

Exploring the Beatitudes: A short guide for leaders

Before you begin

Exploring the Beatitudes can be used by established groups or by a group formed especially to engage with the material together.

If you are working with either kind of small group, this short guide may be helpful.

In all work with groups, it is helpful to share leadership with others and to meet and plan the sessions.

You will need to work through how to gather the group together, the practical arrangements, the leading of the sessions and how to manage feedback from the group to the wider diocese.

Practical Questions

You will need a comfortable, accessible room, the right size for the number of people, where the group will feel relaxed and able to talk together.

You will need a copy of the Beatitudes book for each person. Ideally these can be given out before the group meets.

You will also need access to a computer, television or screen if you are going to use the short films and a way of playing back the audio recordings. The films and audio clips can be downloaded from the website if required.

It is helpful to have refreshments at the beginning and/or end of the meeting: tea and coffee, or a simple meal together.

Gathering the group

If you are an established home group, it may be helpful to invite others to join you for these three sessions. If that does happen remember that you effectively become a new group and will need to take care to welcome and include those who are new.

If you are gathering a group simply to explore this material then it is helpful for the invitations to be both public and personal. Overleaf is a notice you might use in the pew sheet or print on a flier.

Those leading should follow it up with personal invitations. Remember to ask a broad range of people.

Bishop Steven has asked the whole Diocese of Oxford to listen deeply to the Beatitudes in Matthew's gospel this year as we think about the call to be a more Christ-like Church: to be more contemplative, more compassionate and more courageous.

As a church, we are gathering a number of small groups to explore the Beatitudes together, using material specially written for this purpose. The groups will be meeting on the following dates, at these times and venues:

Please do join us and sign up either by email or on the list at the back of the church.

Remember to offer support with lifts on the night if needed and sitters if practical help is required.

Leading the Sessions

The sessions are easy to follow and guidelines are in the text of the booklet. The following is a sample timing for a 90-minute session.

Worship and prayer In your own style or following the simple order in the book	10 mins
Conversation In pairs and then together	10 mins
Film to introduce the topic	5 mins
Dwelling in the Word	25 mins
Reflection: either read the text or listen to the audio	5 mins
Discussion questions	20 mins
Moving forward	10 mins
Closing prayers	5 mins

You will see that most of the time is given to group conversation and interaction. This will need to be gently chaired and steered through the evening.

At the beginning of the first session there may be a need for introductions as part of the opening conversations. You may want to ask people to explain to their conversation partner who they are and why they have come. It's sometimes easier to ask each partner to introduce the other rather than for everyone to speak for themselves.

Managing feedback

As we explore these themes together, we want to learn as much as we can from one another. It would be great to hear what you are learning and also for your group to be able to access other people's insights.

You can do that by:

- sending an email to commonvision@oxford.anglican.org
- filling in the form on our website <https://oxford.anglican.org/commonvision>
(click the tab called 'your thoughts' to complete the form)

Caring for the group

Any act of Christian learning can be powerful and transformative but also throw up new and challenging questions.

Watch out for the group as you engage with the material, particularly for any who seem vulnerable or challenged.

And to follow...

There are many ways to follow up these conversations. There will be another three-session course available in good time for Lent, based on the story of the raising of Lazarus. This material is written in the style of the Pilgrim course. Pilgrim offers eight six-week courses for small groups and is available from <http://www.pilgrimcourse.org/>

May God bless you and your group as you make this journey together,

+Steven Oxford