

ENEMIES

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- 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: OPPONENTS AS OBJECTS

Divide your group into two teams (see variations for group size below). The task of each team is to act out a familiar story (such as a fairy tale) in a brief sketch. The twist is that any time they need a prop, they must call on a member of the opposite team to act as that prop. *(For example, if a team were acting out “Hansel and Gretel”, they might take people from their opposing team to pretend to be breadcrumbs, candy, and an oven door).* If you want to add some competition to the activity, let the teams score one another on how well they did getting through their story in the allotted time, as well as how they did as supporting props for the other team.

IF YOU HAVE A GROUP OF TWO, THEN EACH PERSON CAN BE THEIR OWN TEAM. IDEALLY, EACH TEAM CAN HAVE UP TO THREE TO FIVE MEMBERS. IF YOUR NUMBERS CALL FOR MORE THAN TWO GROUPS, THEN ASSIGN WHICH GROUP SERVES AS PROPS FOR WHICH (2 FOR 1, 3 FOR 2, ETC.). IF YOUR NUMBERS CALL FOR MORE THAN FOUR GROUPS, YOU WILL WANT TO HAVE A SECOND LEADER TAKE SOME OF YOUR TEAMS TO A SEPARATE “STAGE AREA” SO THAT THE INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY DOES NOT OVERTAKE YOUR LESSON TIME.

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: HOW WE FEEL ABOUT OUR ENEMIES

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.

- Are there people in your life that you feel are your enemies?
- What would you like to see happen to them?
- What do you think would have to happen for you to no longer see them as enemies?
- Do you ever pray for these people? How difficult do you think it would be to start?

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

- *Note: Allow your teens to respond as honestly as possible, without going into too many “shoulds” – the lesson will cover that material.*
- *An enemy is someone who is hostile or antagonistic towards us, someone who wishes us harm. Most of us know or have known people who hated us and wanted to harm us. But when we reflect that hatred back, we are taking on the part of an enemy.*
- *It’s easy to see our “enemies” as objects, not people, and to wish harm on them, especially if they have harmed us. But Romans 12:20-21 says, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink...’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

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- Sometimes we can have a hard time imagining that our enemies could change, but this is a failure of hope on our part, for “with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).
- It can be really hard to pray for our enemies, but doing so has a way of giving us insight into how God sees them: with compassion and a desire for them to be saved. Remember Jesus said, “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

THE LESSON: ACTS 16

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 forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts,
We beseech thee, good Lord.*

It is natural to want to retaliate against our enemies. But the New Testament calls believers to something that does not come naturally at all: love for our enemies, and prayer for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44).

How does that work? Well, first of all, we are reminded that because of our sin, *we* were once the enemies of God (Romans 5:10). If God’s grace has done so much for us, we need to be willing to show grace to others. Moreover, our *real* enemies aren’t human beings at all, but rather “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). So the people we are tempted to see as our enemies are actually just lost people in need of rescue, whom we should seek to “save by snatching them out of the fire” (Jude 23).

The epistles call Christians again and again to a standard of behaviour that shows we are followers of a good God, and that we trust him to take care of us and to deal with those who wish to harm us. Listen to what St. Paul wrote to the Romans:

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink’... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:14,19-21).

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In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke tells us about the many amazing things that the Holy Spirit was at work doing in the early Church. Check out how St. Paul and St. Silas responded to their enemies.

Refer to Acts 16:16-40.

(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.

- Who are the “enemies” in this passage? How does St. Paul respond to each of them?
- How would you have expected St. Paul and St. Silas to act in prison? How did they act instead?
- How did God provide for St. Paul and St. Silas in this story?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- Firstly, we have the **slave girl** (perhaps not an “enemy” exactly, but a difficult person in the narrative), who “had a spirit” and attached herself to the ministry of the apostles (v16-17). The text tells us that this was “annoying”. St. Paul cast out the spirit (v18): she was then free from that form of oppression – to the horror of her owners (v19). We do not know what happened to her after that, but there is room for hope. The **slave owners** trumped up charges against them, the **crowds** joined in attacking them, and the **magistrates** had them stripped, beaten and

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thrown in prison (v19-23). We hear nothing more of the slave owners, but later on St. Paul takes the trouble to let the magistrates know that they had treated Roman citizens unjustly (v37). The magistrates “were afraid” (v38). These rulers might think twice in the future before handing out such unjust treatment to other believers – just in case they were also Roman citizens. Most importantly, we have the **jailer**. St. Paul saved him from committing suicide (v28), and God opened the jailer’s heart to ask that all-important question, “What must I do to be saved?”

- These two men must have been in considerable pain. They had been obeying God by preaching the Gospel, and the results of those actions had earned them public ridicule, cruel injustice, and imprisonment (v19-24). We would understand if they responded to all that with anger. Instead they were “praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listening to them” (v25). Both men would have been familiar with the psalms, which say, “By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life” (42:8). His song was certainly with them in that night, and they had just found a new way in which to preach the Gospel!
- St. Paul and St. Silas were on a mission to preach the Gospel. In spite of the harsh treatment they received, they were brought to people who needed to hear the good news: the prisoners, the jailer, and the jailer’s family. God enabled these saints to see the jailer, not as an enemy, but as someone who needed to be saved. An act of God – the earthquake – loosed their chains and provided an opportunity they could not have created themselves (v26). Their “enemy” then washed their wounds and offered them hospitality in his own home (v33-34)! And then they were set free to carry on their work, but not before giving the magistrates a scare that may have made the Christians in the area a little safer (v35-40). Jesus had said to them, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour” (Matthew 10:16-19).

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 praying again with the phrase “*Give us today our daily bread*”. Are there “enemies” in your life that you need God’s help in dealing with? Ask him to remove a spirit of vengeance from your heart, to help you to trust in his care, and to see your enemies through his eyes. Spend some time praying for those same enemies. Read Romans 12:21: “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*” Conclude with a time of thanksgiving.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this prayer.

O God, our Father, who makest thy sun to rise upon the evil and upon the good, and sendest rain upon the just and upon the unjust: Help us to love our enemies, and to forgive those who trespass against us, that we may receive of thee the forgiveness of our sins, and be made thy children in spirit and in truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(PRAYER FROM A PENITENTIAL SERVICE, BCP PAGE 614)

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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.

ACTS 16: THE RESCUE OF THE JAILER

¹⁶As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling. ¹⁷She followed Paul and us, crying out, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." ¹⁸And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

¹⁹But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market-place before the rulers. ²⁰And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, "These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. ²¹They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practise." ²²The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened. ²⁷When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸But Paul cried with a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. ³⁰Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³²And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. ³³And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. ³⁴Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

³⁵But when it was day, the magistrates sent the police, saying, "Let those men go." ³⁶And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore come out now and go in peace." ³⁷But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out." ³⁸The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. ³⁹So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city. ⁴⁰So they went out of the prison and visited Lydia. And when they had seen the brothers, they encouraged them and departed.