

YESTERDAY/TODAY/FOREVER

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

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

ICE BREAKER: YEARBOOK TABLEAUX

Break into small groups of 3-5, and assign each group a school club that they are to make a tableau for, pretending to be a yearbook photo capturing what the people in this group are like (*for example, chess club, cheerleaders, jazz band, drama club, debate club, photography club, etc.*). Each person in each tableau must chose a fictitious name and be ready to introduce their fictional self. Invite your teens to make it as fun and funny as they’d like. When a group presents, one person at a time comes “unfrozen” to introduce themselves in character.

IF YOU’RE WORKING WITH A SINGLE SMALL GROUP (GROUPS OF FIVE OR LESS), ALLOW THE GROUP TO DO MULTIPLE CLUB TABLEAUX, WITH YOURSELF AS THE AUDIENCE. IF YOU’RE WORKING WITH MULTIPLE SMALL GROUPS, THEN ALLOW THEM TO PRESENT TO EACH OTHER ONE AT A TIME.

622: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

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

DISCUSSION: CONSTANT CHANGE

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.

- How have you changed in the last year?
- How has the world we live in changed?
- How do you feel about these changes?
- How do you cope with change?

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

- *Change is a fact of life for human beings. Our bodies grow and change. We learn new things (and forget things we once knew). We gain new experiences and form new goals. Sometimes we have to admit that we were wrong in the past, and move forward in a corrected direction.*
- *The world we live in is also constantly changing. The political powers in the world are in constant flux. New technologies and new fashions may change how we communicate, perform tasks and dress. Our communities change because people and industries move into and out of them. In fact, if someone who lived in our neighbourhood fifty years ago were to come back, they might not even recognize it.*
- *Sometimes change can be exciting, especially if it is a change that we hope will be for the better, but often change can be stressful or unsettling. For example, maybe you just got used to the method of teaching used in one of your*

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classes last year, and this year you have a different teacher with a whole different set of expectations. What would have earned you a good grade last year may not get you a good grade with this different teacher.

- *Change is inevitable. When we face difficult changes we can seek the support of friends and family and look for new opportunities in that change. But one important way to cope with change is to hold on tight to something that does not change (as we shall see in our lesson)!*

THE LESSON: JAMES 1

The first part of the lesson (below) 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.

We live in a world of constant change. From the aging of our bodies to the headlines in the daily news, change is something that touches us all. While we may find some of these changes good and exciting, change can also be disorienting, frightening and exhausting.

*Believers throughout the centuries have lived in radically different situations, many of them fraught with difficulty, but what they (and we) have in common is a God who does *not* change. No matter what we face, God can be our “anchor” and “refuge”. Scripture tells us that Jesus is the same “yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Our God’s holy and loving character and his plan for our salvation are the same right now as they were two thousand years ago, and as J.I. Packer points out, “this thought brings comfort as we enter in to the perplexities of each day: amid all the changes and uncertainties of life”.*

Refer to James 1:12-17.

(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).

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.

- Based on this passage, what concerns do you think St. James had for his readers?
- What does this passage tell us about God?
- Why do you think St. James is taking about “trials” and the character of God in the same passage?
- What can we learn about responding to difficulty from studying this passage?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *St. James was encouraging his readers to “remain steadfast under trial” (v12). His readers were facing difficulties and he wanted them to be grounded in unchanging truth so that the challenges they faced wouldn’t cause them to doubt God’s goodness (v13,17).*
- *God is changeless in his goodness and generosity towards believers. Specifically, the passage tells us that God has promised a “crown of life” to those who love him (v12). It tells us that God is not the source of temptation (v13). God is generous to us, giving us good gifts on an ongoing basis (v17). God does not change (v17). God has made us his own (v18).*
- *St. James understood that it is hard for us to “remain steadfast” when difficulties arise. The more we become focused on the trials and temptations surrounding us, the more likely we are to forget what we know to be true of God’s unchanging character and purposes for us.*

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- *When we find ourselves tempted to blame God for difficulties and to turn away from him, we can instead hit the “pause” button and take some time to reflect on the good gifts that God has given us; to be reminded of his unchanging love for us. Instead of pushing away from him, we can draw nearer and ask him to help us to be steadfast, just as he is.*

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.

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

What are the “changes and chances of this fleeting world” that *you* find wearying? Bring those things before God and ask him to help you find comfort and confidence in his changelessness.

Take some time each day to reflect on one of the following passages of scripture:

- Psalm 90:1-2: *Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*
- Hebrews 13:7-8: *Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.*
- James 1:17: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect.

Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the silent hours of this night, so that we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting world, may repose upon thy eternal changelessness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (AN ADDITIONAL PRAYER FROM COMPLINE, BCP PAGE 727)

CLOSING PRAYERS (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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JAMES 1:12-17: **OUR UNCHANGING FATHER**

¹²Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.