

THOMAS MORE

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: Watch with second hand for timing
- 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: SAY THIS!

As the teens arrive, ask them to think up scenarios that involve a questioner and a responder (for example: a police interrogation, a celebrity interview, etc.). Have the teens pair up, and each pair designate a questioner and responder. One at a time the pairs are assigned a scenario and give a performance based on it. The interrogating actor can only ask questions and the responding actor must answer each time with only the word “*integritas*”, no matter what the question was. The questioner’s challenge is to keep the scene moving forward as though the responses are meaningful. The goal for the responder is to infuse as much emotion and meaning (without laughing) into that single word as possible. So for example, “What do you think we found when we searched your backpack, young man?” – “*integritas*” (said with hand gestures, shrug, glaring facial expression and tone of “I don’t know”) followed by “Do you really expect me to believe you have no idea how that got in there?” – “*integritas*” (said earnestly with nodding). See how long the scene can be kept going and how much expression your teens can put into the scene. You can either time the scenes or allow them to go until they reach a natural conclusion or run out of steam.

Note: At the end of the activity, tell your teens that we get our English word “integrity” from the Latin integritas which means wholeness or completeness. In Titus 2:8 (Latin translation) the related word “integritatem” is used to speak about a character that is morally pure and free from corruption.

FOR SMALL GROUPS, SWAP ACTOR ROLES AND SCENARIOS A FEW TIMES. FOR LARGER GROUPS, LET EVERYONE HAVE A TURN AS EITHER THE INTERROGATOR OR THE RESPONDER AND LIMIT TIME AS NECESSARY.

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: AGREE... OR ELSE!

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 “compelled speech”?
- Have you ever felt that you were being compelled to say something you didn’t agree with? What happened?

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

- “Compelled speech” means being pressured or forced to communicate something; it could be either through speaking, writing or some other sign. Though ordered society requires that people act in accordance with law, freedom of thought has been an important aspect of western democracy for many years. When governments force their subjects to set aside their personal belief and conscience in order to declare that they agree with their rulers, it is a form of tyranny and oppression. Human history has given us many examples of compelled speech, one of which we’ll learn more about today.
- This is a great opportunity to share a story of your own. Though we may never have experienced compelled speech on the part of government, perhaps we’ve been in a school or work situation when we were required to say we agreed with something that troubled our conscience. In these situations, refusal to comply could have serious consequences for us (like the loss of a job). These are difficult moments for all of us, but they are the moments that build and reveal our character.

THE LESSON: INTEGRITY, HONESTY, LOYALTY

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.

*“Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works...
show integrity, dignity, and sound speech...”
(Titus 2:7-8)*

Thomas was born in London, England in 1478. As a young teenager, he spent two years in the household of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and considered the possibility of becoming a monk or a priest. Instead he went on to follow in his father’s footsteps by becoming a lawyer, getting married, and raising a family. In spite of his career choice, Thomas remained devout and disciplined in his faith. Throughout his life he was known for his sharp intellect, and his uncompromising integrity, honesty and loyalty.

Thomas lived during interesting – and dangerous – times. Henry VIII had become King of England in 1509, marrying his brother’s widow (Catherine) in the same year. The royal marriage produced only one surviving child (a daughter named Mary), although the couple lost six others either by miscarriage or soon after birth. The king, who was deeply concerned about producing a male heir, began to wonder how he could solve this problem.

*“Do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.”
(Romans 14:16)*

It was 1520 when Thomas was first consulted by Henry VIII about whether there could be any grounds for claiming his marriage was “invalid” and having it “annulled” by the Pope – which would then free him to marry someone else, someone who hopefully would give him a son. Thomas’s beliefs were rooted in the teachings and the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, and so he gave his opinion that what the king wished for could not be justified. This did not initially create any animosity between king and subject, and for many years Thomas went on to enjoy success in his career and happiness in his home. The king even appointed him to the prestigious position of Lord High Chancellor of England in 1529.

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But Henry VIII became fixated on removing England from under the authority of the Pope, and making himself head of the English Church. He was determined to set aside his wife and marry another, with or without the approval of Rome. Things became dangerous for Thomas when the king declared himself the head of the Church of England, and an oath of agreement to this was drawn up which Thomas was compelled to sign. He and some of his peers found a way to satisfy their consciences by adding to the King's statement the caveat: "So far as the law of Christ allows" (Farmer, *Oxford*).

As the fracture with Rome widened, the political situation in England became increasingly perilous. Thomas recognized the escalating threat, resigned his position, and kept his views private. Then, while Rome was still considering the king's annulment request (which it eventually ruled against), Henry VIII went ahead and married a new wife (Anne Boleyn), naming her queen. Thomas diplomatically declined to attend the coronation.

*"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for you are with me."
(Psalm 23:4)*

It was only a matter of time before the king was not content to allow Thomas a private opinion on the matter. Thomas would be considered guilty of high treason if he refused to swear new oaths which confirmed Henry VIII's supremacy over the English Church and also affirmed the spiritual validity of his new marriage. Thomas' conscience would not allow him to sign on to these statements and he was arrested. For 15 months Thomas remained imprisoned, being pressured to compromise and simply agree to these things that he did not believe to be true. He watched as others who shared his convictions were led off to be executed. In 1535 he stood trial, and after the jury declared him guilty, Thomas, who had so often chosen diplomacy and silence in the past, now defended himself with courage and clarity. He was sentenced to death, and executed by beheading five days later. With his final words, Thomas forgave his executioner, and maintained that he was still "the king's good servant – but God's first" (Farmer, *Oxford*).

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: DAVID FARMER, "OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS" | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, "THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 2" | WIKIPEDIA.ORG, "THOMAS MORE" AND "HENRY VIII OF ENGLAND".)

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

- Why do you think Thomas saw himself as "the king's good servant"?
- How did Thomas cope with "compelled speech"?
- What can we learn from Thomas' example?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Thomas had always served with honesty and integrity. When the king sought an opinion from him, he received an honest one. Later, when the king chose a course of action that Thomas did not agree with, he did not speak against him publicly. When he found that he could no longer serve under the new conditions, he resigned. Throughout the ordeal, which ended in his death, Thomas acted in what he believed to be the best interest of the king. This was only disrupted when the king forced Thomas to choose between obeying God and obeying an earthly ruler.*
- *Thomas did not wish to be at odds with his king. He had hoped to satisfy Henry VIII by his silence or with a modified statement of agreement. But at the end of the day the king would not permit freedom of conscience or private disagreement. Thomas had to choose to either declare to be true what he did not believe to be true or to be executed as a traitor. It was not his wish to be a martyr, but in the end he chose martyrdom rather than betray his conscience.*

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- *Thomas’ lifelong reputation for devotion, integrity and loyalty is a model for us today. Scripture exhorts us to respect earthly authorities. Thomas is an example for us of someone who did all he could to give that respect, until that loyalty trespassed upon his loyalty to God. Like Thomas, we should seek to ensure that our loyalties are properly ordered. Should there be a contest between submitting to the authority of human government and the authority of God, it is God who must always come first.*

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))

Review today’s lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Thomas 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 come back next week prepared to share a bit about your reflections and the action you took.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

Almighty God, by whose grace and power thy Martyr Thomas was enabled to witness to the truth and to be faithful unto death: Grant that we, who now remember him before thee, may likewise so bear witness unto thee in this world, that we may receive with him the crown of glory that fadeth not away; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A MARTYR, P. 310)

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.