

# THE NT EPISTLES

## CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Pencils and pieces of paper
- Copies of the downloadable 622 service booklet
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader's notes
- A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

## ICE BREAKER: HANGMAN, THE SHEEP VERSION

This is the version of hangman you know but with a bit of a twist. Instead of drawing a stick figure of a man, have your teens complete the stick figure of a sheep for this sheep-themed activity.

Ahead of time, write out some of the following scriptural phrases on pieces of paper. The teens take turns selecting one and drawing out the lines on a board that correspond to the letters of the words in the phrase they have selected. They should write in full the words "SHEEP" or "SHEPHERD" wherever they occur. The Bible reference doesn't have to be included, but it may be if you wish. The other teens take turns guessing letters and try to guess what the full phrase is. Each time they guess a letter which is not there, part of the sheep gets drawn until they have no more guesses left.

- All we like sheep have gone astray (Isaiah 53:6)
- The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want (Psalm 23:1)
- The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10: 11)
- Be their shepherd and carry them forever (Psalm 28:9)
- Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost (Luke 15:6)
- Jesus said to him, Feed my sheep (John 21:17)
- I will give you shepherds after my own heart (Jeremiah 3:15)
- I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep (Ezekiel 34:15)
- We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (Psalm 100:3)
- I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matthew 10:16)
- He calls his own sheep by name (John 10:3)
- My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27)

FOR LARGE GROUPS, PLAY IN TEAMS. FOR SMALL GROUPS PLAY AS INDIVIDUALS AND TAKE MULTIPLE TURNS. YOU MAY WANT TO ASSIGN BONUS POINTS IF TEENS CAN GUESS WHAT PART OF SCRIPTURE THE PHRASE COMES FROM.

## 622: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the first part of the order of service for young people in the booklet, up to the middle of page 4.

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK'S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

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## DISCUSSION: WHY SHEEP?

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- Have you ever had a pet? Did you take good care of it? What did that involve?
- Why do you think the Bible likes to use the analogy of sheep and shepherds so much?

*A few things worth pointing out (if they don't otherwise arise during the discussion):*

- *Caring for an animal involves ensuring that it has enough to eat, is safe from harm, and gets whatever else it needs in terms of exercise, etc. You may wish to point out that for shepherds, their sheep were more than just pets, they were their livelihood, so it was even more important to provide good care for them.*
- *The Bible, both Old and New Testaments, often speaks about God's people as sheep and those who provide care for them as shepherds. Because so many people in those times kept sheep, it was an image that the first readers of the Bible understood well.*
- *(The lesson further explores this question, so feel free to move on even if this hasn't been fully answered, and allow the lesson text to fill in some of the gaps.)*

## THE LESSON: EPHESIANS 3

The first part of the lesson can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

Throughout scripture the image of shepherds and sheep holds special significance. God's people, like sheep, need attentive care. God has provided shepherds who are meant to provide that care, but they have not always done a good job of it. In the New Testament (NT), Jesus is called "the good shepherd" and his care is characterized by such a deep concern for us that he "laid down his life for his sheep".

We still find this shepherd image helpful when we talk about spiritual leadership. In fact, the term "pastor", which is used for someone responsible for the spiritual care of others, originally comes from the Latin word for "shepherd".

The Apostle Paul was one of the spiritual shepherds of the early Church and wrote many of the letters that can be found in the New Testament, including the letter to the Ephesians. We believe this letter was written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome, yet in spite of his own circumstances, his concern for building up the Church remained his focus.

Paul's letters are often sprinkled with thanksgivings and intercessions, which give us a window into how he prayed. His prayers are pastoral – they are concerned with the spiritual care and guidance of those in his charge, and they have a lot to teach us.

Refer to Ephesians 3: 7, 13-21.

(VERSES HAVE BEEN CLIPPED FROM THE READING FOR THE SAKE OF BREVITY AND FOCUS, BUT IF YOU HAVE TIME TO EXPLORE THE PASSAGE FULLY, FEEL FREE TO READ IT IN ITS ENTIRETY: EPHESIANS 3:7-21.)

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS' NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE).

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Read through the text. Then ask the teens to respond to what they've just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- What does this text tell us about how Paul sees God?
- Given that Paul is “suffering” (v 13), what would you expect his prayer to be about?
- What does it tell us about what he wants for his readers (the Ephesians)?

*A few notes and reflections for reference:*

- *The passage describes God as the Father, rich in glory, power and love, and able to do more than we could even ask or think. Paul says, “I bow my knees before the Father”. His understanding of God means that Paul speaks to him from a position of humility and respect.*
- *It's noteworthy that Paul's concerns are spiritual in nature and they are for his readers, in spite of the fact that he is “suffering”, presumably in prison in Rome. His prayer is not filled with laments for himself or pleas to God to get him out of there. He wants to ensure that his circumstances do not cause those in his spiritual care to lose heart.*
- *Paul wants to see the Ephesian Christians grow and experience an abundant spiritual life! Specifically he prays for strength, faith and a greater understanding of the love of God. He wants them to be “filled with all the fullness of God”. He commends them to God's care, knowing that all of this and more is well within the scope of what God is able to accomplish.*

DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON'T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU'LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

## PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY “AT-HOME CHALLENGE” IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

Select one prayer passage from Paul's letters to pray with on each day of the coming week. You may wish to use the passage we read today or one of the other two written out below. Begin by asking God to teach and lead you through your prayer time. Pray slowly, considering the words and allowing them to direct your thoughts. You may wish to rewrite the prayer in your own words, perhaps praying for yourself, for people you care about or for the whole Church.

- *Philippians 1:9-11: And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*
- *Colossians 1:9-14a: And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

- AND/OR -

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Take some time to pray through this collect, pausing to reflect after each phrase.

*O God, our heavenly Father, who didst raise up faithful servants to be Bishops in thy Church and to feed thy flock: We beseech thee to send down upon all thy Bishops, the Pastors of thy Church, the abundant gift of thy Holy Spirit, that they, being endued with power from on high, and ever walking in the footsteps of thy holy Apostles, may minister before thee in thy household as true servants of Christ and stewards of thy divine mysteries; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.*

(COLLECT FOR THE COMMEMORATION OF A BISHOP OR ARCHBISHOP, BCP PAGE 312)

## 622 (AGAIN)

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE "PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS" SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-62, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU'RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the "Grace", the final prayer in the booklet.

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### EPHESIANS 3: **PRAYING LIKE A SHEPHERD**

<sup>7</sup> Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power... <sup>13</sup> So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.