

FROM CONDEMNATION

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Pieces of paper, pens
- Copies of the downloadable “Litany” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader’s notes - *note that there are five pages*
- A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: HANGMAN, THE JUSTICE VERSION

This is the version of hangman you know but with a bit of a twist. Instead of drawing a stick figure of a man, have your teens complete the stick figure of a courthouse for this justice-themed activity.

Ahead of time, write out some of the following scriptural phrases on scraps of paper. The teens take turns selecting one of the scraps and drawing out the lines on a board that correspond to the letters of the words in the phrase they have selected (excluding the reference). They should write in full the word “JUSTICE” wherever it occurs. The other teens take turns guessing letters and try to guess what the full phrase is. Each time they guess a letter which is not there, part of the courthouse gets drawn until they have no more guesses left. (You may want to insist that the courthouses are sufficiently detailed to allow at least ten guesses – include walls, a door, windows, pillars, etc.).

- Righteousness and peace have kissed (Psalm 85:10)
- The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness (Romans 1:18)
- Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)
- One trespass led to condemnation for all (Romans 5:18)
- God executes justice for the fatherless and the widow (Deuteronomy 10:18)
- At God’s wrath the earth quakes (Jeremiah 10:10)
- God has not destined us for wrath (1 Thessalonians 5:9)
- The Lord loves justice; he will not forsake his saints (Psalm 37:28)

FOR LARGE GROUPS, PLAY IN TEAMS. FOR SMALL GROUPS PLAY AS INDIVIDUALS AND TAKE MULTIPLE TURNS. YOU MAY WANT TO ASSIGN BONUS POINTS IF THE TEENS CAN GUESS WHAT PART OF SCRIPTURE THE PHRASE COMES FROM.

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 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUSTICE & MERCY

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.

- When was the last time you said, “That’s not fair”? What prompted you to say it? What did you want to see happen instead?
- What qualities do you think a good judge should have?

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- Is it possible for a judge’s decision to be both just and merciful at the same time?
- Theologian and writer R.C. Sproul said, “Don’t ever ask God for justice—you might get it.” What do you think he meant?

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

- *When we complain that something is unfair, it is typically because we feel that we (or someone we care about) have been wronged. When someone wrongs us, it is natural to desire justice, to appeal to some outside judge to take our side and acknowledge that an injustice has occurred and perhaps that some punitive consequences are in order.*
- *A good judge needs to have an understanding of the law: what constitutes right and wrong. A good judge should be fair, demonstrating an understanding of and concern about all those who are impacted when a trespass is committed – including society, the victim, and the offender.*
- *For someone who has been wronged, seeing that wrong acknowledged and consequences applied is justice. For the offender, being apprehended in their wrong-doing is justice, but if it provides the opportunity to reorient their life, then it is also mercy.*
- *It would be entirely just for God to allow us to suffer the consequences of our rebellion. “No one ever suffers unjustly in terms of his or her relationship with God. As long as we bear the guilt of sin, we cannot protest that God is unjust in allowing us to suffer.” - R.C. Sproul*

THE LESSON: GENESIS 6-9

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.

From thy wrath, and from everlasting condemnation... Good Lord, deliver us.

As we look back through the scriptures, back through the story of our ancestors in the faith, we see how our good Lord has been our deliverer in every age. God stepped into our messy world to deliver the faithful time and again in the Old Testament scriptures, and this points us to the ultimate deliverance brought about for us through the work of Jesus Christ.

Christians believe in a God whose character is fundamentally loving and merciful. But sometimes we shy away from talking about the fact that he is also holy, and that his holiness cannot tolerate sin. The prophet Habakkuk said of God, “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and you cannot tolerate wrong” (1:13).

The sinfulness of humanity is why the sacrifice of Christ was *necessary*. If we lose sight of God’s holiness and of the consequences of human sin (condemnation), then we cannot fully appreciate the magnitude of God’s love in saving us from this mess of our own making. But when we do keep these things in view, then we rejoice at God’s great mercy, knowing that “there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

The flood narrative is one of the Old Testament passages that show us the condemnation of wicked humanity as well as the deliverance of the faithful by a holy and merciful God. If you’ve never studied the biblical story of Noah, you may be in for a surprise. (Neither Hollywood movies, nor children’s stories have typically done it justice)!

Refer to Genesis 6:5-8, 13-14, 18-19, 22; 7:7, 16-17, 22-23; 8:1, 18-22; 9:12, 14-15.

(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: GENESIS 6:5-9:15.)

(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.

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- How is humanity described in this passage?
- How is Noah described in this passage? How can he be an example for us?
- In what ways does this passage point to God's justice?
- In what ways does this passage point to God's mercy?
- What are the indications that this is a fresh start for humanity? (Did it work?)

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Genesis 6 tells us that humanity was “wicked”(6:5), that “the earth was filled with violence” because of them (6:13), and that “every intention of the thoughts of [their hearts] was only evil continually” (6:5) – this is an extreme state suggesting that even when people were not actively doing something evil, they were thinking about, intending, desiring evil. So much so that God was “grieved to his heart” and “sorry” that he had made them (6:6).*
- *Noah stands in contrast to the people of his age. The passage tells us that he “found favour in the eyes of the Lord” (6:8). Following God’s instructions cannot have been easy for Noah, but the passage tells us repeatedly that he did “all that God commanded him” (6:22, 7:16). When he emerges from the ark, the first thing Noah does is build an altar and worship God through sacrifice (8:20). Noah is a fantastic example for us of faith in difficult circumstances. Noah trusts God and obeys God, regardless of the fact that he is the only one doing so. Noah is obedient even though the task he has been set must have been difficult and even seemed ridiculous (at least before the rain began). And after a long time spent in the ark, Noah emerges filled with gratitude. He does not forget that God is the one who saved him (he did not save himself).*
- *God’s justice is evident in that the extreme evil of humanity “grieves him to his heart” (6:6) and he takes action. He determines to “blot them out” (6:7) and “make an end” of them (6:13). This is not God’s first response. It is the response he undertakes at a point when people have arrived at the “only evil continually” stage (6:5). But God recognizes that there is an exception to the rule, someone with whom he can make a fresh start, Noah. He is not going to blot out the righteous along with the wicked. He is going to deliver them!*
- *1 Peter 3:20 tells us that “the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark”. Justice was not swift in coming. God had been patient. The narrative in Genesis is clear that things had reached an all-time low before God decided to take action. Yet, even in this act, God showed mercy in providing deliverance for Noah’s family and a fresh start for humanity.*
- *There are a number of ways in which this narrative parallels the creation account earlier in Genesis (a fascinating study on its own!). Noah’s faithfulness and gratitude please God (8:21). Where Adam and Eve were disobedient in a good world, Noah was obedient in a bad one. God makes a new covenant, signalling that the love relationship between him and his people has a future, one that he is committed to (9:12-15), even though he knows human sin will continue to be a problem (8:21).*

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))

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Psalm 119:11 says, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you”. The At-Home Challenge during this unit is to commit a short passage of scripture to memory each week. If the suggested passage is too long, try picking out one verse or phrase that speaks to you particularly and commit it to memory. You will be amazed at how the words of scripture, stored in the heart, will return to you in the moments when you most need them.

JOHN 3:16-18: ¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect.

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

(THE COLLECT FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT, BCP PAGE 147)

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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GENESIS 6-9: CONDEMNATION + DELIVERANCE

6⁵The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” ⁸But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord... ¹³And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth. ¹⁴Make yourself an ark... ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. ¹⁹And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female... ²²Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

7⁷And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood... ¹⁶And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him. And the Lord shut him in. ¹⁷The flood continued for forty days on the earth. The waters increased and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth... ²²Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. ²³He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens. They were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark...

8¹But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided... ¹⁸So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. ¹⁹Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark. ²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. ²¹And when the Lord smelt the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. ²²While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

9¹²And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations... ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.