

BENEDICT OF NURSIA

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Pieces of paper, pens
- A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- Copies of the downloadable “622 service” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader’s notes
- 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 REBEL VERSION)

This is the version of hangman you know but themed around verses related to rebellion. Encourage your teens to give their stick figure a bit of “rebel” personality – they can have artistic license to interpret that in their own way.

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 lines on a board or easel pad that correspond to the letters of the words in the phrase they have selected. 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 rebel gets drawn until they have no more guesses left.

- Do not rebel against the Lord. (Numbers 14:9)
- Many times he delivered them, but they were rebellious. (Psalm 106:43)
- Do not despise the Lord’s discipline. (Proverbs 3:11)
- Their speech and their deeds are against the Lord. (Isaiah 3:8)
- The word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn. (Jeremiah 6:10)
- Like Adam they transgressed the covenant. (Hosea 6:7)
- Their condemnation is just. (Romans 3:8)
- The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. (Romans 8:7)
- We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray. (Titus 3:3)
- These people blaspheme all that they do not understand. (Jude 1:10)

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.

622: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the first part of the order for service for young people in the booklet, up to the middle of page 4.

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: WHEN REBELLION IS FASHIONABLE

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.

- If you were told a new student was coming who was “a bit of a rebel” – what would you be expecting?

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- What are some different ways in which the words “rebel” and “rebellion” get used today?
Are the connotations positive or negative?
- How does the world’s view of rebellion contrast with the Bible’s view of it?
(If you did the opening exercise, you may wish to refer back to some of the verses)

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

- *Popular culture has made it fashionable to be a “rebel”, so when we use the term informally, it is not typically meant to be negative. In fact, most people would take it as complimentary. You might expect someone described this way to be original, gutsy, someone who is relaxed in their attitude towards rules (and may get into trouble as a result). This person might be someone with risqué taste in clothes and music, but probably someone who also has a sort of edgy allure and social credibility.*
- *A rebel is someone who is defined by being in opposition to authority, and a rebellion is an action or a group movement which is actively fighting against the established order, often by violent means. Unless we are discussing violent gangs in politically unstable regions, our use of these terms is usually not negative. For example, many activist groups in the west are technically rebellious, but enjoy mainstream respect and support. Similarly, many fashion labels seek to brand themselves as having a rebellious edge as a way to appeal to modern consumers.*
- *Scripture views God as our authority, and the call for the believer is to live in obedience to God and in a way that respects authority (Romans 13:1). This view is totally at odds with the view of culture today. As a society and as individuals, it goes against the grain for us to set aside our inclinations in order to live in the way to which God has called us.*

THE LESSON: FULLY COMMITTED

Lessons 13-42 follow a slightly different format from previous lessons. The story of the saint being studied is interspersed with verses from scripture that provide added perspective. You may prefer to read the lesson text aloud together as a group, or ask the teens to read it silently to themselves.

***“The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backwards.”
(Isaiah 50:5)***

Benedict and his twin sister Scholastica were born around the year 480 in Nursia, Italy. Both siblings would grow up to establish influential monasteries, and remained close throughout their lives.

Benedict was educated in Rome and during that time was horrified by the vice he witnessed around him. He was still a teenager when he left the city to become a solitary monk in a remote part of Italy. During this time, Benedict struggled and overcame temptations of his own, and after a few years was asked to take on the leadership of a nearby monastery. Benedict was strict and the monks were rebellious. An attempt was made to poison him. Not surprisingly, he returned to his solitary life. But in the years that followed, many people came to him seeking to learn from him.

***“Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the Lord our God,
walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments.”
(1 Kings 8:61)***

In due course Benedict, with some of his disciples, built a monastic community at a place called Monte Cassino, where he instituted – and importantly, *wrote down* – a “Rule” to govern every aspect of community life.

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Benedict died at the age of 70. About four decades later his monastery was attacked, and the monks of Monte Cassino fled, taking Benedict's "Rule" with them. It was this that went on to facilitate the spread of Benedict's order for community life throughout the west.

*"For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you,
but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil."
(Romans 16:19)*

Benedict's experience had taught him that all members of a monastic community were human and had human failings. All people share the sinful inclination towards rebellion. And yet these people had come together with the common purpose of living lives obedient to God in every particular. So Benedict's "Rule" was demanding, but realistic.

Those in charge were exhorted to act with humility and father-like compassion. Those under authority needed to be obedient, rather than rebellious. This sort of harmony and discipline was only possible, Benedict believed, when monks were committed to staying in one place under the authority of one abbot. For this reason, Benedict wrote against "vagabond" monks who wandered from place to place, and were therefore not held accountable by community and abbot for living in accordance with their vows.

The Benedictine monasteries were places of prayer and humble work, but they also became important places of teaching, health care, and hospitality within the broader communities where they were established. Benedict's "Rule" is still read by many, and it has inspired numerous religious communities throughout the centuries, even to this day.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: DAVID FARMER, "OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS" | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, "THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1" | GERARD SAMPSON, "LAYMAN'S BOOK OF SAINTS".)

Then ask the teens to respond to what they've just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- What was Benedict's view of human nature? How did he believe it needed to be managed?
- What evidence can we find that God was able to use "all things" for good?
- Even though we are not part of a monastic community, what can we learn from the principles found in Benedict's "Rule"?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Benedict, like most of us, had the opportunity to observe just how much trouble human beings can get into when they rebel against God. He witnessed this not only in others, but in his own wrestling with temptation. It was necessary for those who truly wished to live devout lives to commit to living in one place and under the authority of that community. This would enable the mutual accountability that would allow the monks to flourish spiritually, both as individuals and as a community.*
- *Romans 8:28 says, "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose". Benedict's early encounter with the vice of Rome, his own temptation, and the attempt on his life all taught him a great deal about human nature. This understanding enabled Benedict to write a "Rule" that was wise and realistic. The attack against Monte Cassino was not a "good" thing, and yet God was able to use this calamity to spread Benedict's "Rule" to other people and communities where it would provide helpful direction.*
- *We can learn to start with honesty, recognizing that we are inclined toward rebellion, but striving to live in obedience to God. Our attitude ought to be humble and compassionate, even if we are elevated to a position*

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of leadership. But particularly, we can learn to put down roots – to fully commit to and engage in our faith community, allowing our leaders to exercise godly authority and allowing other believers to hold us accountable for our conduct. Together, as church communities, we can strive to be a light in our neighbourhoods, just as the monasteries were at their best; places of prayer and hospitality that also seek to minister to the practical needs of those we encounter.

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))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Benedict that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Decide on one concrete action you can take this week based on your reflections.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

O God, who by thy Holy Spirit hast given unto one man a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge, and to another the gift of tongues: We praise thy Name for the gifts of grace manifested in thy servant Benedict, and we pray that thy Church may never be destitute of the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, POET, OR SCHOLAR, P. 317)

CLOSING PRAYERS (622 AGAIN)

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", the final prayer in the booklet.