

GREGORY THE GREAT

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Paper, pens, markers, pencil crayons, etc.
- 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: HEART SCAN

Introduce today's ice breaker by telling your teens that they will be doing a metaphorical sketch of their heart to self-diagnose what they truly care about. Make special note of Matthew 6:21: *“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”*, and ask the teens to pay particular attention to the things they spend their time and money on.

You may also want to refer to a few other terms to help them think about different aspects of how we speak about the heart (see below). Allow those who wish to present and explain their finished sketch to do so, but let them know they can keep the sketches private if they wish. Encourage them to be as thorough and honest as possible.

- “Refreshed” (Philemon 1:7)
- “Repentant” (2 Chronicles 6:37)
- “Diamond-hard” against hearing the word of the Lord (Zechariah 7:12)
- “Tender” (1 Peter 3:8)
- “Anxious” and “Weighed Down” (Proverbs 12:25)
- “Generous” (Acts 2:46)
- “Compassionate” (Colossians 3:13)
- “Perverse” (Psalm 101:4)
- “Forgiving” (Matthew 18:35)
- “Pure” and “Loving” (1 Peter 1:22)
- “Deceitful” (Proverbs 12:20)
- “Evil” (Matthew 15:19)
- “Humble” (Leviticus 26:41)
- “Joyful” (Proverbs 17:22)
- “Prideful” and “Arrogant” (Isaiah 9:9)
- “Bitter” “Jealous” “Selfish” and “Ambitious” (James 3:14)
- “Broken” (Ezekiel 21:6)

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: A HEART LIKE HIS

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

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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.

- How would you describe your own heart? How would you like your heart to be?
- How would you describe God's heart?
- What are the ways that your heart is like God's? Isn't like God's?

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

- *Perhaps our heart is hard and angry, or perhaps it is tender and compassionate; but chances are our hearts have both these characteristics. There are some people that we love and find it easy to treat with compassion and others that we feel bitterness towards. Perhaps we are in a place of joy or perhaps we are in a place of sadness. One of the truest indicators of spiritual health, however, is whether or not our heart is open towards God and seeking to be like his, regardless of our emotional state and circumstance.*
- *God's heart is loving and compassionate towards us; the heart of a good Father. It is made angry by sin and deceit and evil, but its desire is that we turn towards him so that he can bless us. The heart of God is well illustrated by the image of the Good Shepherd as it appears in the Old Testament prophets and in the parables of Jesus: one who cares for his flock with a love that protects and provides.*
- *A heart like God's is one that looks upon others through that lens of a loving Father, desiring the best for them, wanting to see them come to Christ and live holy lives in the light of his presence.*

THE LESSON: THE HEART OF A SHEPHERD

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 joy of our hearts has ceased; our dancing has been turned to mourning.”
(Lamentations 5:15)

The expansive Roman empire with its peace and order had descended into a chaos of invasions, floods, famine and pestilence by the time Gregory came on the scene in the sixth century. A struggle for authority within the Church had created tensions between the bishops of Constantinople in the East and Rome in the West. Though Gregory's family was wealthy and prominent, the city of Rome where Gregory grew up would not have been the glorious and opulent city of former days, but rather a place where ruin and poverty were to be seen all around.

“When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”
(Matthew 9:36)

When Gregory's father died he came into a large inheritance which he used to found seven monasteries (six in Sicily and one in Rome), and to give generously to the poor. He himself entered the monastery in Rome, where he later became an abbot. He also spent time in the service of Pope Pelagius, acting as an ambassador in the East. (In the western Church the bishop of Rome, or “pope”, had come to be regarded as the supreme head of the Christian Church). Upon the death of Pelagius, Gregory was elected to be the next Pope, an election he tried and failed to have annulled.

The political chaos of the time meant that popes were in the position, not just of providing theological and pastoral guidance, but also of trying to negotiate peace with invading armies and find practical solutions to the poverty and civil crises of the people. Gregory was deeply concerned about the people under his care,

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especially the poor and sick. He got right to work doing his best to fill the gaps: arranging for food distribution and repair of the city as well as successfully negotiating peace with would-be invaders.

“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.”
(Matthew 20:26)

When the Archbishop of Constantinople in the East took on the title “Universal Bishop”, Gregory instead chose to call himself “the Servant of the Servants of God”. He believed that we are all called to use our gifts in the service of the “chief Shepherd”, as he wrote:

“For there are some who are eminently endowed with virtues, and for the training of others are exalted by great gifts, who are pure in zeal for chastity, strong in the might of abstinence, filled with the feasts of doctrine, humble in the long-suffering of patience, erect in the fortitude of authority, tender in the grace of loving-kindness, strict in the severity of justice. Truly such as these, if when called they refuse to undertake offices of supreme rule, for the most part deprive themselves of the very gifts which they received not for themselves alone, but for others also... If, then, the care of feeding is the proof of loving, whosoever abounds in virtues, and yet refuses to feed the flock of God, is convicted of not loving the chief Shepherd” (Gregory, *Pastoral*).

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”
(Ephesians 5:1-2)

Though much of Gregory’s attention was taken up with practical concerns, he did not neglect his spiritual responsibilities. Gregory preached and wrote extensively. He began a choir for boys and gave attention to the formation of the liturgy. Perhaps most famously, Gregory is remembered for arranging for the freeing of English slaves he encountered in the markets of Rome, and then sending missionary monks to that part of the world so that England might hear the Gospel. Gregory died at the age of 65 following two years of severe illness. He had been Pope for 13 years, but had spent a lifetime seeking to model his own heart after that of the Good Shepherd.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: DAVID FARMER, “OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS” | GREGORY THE GREAT, “PASTORAL RULE”, TRANS. JAMES BARMBY | 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 do you think was Gregory’s goal in life?
- What were the actions that showed what Gregory cared about most?
- What can we learn from Gregory’s example?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Gregory wanted to serve God and live in a way that honoured him. He did not want the spotlight, but would have preferred to serve in a monastery, perhaps going to England himself as a missionary. From his own words, we can see that Gregory believed his love for God meant using the gifts he’d been given to minister to the needs he encountered.*
- *As soon as independence and wealth became available to him, Gregory did not use them for his own pleasure, but gave to the poor and built monasteries. Instead of living in a palace, he became a mere brother in one of the communities that he’d founded. Gregory cared about the poor, the sick and the slaves. He spent time and money working to make their lives better. He cared about the peace and well-being of those who lived in his city. All of his tireless work to deal with these unglamorous challenges demonstrated his practical care for his flock. But Gregory*

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cared for their souls too. He wanted to see people nurtured in their faith and worship, and to help those from distant lands come to hear the Gospel.

- *There's a great deal we can take from Gregory's example. He was a man who worked diligently, not for his own gain, but to serve God's people. He was willing not merely to "talk-the-talk", but to "walk-the-walk" – to take action where and when it was needed. He strove to be humble and to use whatever he'd been given, whether it be money or ability, to serve the Lord.*

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 Gregory 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 collect.

O God, our heavenly Father, who didst raise up thy faithful servant Gregory to be a Bishop in thy Church and to feed thy flock: We beseech thee to send down upon all thy Bishops, the Pastors of thy Church, the abundant gift of thy Holy Spirit, that they, being endued with power from on high, and ever walking in the footsteps of thy holy Apostles, may minister before thee in thy household as true servants of Christ and stewards of thy divine mysteries; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen. (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A BISHOP, P. 312)

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.