

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

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: ARE YOUR PRINCIPLES FOR SALE?

Ask your teens to create a brief skit which incorporates the phrase “My principles are not for sale”. The phrase can be used in a way that is serious or not, spoken truthfully or not. For an added twist, assign each team two different random items – an occupation and an object – that they must work into their skit (for example, a ballerina and a lemon wedge; a dentist and a teabag; a personal trainer and a potted plant, etc.).

IF YOU HAVE MULTIPLE GROUPS, ALLOW THEM TO PERFORM FOR ONE ANOTHER. IF YOU ONLY HAVE ONE GROUP, ALLOW A LONGER PERFORMANCE TIME AND THE LEADER CAN STAND IN FOR AN AUDIENCE.

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: COMPROMISE VERSUS CONSISTENCY

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.

- Are there times when we ought to be willing to compromise?
- Can you think of a time when someone that you looked up to decided to “sell out”? How did you feel?
- Are there things you wouldn’t be willing to compromise?
What if you were offered a large sum of money to do so? What if you were threatened?
- What does the word “integrity” mean?

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

- *Being able to compromise is important both in relationships and when working collaboratively with others. It means not getting your own way all the time. It means that when something is not a matter of principle, but rather a matter of preference to you, that you are willing to sacrifice either in whole or in part so that a reasonable solution can be reached.*
- *Wikipedia describes the expression “sell out” as “a common idiomatic pejorative expression for the compromising of a person’s integrity, morality, authenticity, or principles in exchange for personal gain, such as money”. Two areas where this might be familiar are music and politics. Fans are often outraged and disillusioned when an artist they admire decides to switch to a different style in order to gain in popularity. Another example of this would be a politician crossing the floor to join a different party. Those who voted for the politician under a particular platform*

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can feel betrayed by such an action, especially if it seems to be motivated by personal ambition. Integrity in role models matters because we all need to see examples of people who are consistent in standing for their principles.

- *Hopefully we do have closely held faith-based beliefs and values that are not for sale, though we may know that circumstances could arise which would make it a challenge and a sacrifice to hold to them.*
- *“Integrity” is a word that means being consistent in holding to and living by moral principles. It can also mean that something is whole and sound, like a building without any cracks that could undermine its structural strength. As Christians, we aspire to be like that building: built on the solid rock of obedience to Christ which cannot be toppled by flood or wind (Matthew 7:24-27).*

THE LESSON: TRUE INTEGRITY

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.

“Honour your father and your mother.”
(Exodus 20:12)

John was born in Antioch (modern-day Turkey) in 347. He was raised by his widowed mother and given a good education. He wanted to become a monk, but his mother begged him not to leave her, so during her life he remained with her, but began to practice a monastic lifestyle in her home. When she died, John moved to a monastery in the Syrian mountains and was there for two years before the extreme austerity caused his health to break down.

***“If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.”***
(Psalm 139:9-10)

So John shifted gears. Back in Antioch again he became a priest, and preached often in the cathedral there. He was an excellent speaker and the people loved and respected him. But when the archbishop of Constantinople died, members of the imperial court in that city conspired to abduct John secretly (lest the people of Antioch resist), and installed him as the new archbishop. However, the powerful classes failed to anticipate the sort of man they now had on their hands: a man who would speak the truth and act with conscience – without compromise; a man who could not be bought, nor bullied.

“In your teaching show integrity.”
(Titus 2:7-8)

John strove for peace between the ruling class and the common people, and offered asylum in his cathedral to people from both ends of that spectrum in turn. He preached boldly from scripture and his words struck home for many. Some who heard him repented of their sins. Others, like the Empress Eudoxia, became angry. She tried to manipulate John by making grants to his church, which he accepted with thanks, but he did not alter his preaching one iota.

John was driven into exile, though the people rioted in response. While in exile, John had no cathedral at which to preach, but this did not stop him from writing. His influence continued, to the frustration of the empress, who wished him dead. She consequently ordered that he be marched to a more remote location.

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John was made to walk in harsh conditions till he collapsed from exhaustion. He asked, and was granted, permission to pause at a roadside church, where he received communion and then died, saying, “Glory be to God for all things. Amen” (Sampson, *Layman’s*).

*“You have upheld me because of my integrity,
 and set me in your presence for ever.”
 (Psalm 41:12)*

Before his exile, in one of his sermons at the cathedral in Constantinople, John spoke these words:

“You know why they are going to depose me, because I spread no fine carpets, and wear no silken robes; because I have not pampered their gluttony, or made presents in gold and silver... But we fear not to be overwhelmed, for we stand upon a Rock. They cannot sink the vessel of Jesus Christ. Tell me, what is it we fear? Death? ‘To me to live is Christ and to die is gain.’ Or exile? ‘The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.’ Or confiscation of goods? ‘We brought nothing into this world, and we can carry nothing out.’ I fear not poverty. I desire not wealth. I dread not death. I do not pray for life, save only for your advancement” (Sampson, *Layman’s*).

A century after his death, this saintly man came to be known as “John, the Golden-Mouthed,” or in Greek, “John Chrysostom”.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: 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.

- How did John reconcile the command to honour mother and father with his desire to be a monk?
- How did John respond when he realized his health would not enable him to continue in the monastery? When he was sent into exile?
- What were the convictions that brought John into conflict with the Empress?
- What can we learn from John’s example?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Many people today would have regarded this as an either/or proposition: either follow your God-given dreams or care for your mother. But John recognized that his call to the monastic life did not excuse him from his other responsibilities and he found a creative way to do both until such time as he was free to give his full attention to a monastic vocation.*
- *Perhaps you’ve heard the expression, “when God closes a door, he opens a window”? John did not give up on his vocation simply because he was unable to continue in the community he had joined. He looked to the future with faith and hope, recognizing that there were other ways to use his gifts in obedience to God. John’s response to his exile was similar: when he could no longer preach, he found he could serve God’s purpose by writing!*
- *John’s bold preaching from scripture was what landed him in hot water, particularly his words against indulgent and frivolous lifestyles. But perhaps even more irritating than the preaching itself was John’s stubborn refusal to defer to the wishes of the powerful, regardless of the inducement offered.*
- *John Chrysostom is a model of integrity. He sought to obey and serve God regardless of the circumstances he found himself in. He did this with determination, creativity, and grace.*

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 John Chrysostom 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 prayer.

Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests: Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting. Amen.

(A PRAYER OF SAINT CHRYSOSTOM, P. 35)

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.