

# PATRICK OF IRELAND

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## CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Paper, pens, tape (for ice breaker)
- 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: 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: PLACES WE LOVE TO AVOID

Take a stack of paper and on each piece write down a place you wouldn't want to go (see suggestions below). As the teens arrive tape one of the papers to each back. As they talk with others in the group, the teens try to guess what their assigned word or phrase is by asking yes-or-no questions of others until they have guessed it. (You may need to indicate that the words are places, but don't tell them what the places share in common at the outset – let them discover that as they go).

- Prison
- Hospital
- Slaughterhouse
- Mine Field
- Principal's Office
- Cemetery
- Crime Scene
- Dentist's Chair
- Slum
- Desert

## 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: THE DARKEST PLACE

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 is the darkest place you can think of? How can light be brought into that darkness?  
*(This is meant to be metaphorical darkness, but if your teens begin with literal answers, that's okay).*
- What do you know about modern-day war, mass migration, and human slavery?
- What do people need when they are in that sort of place?

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

- Note: If anything arises of a serious and current nature during today's discussion, pause to pray for that situation.
- When we are in places of great sadness and hopelessness, we often describe that state as "dark". Perhaps we have experienced the loss of a loved one or have had to relocate away from friends, and these things took us to such a place. God's light can always reach us no matter how sad, fearful or hopeless we feel. Hopefully in our moments of darkness we felt God's presence with us, or perhaps someone reached out to us to remind us that there was still goodness in the world and hope for our future.
- Sometimes in the west we forget that these sorts of circumstances are not only things that happened in human history, but they are things happening in various places today. Hopefully your teens are able to identify one or two examples, and if not, perhaps you can take a moment to tell them. You can find current information on modern slavery at the website for the International Justice Mission ([ijm.org](http://ijm.org)).
- People who are trapped in dark and dangerous situations, like all of us, need God. But scripture reminds us that we also need to be practical in our concern for others. James 2:16-17 says, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled', without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" So people trapped in seemingly hopeless situations also need others to encourage them, to advocate for them and to offer them help in practical ways.

## THE LESSON: A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

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.

***"Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.  
You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy."  
(John 16:20)***

The fifth century was a time of great instability. The Roman empire had weakened. Not only was there rebellion from within the empire, but in both the east and the west the empire suffered attacks, eventually bringing about a total collapse. During this time, Rome withdrew from Britain. Some regions were pagan and others had seen large-scale conversions to Christianity. Picture a time of mass migrations of people, raids from warring tribes, and overlords fighting for prominence. This is the setting in which Patrick's story unfolded.

***"And this is the judgement: the light has come into the world,  
and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil."  
(John 3:19)***

Patrick was born into a believing family in west Britain around the early fifth century. He was the son of a town councillor, and as a youth he didn't give much thought to God. But as a teenager Patrick was abducted by Irish pirates and forced into slavery for six years. It was during this incredibly hard time that his faith flourished and he came to rely on God for everything. Patrick escaped, and once free he began training for the priesthood, even spending some time studying under Martin of Tours. It was many years later that Patrick found himself back in Ireland, this time as its first bishop.

***"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?"  
(Micah 6:8)***

Though Patrick's status had changed in the world, the same evil things were happening around him. Patrick had been bishop in Ireland for many years when an attack by the tyrannical British warlord Coroticus resulted

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in many of the Irish who had come under his care being captured. Even today, as we read words from his letter to Coroticus, we can sense Patrick's outrage and heartbreak:

I am Patrick, yes a sinner and indeed untaught; yet I am established here in Ireland where I profess myself bishop. I am certain in my heart that "all that I am," I have received from God. So I live among barbarous tribes, a stranger and exile for the love of God... I never would have wanted these harsh words to spill from my mouth; I am not in the habit of speaking so sharply. Yet now I am driven by the zeal of God, Christ's truth has aroused me. I speak out too for love of my neighbors who are my only sons; for them I gave up my home country, my parents and even pushing my own life to the brink of death. If I have any worth, it is to live my life for God so as to teach these peoples; even though some of them still look down on me...

And so, now you, Coroticus – and your gangsters, rebels all against Christ, now where do you see yourselves? You gave away girls like prizes: not yet women, but baptized. All for some petty temporal gain that will pass in the very next instant...

May God inspire these men sometime to come to their senses in regard to God again, so that they may repent, however latter day, of their grave crimes... and that they free these baptized women whom they have taken, so that then they may deserve to live to God and be made whole once more, here, now and for eternity.

***"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."***  
*(Matthew 5:14)*

Unfortunately, we don't know what happened to the abducted girls, nor whether Patrick's efforts succeeded in calling their captors to repentance. What we do know is that Patrick cared deeply about the people he had been sent to serve – his former captors. He wanted them to come to know Jesus: no matter what their status, because he remembered very clearly those years when he had been without status. During Patrick's ministry, many Irish came to believe and were baptized, and many monasteries were founded and flourished. The monasteries of Ireland went on to become great places of learning, as well as places from which missionaries were sent out.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: DAVID FARMER, "OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS" | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, "THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1" | ST. PATRICK, "LETTER TO COROTICUS", TRANS. JOHN SKINNER | 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.

- How did Patrick respond to his captors?
- What did he learn from his time in captivity?
- What did Patrick choose to do with his freedom?
- What can we learn from Patrick's example?
- What evidence can we find that God was able to use "all things" for good?

*A few notes and reflections for reference:*

- *Patrick escaped from captivity, but instead of harbouring hatred towards the people responsible for it, he returned to them later in life to offer the most precious thing that he had: the Gospel, and with it, his deep pastoral concern and advocacy on their behalf when it was they themselves who were taken captive.*
  - *During Patrick's captivity, he turned towards God for strength and learned to rely on him.*
  - *Patrick used his freedom to nurture his faith and to study for active ministry. That ministry would actually be to return to the place and people of his captivity and to share the love of God with them.*
  - *Patrick's generous forgiveness towards the Irish was remarkable. The language that he used to describe the Irish and especially the girls who had been abducted tells us that he regarded them as precious in the sight of God. Though Patrick was obviously humble and kind-hearted, these qualities did not prevent him from speaking sharply against those who had done evil, and calling them to repent, to do right, and to be reconciled with God.*
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- 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”. Though slavery is an evil thing, the experience of hardship brought Patrick closer to God. Patrick’s experience in Ireland as a young man would have helped him to better understand the people he returned to minister to later in life, and his personal experience as a slave taught him a life-long humility and a respect for people no matter what their station. Patrick’s ministry in Ireland brought the light of the Gospel to many in that country, and they in turn brought the light of the Gospel to others (most famously, Columba of Iona, who helped evangelize Scotland).*

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 Patrick 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, our heavenly Father, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst call thy blessed Apostles and send them forth to preach thy Gospel of salvation unto all the nations: We bless thy holy Name for thy servant Patrick, and we pray thee, according to thy holy Word, to send forth many labourers into thy harvest; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

(SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A MISSIONARY, P. 314)

## 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.