

FATHER-CREATOR

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Copies of the downloadable “Litany” 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: MIRROR IMAGE

Have the teens get into pairs (a leader can participate if numbers are uneven). Each pair designates an “A” and a “B” partner. They begin by sitting cross-legged facing each other. First the “A” partners must slowly begin to move and the “B” partners must try to perfectly follow those movements as a reflection. After a few minutes, freeze and switch so that “A” follows “B”. Finally have them try to move in sync with no designated leader. If numbers permit, assign one or two “judges” to eliminate pairs that are out of sync until one winning pair remains.

THE LITANY: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the Litany, leaving off the Grace (which can be said at the close of the lesson).

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: REFLECTIONS + DISTORTIONS

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.

- List together qualities and character traits that we associate with fathers. (You may choose to expand the question to include mothers). They can include good and bad qualities.
- In scripture and in many of the prayers of the church, we address God as “Father”. Review the list together and ask the teens to identify which of those character traits and qualities are “reflections” of God’s fatherhood, and which ones are “distortions” of it. If they are able to, invite them to cite scripture to back up their designations.

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

- *A general note about approaching God as “Father”: Scripture invites us to address God as “Father” and to view him through the lens of this relationship. Although there are feminine parent references in scripture, the predominant image both there and in tradition is that of “Father”. It is important to recognize that many people have negative associations with the idea of father based on hurtful personal experiences. In spite of this, we must not avoid the image of God as Father, but rather reclaim a right understanding of the fatherhood of God. When we do this it has the potential to provide healing for the inadequacies of our human relationships, and a richer understanding of who God is.*
- *The list your teens come up with will be unique. It may include positive character traits such as strong, loving, and patient. But it may also include negative character traits such as selfish, short-tempered or absent. Encourage your teens to expand their list to take in the broad scope of human experience– not just their own, so that your list can*

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be as diverse as possible.

- *All of our earthly fathers are human and have failings, ways in which their fatherhood is a distortion, rather than a reflection of God's fatherhood. When they are at their best, our human fathers point us to what God is like. But sometimes, we come to God, our heavenly Father, with false assumptions about what he is like because of what human fathers can be like. God our Father is generous, patient and loving. Scripture says he will never leave us nor forsake us.*
- *If your discussion has raised serious concerns, pause to pray for God's healing in those situations.*

THE LESSON: EXODUS 3-4

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.

O God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth: have mercy upon us.

The first line in the Litany addresses God as Father-Creator, and those two titles are packed with meaning for us! When we talk about God as our sovereign Creator we are reminded that he is distinct from and in authority over all that he has created – including us. Theologians call this the “transcendence” of God. But God is also present and involved with his creation. The first epistle of John says, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are” (1 John 3:1). Our Father cares about us in a way that is personal and intimate. He has said that he will never leave us nor forsake us. Theologians call this the “immanence” of God.

Sometimes we can carry over confused or broken ideas into our understanding of God and our relationship with him. If we forget that he is transcendent, we might think that we can customize him to fit our preferences. (We can't!) Or if we forget that he is immanent, we may think he doesn't care enough to listen to our prayers. (He does!)

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In a moment we're going to take a look at the story of God's call of Moses in the book of Exodus. Now you may know the larger story, but in case you don't, here's the scoop: The people of Israel were slaves in the land of Egypt. Though Moses was an Israelite he had been raised by an Egyptian princess. One day he saw an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite and Moses killed him. When it became known, he fled to the land of Midian where he married and settled down, until this one day when he had an unexpected encounter with our immanent and transcendent God.

Refer to Exodus 3:2-8, 11-14, 4:1, 10-15.

(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: EXODUS 3-4.)

(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.

- What are some things in this encounter that point to the transcendence of God?
- What are some things in this encounter that point to the immanence of God?
- Moses became a hero of the faith who led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to the threshold of the Promised Land. Based on this passage, would you have thought him qualified for that? How does Moses' attitude need to change?
- What can we learn about God by how he responds to Moses in this passage?

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A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *There's a lot in the text and you may not have time to go into everything! The miracle of the burning bush and the holiness of God remind us that God is not the equal of creation (he is above it!). His knowledge of what has happened to the people of Israel in Egypt and his power to deliver them also point to his being all-knowing (omniscient) and all-powerful. The name that God reveals to Moses "I am who I am" is especially significant. In the original Hebrew it is a play with tenses, which carries the suggestion of God being outside of time (I am/I will be), beyond human comprehension and yet present to help in every age. The miraculous signs that God provides for Moses to perform also point to his transcendence.*
- *God doesn't just have far-off knowledge of the suffering of Israel, but he cares enough to "come down to deliver them". Notice how many times God tells Moses that he will be present with him! God carries out a lengthy dialogue – almost a negotiation – with Moses, as he invites him into what he will do to deliver his people.*
- *Moses is an unlikely (and unwilling) hero. But all he really needs is to trust that God is able, because God is the one who is going to make it happen.*
- *The patience of our Father-God is really on display in this encounter! We know from the broader context that Moses is deeply concerned about his people in Egypt, yet when God appears to him in an awesome way declaring that he is to be involved in their deliverance, Moses begins to throw out road-blocks. God patiently responds to each of them, answering Moses with help and a promise to be present every step of the way. In the end, this is still not enough for Moses. You may notice that verse 14 says God became angry with Moses. But notice this too: God doesn't strike Moses down, nor does he give up on him. Once again, he responds with patience, allowing for Moses' brother to accompany him.*

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).)

Spend some time thinking about the human failings of your parents. The purpose of this exercise is *not* to make you resentful towards the earthly parents or caregivers that God has given you: Remember that they are human and ask God to help you forgive them when they fail to reflect God's fatherhood. Next, take some time to go through each item on your list and ask God to remind you of what *his* fatherhood is like. End with a time of thanksgiving.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect.

O God, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal. Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. Amen. (THE COLLECT FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, BCP PAGE 223)

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CLOSING PRAYERS

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", printed at the end of the Litany booklet.

EXODUS 3-4: I AM... WILL BE WITH YOU

3 ²And the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ³And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." ⁴When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey..."

¹¹But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

¹²He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." ¹³Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'..."

4 ¹Then Moses answered, "But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'..." [In response, God provided Moses with miraculous signs.]

¹⁰But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue." ¹¹Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? ¹²Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." ¹³But he said, "Oh, my Lord, please send someone else." ¹⁴Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. ¹⁵You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do."