

Confessing the Beatitudes

2011–2012 *Horizons* Bible Study by Margaret Aymer

Workshop for Leaders

By Y. Dianna Wright

What Is This?

A lesson plan for leaders to use in introducing *Confessing the Beatitudes* to Presbyterian women or any group planning to use this study

Who Is This For, and Why?

- Bible study leaders can use this workshop at a gathering of Presbyterian women or any group in the congregation, to introduce the study and generate interest and enthusiasm for upcoming study sessions.
- Bible study leaders also can use this workshop at a gathering of Presbyterian women in the presbytery, to introduce the study to leaders at the congregational level.

Main Idea

In *Confessing the Beatitudes*, author Margaret Aymer focuses on the teachings of Jesus in *Matthew* and *Luke*, helping readers connect faith with daily life. By accompanying readers through a process of reflection and confession, she addresses some of the most difficult issues facing the world today: the economy, hunger, poverty, Christian community, water issues, a woman's role in society, faith and public life, and justice and peace. This workshop will help you get acquainted with *Confessing the Beatitudes* and help you prepare to lead a group of participants through the study.

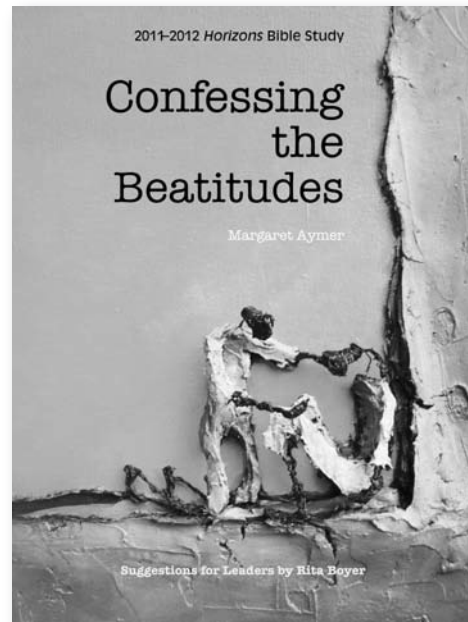
Learning Objectives

Utilizing this workshop, participants will

1. compare the beatitudes found in *Matthew* with those found in *Luke*;
2. review key contextual questions about the Beatitudes;
3. explore the concept of confession and consider the importance of group confession;
4. survey a summary chart of lesson content; and
5. discover resources and helps contained in the study book and on the *Horizons* web site.

Materials Needed

- Bibles
- Hymnals
- Newsprint and markers
- Copies of the *Confessing the Beatitudes* study
- Copies of the Group Confession Worksheet (found on page 78 of the Bible study)
- Copies of the Lesson Summary Chart handout



Lesson Plan

1. Gathering the Community

Before participants gather, create a worship center similar to those described in each lesson at the beginning of the Suggestions for Leaders. Place an open Bible and a candle in your worship center. Ask participants to come together; light the candle, using the Christ-candle liturgy on page 7. Say, “We are about to take a fascinating look at the beatitudes that Jesus shared with the people of his day. As we will soon learn, Jesus spoke the Beatitudes to two different audiences. In *Matthew 5:1–12*, Jesus has a conversation with his disciples that is often called the Sermon on the Mount. In it, he shares nine beatitudes. In *Luke 6:20–26*, Jesus is teaching a crowd of people. Sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain, this passage contains four beatitudes similar to those found in *Matthew*, along with four accompanying woes. This study follows the order of the beatitudes in *Matthew* and places alongside them those found in *Luke*. Each lesson of the study ends by inviting us into a process of confession. The author makes her confession, then invites us to create a group confession. As we begin this study, know that the author is most excited about the process of group confession because it can help us make the Beatitudes part of our journey of discipleship,

moving us from confession to action. So, as our author says, “Come, let us confess the Beatitudes!”

2. Exploring What We Know

Place two sheets of newsprint on separate sections of a wall in the room. Divide participants into two teams. Give each team three minutes to write as many of the Beatitudes on the newsprint as they can recall. If you have a large group, you may want to create more than two teams. Call the group back together and ask a volunteer to read the text from *Matthew* and *Luke*. Give points to each team for each beatitude they named.

Say, “The author reminds us that the Beatitudes are quite familiar to many Christians. What are some of your impressions of the Beatitudes? What do they mean to you?” Give participants a few minutes to discuss in small groups of two or three.

The Beatitudes in *Matthew* and *Luke*

Make copies of the chart below to hand out to participants. Say, “As we continue to reflect on the meaning of the Beatitudes, this chart will help you see how the passages in *Matthew* and *Luke* relate to each other. Additional scriptures assigned to each lesson are noted. Keep this guide close as you progress through the study.”

Lesson	<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Luke</i>	Other
One	5:3	6:20, 24	
Two	5:4	6:21b; 25b	
Three	5:5		<i>Psalm 37</i>
Four	5:6	6:21a; 25a	<i>Psalm 107:1–9</i>
Five	5:7	10:25–37	
Six	5:8		<i>Psalm 24; 51:1–12</i>
Seven	5:9		<i>James 2:15–16</i>
Eight	5:10; 13:20–21		<i>Romans 8:31–39</i>
Nine	5:11–12; 23:29–36	6:22–23	

In *Matthew*, there are nine beatitudes. In the first four (what the author notes as the first verse), Jesus describes a group of people we are called to honor—the destitute, the mourners, the humbled, and those famished for food and justice. In the last five (the second verse), we also are called to honor those who show mercy, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those persecuted for the sake of justice, and those who put their honor on the line for Christ’s sake.

In *Luke*, Jesus shares four beatitudes and four woes. Here, Jesus calls us to honor the destitute, the weepers, those who are famished, and those who put their honor on the line for Christ’s sake. Through his four reproaches, Jesus says “shame on you” to those who are affluent, those who laugh at or mock others, those who are stuffed or physically satisfied, and those who place their reputations above the needs of others.

3. Approaching the Beatitudes

Direct participants to Lesson One, page 7, **Setting the Scene: A Word About Context**. Remind participants that any time we do a study of scripture, it is important that we consider the context of the scripture. Review the contextual information below with participants. (You also can refer to information found in the Introduction to the study and Lesson One.)

- **What?**

What kind of writing is this? While we know that the Beatitudes often are identified as teachings of Christ, the author of our study also identifies the Beatitudes as poetry. Jesus uses parallels to explain his teachings in more detail, and, as we see in *Luke*, he also utilizes opposites (blessings and woes/honoring and shaming). Direct participants to Lessons Four and Eight for more information.

- **Where?**

Where was Jesus when he spoke the Beatitudes? In *Matthew*, Jesus delivers the Beatitudes from a mountain. He is having a private conversation with his disciples. In *Luke*, Jesus is in a valley, preaching to a crowd of people who have come to be healed from disease and unclean spirits. Our author reminds us that the crowd in *Luke* is mostly comprised of people who are destitute. Remind participants of the importance of keeping these two groups distinct, paying special attention to how Jesus addresses each, as they go through the study.

- **When?**

When did Jesus teach the Beatitudes and what was going on at the time? Jesus is in Roman-occupied Palestine. Our author notes that Rome brought many in Palestine into a system of oppression. Famine, poverty, and economic injustice were the experience of many in Jesus’ audiences. It is in the context of the cruelty of Rome that Jesus lives and teaches. In *Matthew*, the teaching of the Beatitudes occurs at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. In *Luke*, Jesus has been traveling, preaching, and healing for some time before he gives the Sermon on the Plain.

- **Why?**

Why did Jesus teach the Beatitudes? Jesus uses these sayings to teach his disciples and followers about honor. In Lesson One, our author tells us that the phrase we traditionally hear as “Blessed are . . .” is better translated, “How honorable are . . .” Jesus is teaching the people of his day (and us!) how to be disciples. By identifying the people whom *Jesus* honors and whom *God* honors, we begin to understand how *we* are to live in relationship with *all* our neighbors. These teachings begin long sections in both *Matthew* and *Luke* of instructions on how people of faith should live. Not only do the Beatitudes reflect Rome’s cruelty, they also reveal the good news of God’s justice and grace.

As you conclude your presentation of this contextual information, ask participants to gather in groups of two or three and share with each other how their initial impressions of the Beatitudes might be affected by hearing this overview of the context of the Beatitudes. How do they think this information might help them in their study of the Beatitudes? Bring the entire group back together and share insights.

4. Confession

Place another piece of blank newsprint on the wall. Make two columns on the paper. Write **Individual** on one side and **Corporate** on the other. Say, “One of the most unique aspects of this study is the focus the author places on confession. When you think of confession, what typically comes to mind?” As participants respond, keep track of how many times people mention confession in an individual sense and how many times it is mentioned in a community or corporate sense. Simply place hash marks in each column.

Say, “We often think of confession as something an individual does—something between that individual and God. And many times, we think of confession only in connection with sin. On page 4 of our study, though, our author presents confession to us in a way that might not be as familiar. Let’s read her words together.” Ask a volunteer to read the section on page 4 titled **Confessing the Beatitudes**. Then have another volunteer read the information in the box titled **Creating a Group Confession**. Say, “Let’s think for a minute about understanding confession as an opportunity to speak the truth. Our author says on page 10 that ‘Confession marks Christians as a people who recognize the truth, learn more about the truth, and speak the truth—both about God and about ourselves.’ Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Take a few minutes to discuss with your neighbor.”

As you call the group back together, say “Recall that, through the Beatitudes, Jesus is teaching the people of his day (and us!) how to be disciples. By identifying the people whom *Jesus* honors and whom *God* honors, we begin to understand how *we* are to live in relationship with *all* our neighbors. How might creating a confession together help us better become the people of God?” As participants respond, write their ideas on a sheet of newsprint on the wall.

Place another sheet of newsprint on the wall next to your brainstorming, and say, “It sometimes is challenging to think of things in new ways. It often helps to just jump right in and begin practicing what is new. Let’s jump into this new understanding of confession, and see how we might create a group confession, even in this introduction to *Confessing the Beatitudes*. You’ll find great information from our author on pages 10–12 of the study. In addition, our Suggestions for Leaders author has developed a step-by-step process for us.” Hand out copies of the Group Confession Worksheet found on page 78 of the Bible study.

Say, “In each lesson, our author will share her confession with us, showing us the way to proceed in our own confession.” Ask a volunteer to read the author’s first confession, found on page 11, last paragraph. Say,

“Now that we have heard from our author, let’s look at the Group Confession Worksheet and try to respond to one step in the process: after reviewing the Beatitudes and this new process of confession, what is the truth we feel led to tell about God and God’s gracious ways? I’ll write down all our thoughts on the newsprint, and whenever we come together, I’ll put this up so we can look back on the ways that we saw God moving among us today.” Allow participants time to think and respond. Remind them that, though this process may feel intimidating, it will provide them with a beautiful opportunity to seek God’s will for them in their lives—as individuals and in community.

5. Engaging the Study

Say, “Now that we’ve explored the Beatitudes and the concept of group confession, let’s review some of the special features of the study, and look at some charts that might help you during your time with the Beatitudes.” Invite participants to open their studies and flip through them casually, paying attention to the topics of each lesson, and pointing out scriptures and Key Ideas identified at the beginning of each lesson. Review the symbols on page 5 of the Introduction, and ask participants to scan the study again, looking for the symbols in each lesson. Using the charts, tables, and information below, discuss how using these added features of the study will add to the group’s experience of the text.

What?! You Expect Me To Learn Greek?

Direct participants to the box on page 8, and encourage them to embrace the exciting opportunity our author provides for us in sharing the original language of the Beatitudes. In nearly every lesson, the author identifies the original Greek, Hebrew, and Latin words pertinent to our study of the Beatitudes. Make copies of the language chart on page 5 to hand out to participants. Encourage them to keep it close as they read scripture and work their way through the study.

Language Chart

Lesson	Word	Language	Meaning
One	<i>makarios</i>	Greek	How honorable
One	<i>ptōchoi</i>	Greek	The destitute—those who are poor and unable to support themselves through work
One	<i>plousioi</i>	Greek	The affluent—those who are so rich they do not have to work
Two	<i>penthountes</i>	Greek	The mourners
Two	<i>klaiontes</i>	Greek	The weepers
Two	<i>gelōntes</i>	Greek	The laughers, the mockers or scorners
Three	<i>praeis</i>	Greek	The meek or humble
Three	<i>latifundia</i>	Latin	A large farm created by taking the farms of poor peasants and then turning the peasants into laborers on their own lands
Four	<i>peinontes</i>	Greek	The famished
Four	<i>dikaiosyne</i>	Greek	Justice, but often translated “righteousness”
Four	<i>chortazo</i>	Greek	Fed or pastured
Four	<i>empimplemi</i>	Greek	Stuffed or filled all the way up
Five	<i>eleos</i>	Greek	Mercy—for Jewish Christians, it meant steadfast love, and for Gentile Christians, it meant pity or clemency
Six	<i>katharos</i>	Greek	Genuine, clean, unmixed and pure
Seven	<i>shalom</i>	Hebrew	Wholeness, well-being, peace
Eight	<i>paterfamilias</i>	Latin	The oldest male, head of the family
Eight	<i>inclusio</i>	Latin	Repetition of the first and last phrases of a poem

After giving participants a minute to review the chart, and the language boxes in each lesson, ask “What do you think about reading some of the original words used in Jesus’ time? Is it important to you to take the time to learn these words and consider their meaning? Why or why not?” Discuss as a group.

Art

Say, “The art for this study is particularly striking. We even have a brief statement from the artist describing each lesson piece. Spend some time looking at these images. Which stand out to you? How do such vivid images affect the way you think about each particular beatitude? How does the artist’s statement affect you?”

If your group is willing, invite them to physically try to reproduce some of the scenes from the art. Explain that sometimes people are best able to relate to the written word by trying to embody it. As they attempt a few scenes, ask them how it feels to

- stand alone as one of the destitute (Lesson One)
- sit in great sorrow, yet know Jesus is with them (Lesson Two)
- be shown mercy and to be the one extending mercy (Lesson Five)
- physically bring people together to make peace (Lesson Seven)
- stand apart from others because they are standing up for Christ (Lesson Nine)

Make copies of the chart on page 7 to hand out to participants. It provides excellent summary information, and participants may want to tuck it into their copy of the study.

As you conclude your time together, say “The author invites us to make the Beatitudes a part of our journey of discipleship as we move from confession to action. Let us embrace this opportunity with open hearts and willing spirits!”

6. Resources and Additional Helps

Various pages throughout the study highlight additional resources for Bible study participants. Be sure to tell participants about the web resources listed below, and direct them to the back cover of the Bible study for more information, as well. Make sure to highlight:

- *Confessing the Beatitudes* companion DVD—Order information is on the back cover and below!
- Web Resources—Visit <http://horizons.pcusa.org/bible.htm> for
 - ♦ Lesson handouts to accompany the Suggestions for Leaders lesson plans
 - ♦ Videos of the author, Margaret Aymer, talking about various aspects of the study (available March 2011)
 - ♦ A link to the *Confessing the Beatitudes* blog—the author, Margaret Aymer, will blog about each lesson monthly, from August 2011–May 2012

***Confessing the Beatitudes* Companion DVD!**

How would you like to learn about the *Confessing the Beatitudes* study from the author herself? Now is your chance! In nine videos that correspond to the nine lessons of *Confessing the Beatitudes*, author Margaret Aymer will teach each lesson of the study, adding additional insights and leaving you with questions and discussions to consider in your group. In bonus videos, Margaret also will guide you through sample steps to creating a group confession and teach you more about the Accra Confession. The DVD includes lesson summaries that review important aspects of each lesson, and a main points outline for each lesson. As a final bonus, you’ll receive a role-playing piece called “The Faces of the Beatitudes: Skits from the Time of Jesus.” Though fictional, these role-playing skits provide important, often humorous insights into the New Testament world in which Jesus taught the Beatitudes. Ideal for personal devotion *and* for public performance! HZN11103; \$20.00. Order from Presbyterian Distribution Service, 800/524-2612. Price does not include shipping and handling (10% of order total, \$5.25 minimum, \$65.00 maximum). Available summer 2011.

Lesson	Scripture	Accra	Focus	Hymns/Music
One	<i>Matthew 5:3;</i> <i>Luke 6:20, 24</i>	Para. 7-11; pages 79-80	Honor those who are destitute and hopeless; recognize who we are and who Christ calls us to be	“The Cry of the Poor— <i>Psalms 34</i> ” and “ <i>Cuando el Pobre</i> ” (PH 407)
Two	<i>Matthew 5:4;</i> <i>Luke 6:21b; 25b</i>	Para. 1-4, 28-29; pages 79 and 81	Honor those who mourn; consider the ways our lifestyles might make others mourn and weep	“I Want Jesus to Walk with Me” (PH 363)
Three	<i>Matthew 5:5;</i> <i>Psalms 37</i>	Para. 24-30; pages 81-82	Honor those who are humbled, who rely on God and are not arrogant; honor those who face the wicked daily with no recourse except God	“I Love the Lord, Who Heard My Cry” (PH 362); also see p. 85
Four	<i>Matthew 5:6;</i> <i>Luke 6:21a, 25a;</i> <i>Psalms 107:1-9</i>	Para. 28-33; pages 81-82	Honor our sisters and brothers who are famished, knowing they are of special concern to God	
Five	<i>Matthew 5:7;</i> <i>Luke 10:25-37</i>	Para. 26-33; pages 81-82	Feel, act, and dedicate ourselves to those in need; see the needs of the world, act upon those needs, and dedicate ourselves to addressing those needs	“Beatitudes” by Sweet Honey in the Rock; see p. 85
Six	<i>Matthew 5:8;</i> <i>Psalms 24;</i> <i>Psalms 51: 1-12</i>	Para. 1-4, 37; pages 79 and 82	Honor (and strive to become) those who are willing to wrestle with God and be changed; consider our own complicities in those unjust systems of economic globalization; live prophetically in our individual and corporate lives	“Create in Me a Clean Heart”; see p. 85
Seven	<i>Matthew 5:9;</i> <i>James 2:15-16</i>	Para. 5-8, 16-21; pages 79-81	Honor (and strive to become) peacemakers, living into our identity as children of God; bring violence against one another to an end; work for the cessation of all forms of violence	“O Day of Peace” (PH 450), “Canto de Esperanza” (PH 432); also see p. 85
Eight	<i>Matthew 5:10;</i> <i>13:20-21;</i> <i>Romans 8:31-39</i>	Para. 17-36, (focus on 35); pages 80-82	Honor (and strive to become) those who follow Christ even in the face of persecution, for the sake of justice; trusting that, in times of trial, the Spirit of God will be with us	“Guide My Feet” (PH 354); also see p. 85
Nine	<i>Matthew 5:11-12;</i> <i>23:29-36;</i> <i>Luke 6:22-23</i>	Entire confession; pages 79-82	Honor (and strive to become) those who live into the outrageous joy that marks us as citizens of the dominion of heaven, brothers and sisters of Christ	“I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” (PH 364)

Order Form

To order, call Presbyterian Distribution Service—800/524-2612 (9 AM–7 PM, EST, Monday–Friday)—or complete and mail in the order form below.

TITLE	PDS#	QTY	PRICE	SUBTOTAL
2011–2012 Horizons Bible study, Confessing the Beatitudes by Margaret Aymer				
English edition—with Suggestions for Leaders by Rita Boyer	HZN11100		\$8.00	\$
Ecumenical edition	HZN11102		\$8.00	\$
Korean edition—Translated by Kwangae Yoon with Suggestions for Leaders by Hyecheon Yoon	HZN11120		\$8.00	\$
Spanish edition	HZN11110		\$8.00	\$
Large-print edition	HZN11150		\$12.00	\$
Audio CD edition—Slightly abridged version; no Suggestions for Leaders	HZN11172		\$15.00/set	\$
<i>Confessing the Beatitudes</i> Companion DVD—Margaret Aymer teaches each lesson of the study and includes questions and discussions to consider for your group. Also includes lesson summaries, main points outline for each lesson and role-playing skits.	HZN11103		\$20.00	\$
Workshop for Leaders—An introduction to this Bible study	HZN11101		free	
Pendant/charm—features Ann Kim’s art inspired by the fifth beatitude	HZN11300		\$10.00	\$
Promotional poster	HZN11410		free	
Bulletin cover	Available for free download only at http://horizons.pcusa.org .			
<i>Horizons</i> magazine	Call 866/802-3635 or subscribe online at www.pcusa.org/horizons .			
			SUBTOTAL	
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			TOTAL	

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