

PEACE

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: 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: WALL OF CONFLICT

Bring in a stack of old/unwanted newspapers and magazines. Be sure to include some papers that cover international news. Invite the teens to cut them up and create a collage together containing evidence that the world is filled with conflict – this can include interpersonal conflict, but especially global conflict. When they finish (or when the allotted time has passed), post the resulting work, and take a few moments to review the collage. What does this exercise demonstrate about the world we live in?

A SMALL GROUP MAY BE HAPPY WORKING TOGETHER ON A SINGLE COLLAGE. FOR LARGER OR MORE INDEPENDENT GROUPS YOU MAY WANT TO HAVE THEM 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 (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: THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

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 do you think are the causes of war?
- How do you think peace can be brought about in situations of conflict?

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

- *James 4:1-2 says, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.” James was writing about fighting at the personal level, rather than armed conflicts between nations, but the desire for power and control is often at the root of these larger issues, though they may be disguised in terms of self-defence, pre-emptive strikes or consolidation of territory. Sometimes misguided religious zeal plays a part. In the best circumstances, wars are fought when there is a widely acknowledged need to repel a great evil.*
- *There is a great deal of secular scholarship on this topic, but it may be best to keep reflection light, allowing your teens freedom to discuss their thoughts and then letting the lesson and scriptures speak for themselves. Scripture’s view is that true peace is something that Jesus gives to us. He said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you” (John 14:27).*

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THE LESSON: GENESIS 4 + JAMES 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.

*To give to all nations unity, peace, and concord,
 that they may serve thee without fear,
 We beseech thee, good Lord.*

Ever since humanity rebelled in Eden, there has been violence and conflict on the earth. When we disobeyed God we broke the peace that had existed, and our relationships with him and each other have borne the consequences.

The world is marked by the absence of peace, and it is hostile to Jesus and those who follow him. Jesus said to his disciples, “In the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). He has given us inner peace and peace with God, yet we know life in this world will not be smooth sailing. In spite of this, we are called to be at peace with others “so far as it depends on you” (Romans 12:18), and to pray for the leaders of the world, so that “we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Timothy 2:2).

At the same time, we remember that we are citizens of the kingdom of heaven and we pray with longing for that kingdom to come. But for now, we do what we can to work for peace, remembering that Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

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Genesis tells us that Adam and Eve had two sons after being expelled from Eden. It took only one generation for the disobedience of that first sin to devolve into murder. Take a look.

Refer to Genesis 4:3-10; James 3:16-18.

(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 4:1-16; JAMES 3:13-18.)

(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 did Cain kill Abel?
- What was Cain’s attitude after killing Abel?
- What was God’s perspective on what had happened?
- What does the passage from James 3 tell us about conflict and peace? How does this apply to the situation with Cain and Abel? How might things have been different if Cain had heard and listened to the message in James?
- What can these texts teach us about peace?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Cain was angry (Genesis 4:5) because Abel’s offering was accepted by God and his own was not. God saw what was lacking in Cain’s offering, and recognized the sin-root of his anger and where it would lead. He even warned Cain that he must “rule over it” (Genesis 4:7). But Cain did not heed God’s warning and his jealousy and anger drove him to kill his brother.*

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- *Cain's attitude was far from penitent. He denied knowing the whereabouts of his brother and defiantly posed the famous question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The words of Cain are like a manifesto of indifference. Anger hardened him to the act of murder, and murder hardened him to indifference towards those he should have loved, as well as towards what he had done.*
- *Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks". God saw both the actions and the motivations of these two men. He also saw where Cain's sin would lead. He cared about the direction Cain was heading in, and he cared about the atrocity that had been committed against Abel. Genesis 4:10 says that the blood of Abel "cried out" to God from the ground. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).*
- *James identified jealousy and selfish ambition as roots of "every vile practice" (James 3:16). He saw the antidote in "the wisdom from above" – peace that leads to righteousness. If Cain had set aside his jealousy, and sought those wise traits James advises ("pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, impartial, sincere" – James 3:17), he would not have murdered his brother. Instead, he would have been sincere in his interactions with God, seeking to make things right by changing his own heart and actions, rather than eliminating his rival. Though Cain did not have the benefit of James' words, he did have a clear and direct warning from God himself (Genesis 4:6-7).*
- *Peace becomes possible when we have a right relationship with God. We need to listen to God and pursue righteousness and that "wisdom from above". Then we will set aside the sinful attitudes and preoccupations that draw us into conflict and "every vile practice" and instead our lives will be characterized by peace. Mother Teresa is commonly attributed with the saying, "What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family", meaning that each of us can work toward peace by loving those around us.*

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 a situation or part of the world in need of peace, then ask them to share that one item with the group. (If you have more than ten teens you'll want to break into smaller groups.) Each person in the group should write all the items 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 the names on your group's list. Ask God to bring his peace into these situations and areas and to bless the efforts of those who are actively working to make that happen.

- AND/OR -

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Take some time to pray through this prayer.

Almighty Lord and everlasting Father, who wouldst have the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of thy Son Jesus Christ: Bestow thy blessing, we beseech thee, upon all who labour for peace and righteousness among the nations, that the day may be hastened when war shall be no more, and thou shalt take the nations for thine inheritance; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (COLLECT FOR ADVENT EMBER DAYS, BCP PAGE 100)

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.

GENESIS 4 + JAMES 3: A CASE STUDY IN CONFLICT

(GENESIS 4): ³In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

⁸Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" ¹⁰And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground..."

(JAMES 3): ¹⁶For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.