» Who is blessed or fortunate?

» Imagine how the disciples reacted to teachings. Was this good news for them?

» What attitude does this blessing confront in the Roman world?

» What opposite blessing would that world offer?

» How did Jesus exemplify this beatitude? Think of an account in the Gospels that illustrates this characteristic.
Consciousness Examen for the Beatitudes
(Refer to Adult Bible Study, p. 30, #1).

- In this time, reflect silently on one or more of the blessings in Matthew 5:1-12.
- Imagine Jesus (or God) being with you, wrapping you in love and compassion.
- Recall recent times you practiced this value and how fortunate you felt. Express your gratitude.
- Recall times you “messed up” and needed an attitude adjustment. Express your regrets and ask for forgiveness.
- Reflect on the evidence around you that makes you sad: people you know who are falling short of God’s expectations, or people who feel insignificant, or are suffering because of an injustice. Pray for wisdom to know what to say and do to bring healing and hope.
- Listen for Jesus’ words of comfort, forgiveness, or counsel. Be aware of God’s unconditional love and acceptance.
Interacting with God’s Story and Vision

A. Living the Beatitudes now

Using the same groups, consider what each blessing means for Christians today. Draw from these questions in this section.

» What modern-day language would you use?
» Is the “reward” that Jesus offers worth it for us?
» How does living this blessing fly in the face of common sense or conventional wisdom?

Note the verb tenses in the Beatitudes. Most are future tense, meaning that God will reward faithful living but not necessarily in this lifetime.

» Does such delayed gratification work in our society?
» Does God’s way of poverty, simplicity, meekness, mercy, purity, and peace in any way appeal to people today?

List some practical attitudes and behaviors that express this value.

» Whom do we know who exemplifies this characteristic?
» How can we advocate for people who are poor in spirit, meek, and so forth?
» How would your congregation or community be transformed if everyone adopted this value as part of their daily living?
» What might be some risks, challenges, or benefits of living this way?

B. Illustrate a blessing

Using the art supplies, create a picture, symbol, poem, or story to illustrate what the Beatitudes mean to you.

C. Corporate challenge

How does your congregation measure up when it comes to upside-down living? Use Matthew 5:1-12 (ABS, p. 27) to “rate” the congregation on each Beatitude with a rating between 1 and 5—1 meaning “awesome” and 5 meaning “we could do a lot better.” Share and compare the results. Give examples of how your congregation is already living in God’s countercultural ways. Then address the blessings that need more attention.

» How might God be calling us to practice this value with more intention?
» If everyone lived this value with sincerity and integrity, what difference would it make in our church and community?

Imagine your church as an agent of transformation in the world, using the Beatitudes as your mission statement. Refer to ABS, page 31, #2 to consider the skills needed in encountering the world. Pray for discernment in knowing how your congregation can be God’s blessing in your neighborhood and beyond.

D. Living with suffering

Darling encourages us to examine the hardships we face in life (ABS, p. 31, #3) and discover what lessons can be learned.

» Share a personal experience of hardship or suffering. What did you learn?
» Where was God in the experience?
» Some people blame themselves when they come into hard times; others do not take any personal responsibility. Can you think of examples when either situation is valid?
» How do we deal with people, including ourselves, when the suffering is brought about by circumstances beyond our control or happens to someone who doesn’t “deserve” it, such as a debilitating illness, an accident, a victim of domestic violence, a war immigrant?
» How do the Beatitudes inform how we respond to suffering?