

AUTHORITY

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Paper and pencils or pens
- Copies of the downloadable “Litany” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader’s notes
- OPTIONAL: 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: CAESAR SCENES

Give each of your teens a piece of paper and something to draw with. Introduce the activity by explaining that “Caesar” was the title given to the dictatorial ruler of the Roman Empire. Ask them to invent a scene or simple story about Caesar and then draw it out – without words. After a short amount of time, switch the drawings and have the teens take turns “interpreting” each other’s drawings.

FOR LARGER GROUPS, HAVE THEM TEAM UP TO CREATE DRAWINGS AND HAVE A VOLUNTEER FROM ANOTHER GROUP DO THE INTERPRETATION.

THE LITANY: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson (below) 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: TO RESPECT OR NOT TO RESPECT

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.

- Do you think people have too much respect for authority figures or too little? Why?

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

- *Allow your teens to share their opinions freely. A case could certainly be made for both points of view. Studies that followed World War II (Milgram experiments) demonstrated that a surprisingly high percentage of people were willing to act against their conscience when ordered to do so. This, of course, is a chilling thought. On the other hand, we live in a culture where anarchy (that is, a state of chaos arising from the refusal to recognize authority) is considered by many to be “cool”. Instead of respecting authority but listening to conscience, many have concluded that they would prefer to be their own king in all matters, taking aggressive action against authority figures in their lives and communities.*

THE LESSON: MATTHEW 17, 22

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.

AUTHORITY

*To endue those set in authority with grace, wisdom, and understanding,
We beseech thee, good Lord.*

As Christians we know that this world is not our home. We belong to another King and another Kingdom. Our first allegiance is to God. When there is a contradiction between the commands of God and those of human authorities, then “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

But Christians are *not* anarchists. On the contrary, we are exhorted to honour those set in every kind of authority over us and to pray for them: even those we might be tempted to see as our enemies. Scripture commands us to be “subject” to human institutions (1 Peter 2:13), recognizing that authority is “instituted” by God (Romans 13:1) and has a role to play in maintaining order in society. We are also called to be mindful of the reputation of the Church in all our behaviour. When we “let our light shine” the result should be that others see *good works* and give glory to God (Matthew 5:16).

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In a moment we’ll take a look at the example and teaching of Jesus, as recorded in St. Matthew’s Gospel. We’ll look at two stories. In the first, Jesus and St. Peter are approached about a religious tax that supported the upkeep of the temple. In the second, Jesus is confronted about the Roman tax, which was paid to an oppressive and idolatrous regime.

Refer first to Matthew 17:24-27, then to Matthew 22:15-22. You may wish to follow the first reading with the first two discussion questions before continuing to the second reading.

(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 is the reason that Jesus gives for paying the temple tax (Matthew 17)?
- What do you think St. Peter learned from the miracle that Jesus performed?
- What sort of answer do you think the Pharisees and Herodians might have been expecting from Jesus (Matthew 22)?
- What do you think Jesus meant by saying, “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s” and “Render to God what is God’s”?
- ...And what *do* we owe to God?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Jesus says that in order “not to give offence” to the religious leaders they will pay this tax (17:27), even though as the children of God – whose temple it is – they are not obligated to do so. They are “free” (17:26) but that freedom is to be used in a way that is responsible concerning the faith of others, a recurring theme in the New Testament. For example, St. Paul, writing to the Romans said, “make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister” (Romans 14:13). And in Galatians 5:13: “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love”.*
- *Jesus had explained that they would pay the tax and why. The unasked question in the text then becomes “Where will we get the money from?” But the answer is clear: God will provide. As St. Paul wrote, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God... And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6,19).*
- *The Pharisees and Herodians were not friends, yet both were willing to work together to try to undermine Jesus. The Herodians received their power through Roman channels and would have been happy to hear Jesus legitimize*

AUTHORITY

the oppressive regime they supported. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were infuriated at the prospect of giving money to their idolatrous conquerors. Both groups hoped to trick Jesus either into inciting rebellion by suggesting the tax not be paid or losing popularity with the people by supporting the Romans.

- *St. Matthew’s Gospel underlines again and again Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom of God. Caesar is the king of a different, earthly, kingdom. While pointing out the distinction, Jesus chose not to question the legitimacy of the Roman Empire. Instead he used this opportunity to speak about returning to God what is owed to him, and honouring those we encounter in this world, by also returning to them whatever we might owe. St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, put it this way: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God... Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honour to whom honour is owed” (Romans 13:1,7).*
- *We owe God everything, our hearts, our very lives. Jesus knew his questioners were not sincerely asking for his insight. He also knew that both groups were after their own gain. There is a wake-up call in his command to “render to God what is God’s” – something they were not doing while they conspired either with or against the Romans. Notice how they responded: these malicious questioners “marvelled” (22:22). While they were preoccupied with who gets to have earthly power, they had forgotten the God who is sovereign over all.*

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))

Give your teens a moment to think of someone in authority whose example and decisions directly impact them. It could be a political leader, a teacher or principal, coach, parent, etc., then ask them to share that one name with the group. (For groups of more than ten, you’ll want to break into smaller groups.) Each person in the group should write all the names mentioned down on their lesson paper so they can remember them.

During this unit, we’re going to focus our prayers on specific people in our world.

Each day this week, take time to pray for each of those named on your group’s list. Ask God to help them to exercise their authority in a way that respects his authority. Or in the words of the Litany, to give them, “grace, wisdom, and understanding” as they carry out their responsibilities.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this prayer.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, send forth, we beseech thee, upon thy servants who bear office in this city [or town, or village, or municipality] the spirit of prudence, charity, and justice; that they may in all things walk before thee with steadfast purpose and a single heart, and faithfully serve in their several offices; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (PRAYER FOR CIVIC AUTHORITIES, BCP PAGE 50)

AUTHORITY

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 17, 22: **FREE TO RENDER WHAT IS OWED**

(MATTHEW 17): ²⁴When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?" ²⁵He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?" ²⁶And when he said, "From others", Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are free. ²⁷However, not to give offence to them, go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself."

(MATTHEW 22): ¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. ¹⁶And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" ²¹They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they heard it, they marvelled. And they left him and went away.