

OBEDIENCE

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Small container, pens or pencils and paper
- 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: ROAD SIGNS

As the teens arrive, give them a pencil and pieces of paper and ask them to write down some instructions that they have seen on signs. (A few examples would be: “Beware of Dog” “Do not enter” “Come in, we’re open” “Deer crossing” “Dogs must be on leash at all times” “Out of order” “Do not disturb” “Emergency Exit”). You may want to add a few yourself. Gather in a circle with the papers in an opaque container for this story-telling improvisation game. The first person selects a piece of paper and begins to tell a story that incorporates the sign they have selected. This means the sign should play a significant part in the story – either because the characters see it and heed the information or because they don’t see it or ignore it – and whatever results from that. After thirty seconds the storyteller stops and the next person selects a new piece of paper and continues the story, incorporating the newly selected sign.

FOR SMALL GROUPS HAVE THE TEENS WRITE AS MANY SIGN MESSAGES AS THEY CAN THINK UP. DEPENDING ON YOUR GROUP, YOU MAY HAVE ONE LONG STORY OR SEVERAL SHORT ONES. THERE ALSO MAY BE TIME FOR EACH PERSON TO HAVE MULTIPLE TURNS. YOU MAY FIND IT SMOOTHER WITH SMALL OR SHY GROUPS TO ALLOW EACH PERSON TO TELL THE STORY UNTIL THEY EITHER GET STUCK OR HIT A NATURAL BREAK POINT RATHER THAN TIMING EACH PERSON.

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 “O” WORD

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 comes to mind when you hear the word “obedience”? Does it have negative or positive connotations? Why do you think that is?
- Can you think of a situation in which it would be in your best interest to obey someone else? List a few examples.

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

- *In today’s world, the word “obedience” usually has negative connotations. We may think of children obeying their parents, and question whether parents have the right to be obeyed. But in most cases, parents have more world knowledge than their children and love their children: two very good reasons for children to take their direction seriously.*
- *Hopefully your teens can come up with a good list. If they need some prompting, ask them to think about people who have unique knowledge or authority to teach or protect, such as a teacher telling you to do your homework,*

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or a police officer making sure you obey the rules of the road, or a mountain guide telling you the safest way to climb a rock face. There are always situations in which we would do well to listen to someone who knows more than we do and is acting for our welfare: by these criteria God always qualifies to be obeyed!

THE LESSON: MATTHEW 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.

...by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation, Good Lord, deliver us.

St. Paul wrote, “The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:47). *What was he talking about?* He was contrasting Adam with Jesus. Scripture tells us that God made Adam from the earth and breathed life into him. Then Adam sinned, plunging all of humanity into a separation from God. But God had a solution. It involved sending his son Jesus to be “a second man”, whose obedience would be as far-reaching in impact as Adam’s disobedience. “For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19).

Last week we looked at Jesus’ obedience in humbling himself to take on human flesh and become one of us (“the incarnation”). But his obedience didn’t stop there. It was continuous and perfect. It characterized everything he did. Throughout the Gospels the writers pause often to note that what Jesus did or where he went was not just chance, but was actually in obedience to God’s law, the direction of the Holy Spirit, or in fulfillment of prophecy.

What does Jesus’ total obedience to God have to do with *us*? Everything. Because it was *for us*. He fulfilled every requirement so that he could be the perfect sinless, sacrifice, suffering “once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

Refer to Matthew 3:1-2, 12-4:11.

(VERSES HAVE BEEN CLIPPED FROM THE READINGS FOR THE SAKE OF BREVITY AND FOCUS, BUT IF YOU HAVE TIME TO EXPLORE THE PASSAGES FULLY, FEEL FREE TO READ THEM IN THEIR ENTIRETY: MATTHEW 3:1-4:11)

(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.

- Why do you think John the Baptist objected to baptizing Jesus? Why did Jesus insist?
- How would you characterize the three temptations described in Matthew’s Gospel?
- How did Jesus respond to temptation?
- What are some indications in this passage that God cares for Jesus?
- Which of these temptations do you think you would have had the hardest time resisting?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance, of ceremonial cleansing (3v2). (It was different from the Christian baptism with which we are familiar – one that signifies our participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ – though both point to new life.) But Jesus had never done anything requiring repentance! Yet Jesus insisted on being baptized because participating in this ceremonial cleansing was a part of his “fulfilling all righteousness” (3v15).*
- *Throughout the history of the Church, these temptations have been interpreted in different ways. Traditionally they have been seen as examples of the three cardinal sources of temptation named in the Litany petition that we looked*

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at in lesson 14: the world (being given the kingdoms of the world), the flesh (making stones into bread), and the devil (throwing himself off the temple pinnacle). Ultimately, each temptation suggests that Jesus not do things in God's way. They are all temptations to disobedience. Where each temptation seeks to pull Jesus in the direction of a sin, his entire life moves in the direction of its opposing virtue. Jesus was tempted to indulge his physical appetite through a misuse of his power (4:3), but instead he chose the way of selfless service, using his power to feed others. He was tempted to a prideful display of ego and self-preservation (4:5-6), and instead led a life of humility, self-sacrifice and obedience to the Father. He was tempted to grasp worldly wealth, status and power (4:8-9), but lived a life of self-giving love. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20).

- In each of the temptations, Jesus responds with an appeal to scripture. He knows what he must do and not do because he is intimately familiar with God's will. The passage shows us that there is direction and also strength in the word of God to help us respond faithfully. "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- Jesus lived in close communion with his Father. We see this in everything. At the baptism we get this amazing glimpse of that relationship when the voice from heaven declares, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (3:17). We find that it is not an accident that Jesus undergoes temptation; rather he was led to it "by the Spirit" (4:1). And when this trial was over, angels were sent to minister to him (4:11).
- Encourage your teens to find some time later in the week to reflect on the temptation they identified, and especially on Jesus' response. Jesus' obedience is a wonderful example for us as we seek to live lives that honour God.

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/BPCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer).)

Scripture is filled with prayers and praises in the form of poetry and songs. During this unit, try your hand at song-writing; drawing inspiration from the love God has for you, made evident in the work of Jesus Christ.

Spend some time this week writing your own song of praise inspired by Christ's obedience.

(Stuck? Spend some time instead reflecting on the words of this hymn translated from a 15th century Latin hymn in 1854 by Benjamin Webb: "For us baptized, for us he bore his holy fast and hungered sore, for us temptation sharp he knew; for us the tempter overthrew... To him whose boundless love has won salvation for us through his Son, to God the Father, glory be both now and through eternity".)

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect.

Lord, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(THE COLLECT FOR THE 18TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, BCP PAGE 247)

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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.

MATTHEW 3-4: **RADICAL OBEDIENCE**

3¹In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ²"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"... ¹³Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" ¹⁵But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness." Then he consented. ¹⁶And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

4¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" ⁷Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

¹¹Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.