **Check** the one line that sounds most like you right now.

JESUS SAYS, "BLESSED ARE…"	THE WORLD USUALLY SAYS…	ME?
the poor in spirit (5:3)	"Have it all together."	☐
those who mourn (5:4)	"Never let them see you cry."	☐
the gentle (5:5)	"Push your way to the front."	☐
those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (5:6)	"Just look out for yourself."	☐
the merciful (5:7)	"Don't get mad, get even."	☐
the pure in heart (5:8)	"Fake it till you make it."	☐
the peacemakers (5:9)	"Pick a side and win."	☐
those persecuted for righteousness' sake (5:10)	"Just go along with the crowd."	☐

FLIP IT

The world says I'm blessed when _____

Jesus says I'm blessed even when _____

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My One Step

MY ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Every _____ (morning / at school / lunch / bedtime)

I will live upside down by _____

Example: "Every day at lunch, I will notice one person who usually gets overlooked and say hi."

My Flip Card · Week 1

The world says: Blessed are the

_____

Copy it onto the front of your card below.

Where I Am (only you see this)

The line from Jesus' list that sounds like me:

_____

One overlooked person I could notice:

_____

MY WEEK TRACKER

Check each day you did your step.

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

MY PRAYER LIST

Write down the joys and concerns people shared tonight (first names only) and keep praying this week.

JOYS: THANK YOU, GOD, FOR…	CONCERNS: PLEASE BE WITH…

MY FLIP CARD · WEEK 1

✂ Cut out along the dashed line, fold in the middle, punch the circle, and add it to your ring or phone case. A new card every week; Week 6 completes your set.

FRONT · WEEK 1 · BLESSED ARE…

PUNCH HERE

The world says:

Blessed are the _____

_____

Flip Card 1 · Blessed Are…

BACK · FLIP IT OVER

Jesus says:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

MATTHEW 5:3

For me, this means _____

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5 Days Upside Down

TAKE-HOME DEVOTIONAL · 5 MINUTES A DAY

Each day: read the verse, think about the question, write one honest sentence. That's it.

DAY 1 Matthew 5:3 · Empty hands

"Poor in spirit" means coming to God without pretending you have it all together. What's one thing you can stop pretending about with God today?

DAY 2 Matthew 5:4 and Psalm 34:18 · Not forgotten

"Yahweh is near to those who have a broken heart." What's something you're sad about, big or small? Tell God about it honestly.

DAY 3 Matthew 5:5 and 11:29 · Gentle is strong

Jesus said, "I am gentle and humble in heart." Where is one place today you could be gentle instead of pushing to the front?

DAY 4 Matthew 5:7–9 · Mercy and peace

Is there someone you need to forgive, or a fight you could help calm down? What's one peacemaker move you could make this week?

DAY 5 Matthew 20:16 · Last and first

"So the last will be first, and the first last." Who is someone the world puts last? How could you put them first today?

A prayer you can pray this week

Jesus, thank you that I don't have to have it all together to belong to you. When I'm empty, fill me. When I'm sad, comfort me. Teach me your upside-down way, and help me see the people everyone else walks past. Amen.

Next week · Week 2: **Salt and Light**

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