

BASIL THE GREAT

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- A stack of old newspapers and magazines, scissors, paper and glue
- 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: TEMPTATION CITY

Bring in a stack of old/unwanted newspapers and magazines. Invite the teens to cut them up to create together a collage of a place filled with temptations and distractions. You may wish to include one or two relevant Bible verses, such as:

- *“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness”.* (Mark 7:21-22)
- *“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these”.* (Galatians 5:19-21)

IF YOU HAVE A GROUP OF SIX OR MORE, BREAK THEM INTO GROUPS OF THREE TO FIVE AND HAVE EACH GROUP PRESENT BRIEFLY WHEN THEIR COLLAGE IS COMPLETE.

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.

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.

DISCUSSION: A TIME TO RESIST, A TIME TO FLEE

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.

- What is temptation?
- How do you cope with temptation?
- Are there times when you just need to flee – that is, to get yourself right out of a situation?

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

- *A temptation is how we describe an allure or desire to do something that is sinful. Being tempted to sin is different from actually sinning. Scripture tells us that even Jesus was tempted. A great analogy attributed to Martin Luther is that temptation is like a bird flying above our heads, which we cannot control, but we are headed for trouble if we invite the bird to make a nest in our hair.*
- *Resisting temptation isn't easy for anyone. It can take honesty, prayer, intentionality and discipline. We probably have strategies that we use to help us avoid things that we know may tempt us, such as choosing who to spend time with socially, avoiding certain places, etc.*

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- *Maybe some of your teens have found themselves at a party where things began to get out of control and they knew they needed to leave if they didn't want to get caught up in the trouble. This is a great opportunity to share a story of your own.*

THE LESSON: INTO THE DESERT

Lessons 13-42 follow a slightly different format from previous lessons. The story of the saint being studied is interspersed with verses from scripture that provide added perspective. You may prefer to read the lesson text aloud together as a group, or ask the teens to read it silently to themselves.

“For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions —is not from the Father but is from the world.”

(1 John 2:16)

Around the third century, stories began to be told of believers fleeing to the Egyptian desert in order to lead holy lives by leaving behind the distractions and temptations of worldly life. The oldest biographies we have are of Paul the Hermit and Anthony the Great, both of whom sought solitude in the desert. This solitude was hard to maintain for the early desert monks, since others often came to them seeking guidance or training. It was Pachomius the Great who first established a “rule” so that an organized community of monks could live holy lives together, yet apart from the world.

But while the desert communities grew, the Roman world changed as well. Hostility towards Christianity subsided, and eventually the faith was adopted as the official religion of the state. The nominal conversion of an empire meant that lines which were previously clear became blurred, and the leaders of the Church gained in prominence, wealth and power. As these changes unfolded in the cities, the appeal of the desert communities became like a beacon to those who were wary of becoming complacent in their faith and corrupted by the world.

“The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

(1 Corinthians 1:25)

Basil was born into an affluent believing family in Caesarea (modern-day Turkey) about the year 330. He had numerous siblings, many of whom are also venerated as saints, in particular his elder sister Macrina, and brothers Naucratus, Peter and Gregory.

Basil's father wished him to follow in his footsteps and become a lawyer, so he was given an elite education away from home. When he returned, he did so with an attitude of superiority, having been immersed in the study of the great pagan intellects of that era. Of this, Basil wrote:

“Much time had I spent in vanity, and had wasted nearly all my youth in the vain labour which I underwent in acquiring the wisdom made foolish by God. Then... like a man roused from deep sleep, I turned my eyes to the marvellous light of the truth of the Gospel, and I perceived the uselessness of ‘the wisdom of the princes of this world, that come to naught.’”

“Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

(2 Timothy 2:22)

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At home Basil's quieter siblings had set aside the attractions of the world to live humble, contemplative lives. Basil was sobered by the death of both his father and his brother Naucratus and greatly influenced by his sister Macrina, who pointed him to the study of scripture and the disciplines of the desert. And so to the desert regions of Egypt and Syria Basil went, visiting both solitary monks and monastic communities, and learning all he could. When he returned home this time, it was in a different spirit, and Basil established a monastic community for men, while his sister Macrina had already established one for women.

It was a mere twenty years between Basil's baptism and his death, but Basil made very good use of the time he had. He was made bishop of Caesarea, became an influential theologian, defended the faith against the heresies of his day, and created a rule for monastic communities that balanced prayer with the humble service of others. Basil was so beloved that at his death even the unbelievers joined in mourning him.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: ST. BASIL THE GREAT, "LETTER CCXXIII: AGAINST EUSTATHIUS OF SEBASTEIA" FROM "LETTERS AND SELECTED WORKS", ED. PHILIP SCHAFF, HENRY WACE | DAVID FARMER, "OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS" | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, "THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1" | GERARD SAMPSON, "LAYMAN'S BOOK OF SAINTS".)

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

- What do you think the 'pros' and 'cons' of a believer moving to the desert would be?
- What do you think Basil's temptations were (based the information included in today's lesson)?
How did he fight them?
- How were other people's lives changed because of Basil?
- What can we learn from Basil's example?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Anyone living in a "temptation city" environment would find some reprieve in a quieter and more remote location. But although the noisiest and most obvious temptations would be gone, there would still be temptations of a different sort – temptations that come from the heart rather than from something outside of oneself. Also, if we're called to a life of sharing the Gospel and serving others, it could be harder to do from such a remote place.*
- *Basil's great learning had also given him a spirit of pride. It is easy for many of us to become "puffed up", imagining that we are better than others because of one thing or another. In Basil's case, he had been given a privileged education with the elite of the land. But some of his siblings, Macrina in particular, helped Basil to realize that true wisdom would be found in God's word and in humility. His time visiting monks and communities in the desert also provided an example for Basil of a way to live life differently.*
- *Basil's work had a huge impact on the Christian world, especially in the East. He established monastic communities characterized by manual work and prayer, and laid the groundwork for other religious communities in the future. He helped to fight the heresies of his day (in particular Arianism). His work helped the needy and effectively spread the Gospel. The lives of others were made better and people were brought closer to God as a result of Basil's work.*
- *Basil was someone who threw himself into his work wholeheartedly. He had a fantastic intellect, which he surrendered to the service of God, rather than using it as a tool to bolster his own ego. He also took the time to visit others and see what they were doing and how their religious communities were working. All of this took stamina and humility. The remaining years of his life were busy and devout. Basil is a wonderful example of a passion surrendered to divine purpose.*

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.

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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))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Basil that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Decide on one concrete action you can take this week based on your reflections.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following collect.

O God, our heavenly Father, who didst raise up thy faithful servant Basil to be a Bishop 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. (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A BISHOP, P. 312)

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.