

# OFFENDERS PART ONE

## CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- A stack of old newspapers and magazines, scissors, paper and glue
- 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: GOOD WORLD/BAD WORLD

Bring in a stack of old/unwanted newspapers and magazines. Invite the kids to cut them up and create together two collages of phrases and images. The first collage should be made up of everything that reminds us that *God made the world good* and that we can still find things of beauty and truth that point us to him. The second collage should be made up of everything that reminds us that *our world and the people in it are “fallen”* – broken and inclined towards evil. When they finish (or when the allotted time has passed), post the resulting work, and take a few moments to review the collage. Ask your teens what stood out to them as they worked on this project.

A SMALL GROUP MAY BE HAPPY WORKING TOGETHER ON TWO MASTER COLLAGES. FOR LARGER OR MORE INDEPENDENT GROUPS YOU MAY WANT TO LET THEM SPLIT INTO SUB-GROUPS AND WORK SEPARATELY AND THEN POST THE RESULTS TOGETHER AS ONE LARGER PIECE BEFORE REVIEWING.

## 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: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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.

- C.S. Lewis once posed the question: “If a good God made the world, why has it gone wrong?” Is that a question that you’ve asked yourself? What was it that prompted you to ask the question?
- Ask your teens to consider and respond to what C.S. Lewis went on to write: “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line”.

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

- *Most of us have had a point in our lives – maybe many points in our lives – when we’ve encountered something particularly dreadful and just cannot understand why a good and sovereign God has allowed it. It may be finding out about atrocities happening on the other side of the globe or an injustice we have experienced in our own lives.*
- *Lewis’ logic invites us to consider that if we are making a complaint, it is because we have some innate sense of what the world ought to look like. We know something is wrong because we have a God-given concept of goodness.*
- *Note: This is a really involved theological issue. The problem of evil is the primary explanation cited by those who are hostile towards or have abandoned the faith. We’re not going to “solve” the angst some of your teens may feel*

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*around this with one lesson, but it's important to allow them to ask the question and then to respond to them with empathy and good theology!*

## THE LESSON: ROMANS 1-3

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.

*Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers...*

The human story is one of a beautiful relationship with God, disrupted by human disobedience. The creation account in the book of Genesis tells us that the first man and woman had only one rule to follow – and they broke it. Theologians call this event “the fall” – something that set in motion a tragic separation from God for all of humanity and the world we inhabit. All of the ugliness and evil that we find in the world and in our own hearts trace their roots back to that choice to rebel against our Creator.

Ever since the fall, the story has been of a holy God, offended by the sin of humanity, yet reaching out in love to bridge that chasm and make a way back home for us. In the meantime, we're fallen people living in a fallen world. But God *has* made a way and the way is Jesus – this is the good news of the Gospel!

In spite of the fact that we are surrounded by evidence and consequences of the fall, human beings often cling to rebellion, shaking our fists at God for the brokenness we encounter, rather than acknowledging to him that we are all offenders – part of the problem – and we cannot fix the situation on our own.

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St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, spends the first three chapters elaborating on this truth: that God is righteous, and that we are all offenders in need of his grace. Brace yourselves: St. Paul doesn't mince words!

Refer to Romans 1:18-22, 3:10-16, 23-26.

(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: ROMANS 1:18-3:26.)

(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 does this passage tell us about the character of God?
- What does this passage tell us about humanity?
- According to this passage, what is God's solution to the evil of humanity?

*A few notes and reflections for reference:*

- *God's power and goodness are revealed in nature (1:20). God is righteous and his response to evil is wrath (1:18). This isn't something we like to talk about in modern times, but we should because it can help us in our outrage over the evil we encounter in the world to know that God is also outraged by it! The difference is that our anger is misdirected if we are aiming it at God. He knows where the blame lies. God is gracious (3:24), he is forbearing (patient) (3:25), and he is just (3:26).*
- *St. Paul does not paint a flattering picture of humanity. In fact, we have skipped over some portions of the text where Paul is even more florid in his depictions of just how much of a mess we are. Specifically, in the verses we have read together, humanity is described as ungodly, unrighteous, suppressors of truth (1:18), without excuse (1:20), foolish, dark-hearted (1:21), not seeking after God (3:10), deceivers, malicious (3:13), violent (1:15), agents of ruin and misery (3:16). In short, humanity is sinful and fallen (3:23), in need of redemption and justification (3:24).*

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- Romans 3:23-26 uses some heavy theological terms: justification, redemption and propitiation. These all point us to the truth that the gravity of human sin necessitated divine intervention in the form of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In spite of God's just wrath against a sinful world, he has not destroyed us nor given up on us. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).*

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 prayerfully reading through the words of Psalm 32:1-7: "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord", and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance".*

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect.

*O most mighty God, and merciful Father, who hast compassion upon all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made; who wouldest not the death of a sinner, but that he should rather turn from his sin, and be saved: Mercifully forgive our trespasses; receive and comfort us, who are grieved and wearied with the burden of our sins. Thy property is always to have mercy; to thee only it appertaineth to forgive sins. Spare, O Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed; enter not into judgement with thy servants, who truly repent us of our faults, but so make haste to help us in this world, that we may ever live with thee in the world to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* (COLLECT FROM A PENITENTIAL SERVICE, BCP PAGE 613)

## 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.

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## ROMANS 1-3: **ALL HAVE SINNED. ALL ARE FALLEN.**

**1** <sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup>For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup>For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup>For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup>Claiming to be wise, they became fools...

**3** <sup>10</sup>As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup>no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. <sup>13</sup>Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. <sup>14</sup>Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. <sup>15</sup>Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup>in their paths are ruin and misery, <sup>17</sup>and the way of peace they have not known..."

<sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

<sup>26</sup>It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.