

Lesson 13: Introduction to Blessings and Gratitude

Welcome to the summer season and Via Positiva! This is the time when we focus on all the wonderful things life has to offer! This year, our theme is Blessings and Gratitude. Today's lesson will serve as an introduction to the unit.

You can begin by simply asking the kids what the word "blessing" means to them and what the word "gratitude" means to them. In general, a blessing is something that makes you feel happy, healthy, and fortunate. Some people believe that blessings come from God. And the word "gratitude" simply means being thankful.

Videos

For the younger classes, we read stories about giving thanks. In the Preschool-Kindergarten class, we read *Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message* by Chief Jake Swamp and Erwin Printup, Jr. In this [video](#), you'll hear Chief Swamp read the story in both English and Kanyen'kéha, the language of the Mohawk people. This [video](#) is shorter, and the story is read only in English. For a brief introduction to Native Americans, click [here](#) to review the ideas found in our Native American Peace lesson.

In the Lower Elementary class, we usually read *Giving Thanks* by Jonathon London and Gregory Manchess. Click [here](#) for a video reading of that book.

Readings

For the older kids, we share a few Bible passages about blessings and then ask a few thought questions. In general, we are not looking for specific answers. Instead, we're just letting them play around with different ideas. These Bible verses are short and don't include a lot of context, so feel free to read them a few times so kids can get the gist.

Deuteronomy 15:6

When the Lord your God has blessed you, as he promised you, you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.

Thought Question

What do you think about this idea that "ruling over other people" is blessing? Do you think that would be a blessing for you? What about the people you ruled over?

Deuteronomy 30:16

If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

Thought Question

Do you think blessings come from God? If so, do you need to obey God or observe commandments to receive blessings? If not, then where do blessings come from?

Jeremiah 17:7-8

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.

They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.

It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of the drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

Thought Question

Do you think that, if you simply trust, you will have everything you need? If so, where do you place your trust - in God, in the Universe, in your caregivers?

It's also interesting to explore the Beatitudes. Jesus suggests that unusual things are blessings. In fact, his ideas are almost backwards or the opposite of everyone else!

Matthew 5:1-10

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst, for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...."

The Beatitudes include some difficult concepts and vocabulary words (e.g., poor in spirit, mourn, meek, merciful, persecuted). Feel free to explore those vocabulary words, but don't get too caught up in the details. The general idea is that we tend to think that the person who is pushy and loud will gain the most and therefore appear to be the "most blessed." But Jesus suggests that sometimes it is the people who are humble, or even people who seem sad and lonely, who gain the most and are therefore the most blessed.

Be sure to ask the kids what they think about that. They might even have an example of a time when the pushy, loud person did NOT gain the most and the quiet, unassuming person won out.

The Tao Te Ching also has a tendency to view things in a somewhat "opposite" or "backwards" way. The Tao Te Ching comes to us from China in the 6th century BCE, so it's about 2500 years old. There are many translations, but this one, by John Mabry, is one of my favorites.

Tao Te Ching - 1st paragraph, Chapter 22

If you don't want to be broken, bend.

If you want to be straight, allow some crookedness.

If you want to be filled, become empty.

If you want to be made new, let yourself be used.

If you want to be rich, desire little.

Wanting more and more is craziness!

Craft

Our crafts for this week focus on recognizing our own blessings either by creating a Blessings Banner or a Blessings Mandala.

Blessings Banner

Making a Blessings Banner is super-easy. Simply take a piece of paper or posterboard and write My Blessings on the top. Then, have the kids draw or write their blessings underneath the heading. We also give them old magazines, scissors, and glue sticks so they can cut out images of their blessings. If you don't have old magazines, consider printing out computer images of their blessings.

Blessings Mandala

The word "mandala" {MAHN-duh-luh} means "circle." Mandalas originated in Asia as "deity maps" that could be used to create a sacred space or to aid in meditation.

Nowadays, they can be found across the globe, which means they come in all sorts of styles and colors. Here are a couple of examples.



The Tibetan Buddhist tradition is widely known for its sand mandalas. Monks apply the colored sand using a tool called a "chakpur" {CHOCK-pur}. The act of making the sand mandala is considered a meditative practice. Shortly after completing these mandalas, there is a dissolution ceremony that offers the mandala's blessings to the world. Some of the Jubilee! kids saw Tibetan monks making a sand mandala at Urban Dharma a few years ago, and some of them have used a *chakpur* to make their own mandalas. Here are a couple of images of Tibetan monks making a sand mandala.



To make a Blessings Mandala, simply draw a large circle (using a mixing bowl or something like that) on a sheet of paper. Then, let the kids draw, write, or attach images of their own blessings inside the circle.

Activities

One of our points was that the Beatitudes kind of turn the idea of "blessings" on its head when Jesus presents an "opposite" view of what blessings are. Sometimes, we do a few "opposite" activities just for fun. Here are a few of those ideas.

Backwards Names

See if you can figure out how to write your name backwards.

Backwards Clothing

Make today "backwards day" and wear your clothes either backwards or inside out.

Backwards Jokes

Q: What vehicle is spelled the same backwards and forward?

A: Racecar

Q: What has four legs and goes "oom-oom"?

A: A cow walking backwards

Q: Forwards it is heavy, backwards it is not. What is it?

A: A ton.