

# THE VENERABLE BEDE

## CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Pencils and pieces of paper; small container
- Clock or watch with second hand for timing
- 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: ORDINARY/EXTRAORDINARY

As the teens arrive, give each of them a pencil and some small pieces of paper and ask them to write down some ordinary nouns — a person, place or thing — one item on each separate piece of paper (for example: armchair, grocery store, plumber, etc.). You may want to add a few yourself. Gather in a circle with the papers in an opaque container for this story-telling improvisation game. The first person selects a piece of paper and begins to tell a story that incorporates the word selected. After thirty seconds the storyteller finishes with the words, “Something extraordinary was about to happen next”. The next person selects a new piece of paper and continues the story, beginning with the words, “It was all because of the \_\_\_\_\_”, inserting the newly selected word, and continuing the story in the same rhythm.

*For example: (1) A brother and sister were having an argument over who would get to sit in their favourite armchair... But something extraordinary was about to happen next. (2) It was all because of the grocery store. Suddenly, they both remembered that they were out of popcorn and agreed to delay their argument to go and get some together... But something extraordinary was about to happen next... (3) It was all because of the plumber, who arrived just as they were setting out on their way...*

FOR SMALL GROUPS HAVE THE TEENS WRITE AS MANY OF EACH CATEGORY OF NOUN ON DIFFERENT PIECES OF PAPER AS THEY CAN THINK UP. DEPENDING ON YOUR GROUP, YOU MAY HAVE ONE LONG STORY OR SEVERAL SHORT ONES. THERE ALSO MAY BE TIME FOR EACH PERSON TO HAVE MULTIPLE TURNS. YOU MAY FIND IT SMOOTHER WITH SMALL OR SHY GROUPS TO ALLOW EACH PERSON TO TELL THE STORY UNTIL THEY EITHER GET STUCK OR HIT A NATURAL BREAK POINT RATHER THAN TIMING THEM.

## 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: HE MUST INCREASE, I MUST DECREASE

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.

- Do you think of yourself as being “ordinary” or “extraordinary”? Why?
- Who are the people you admire the most? Would you describe them as “ordinary” or “extraordinary”? Why?
- **“He must increase, but I must decrease”**. Does anyone know where this quote comes from? What made the person who said this (John the Baptist) extraordinary?

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

- *The truth is that we are all both ordinary and extraordinary. Many of us have ordinary aptitudes and lead ordinary lives. We are human beings and we belong to the larger human story. Even if we have unique identities and abilities, we are not the hero of the human story. But this does not mean we're not extraordinary. We are all extraordinarily loved and valued by the true hero of the story, Jesus. And if we choose to serve him, God can do extraordinary things through us.*
- *Many of the "extraordinary" celebrities who appear to be glamorous in the eyes of the world are actually narcissists – people who would make terrible friends. These are people who love the spotlight and being the centre of attention, but they may also be people who think they are above the rules and lack empathy towards others. But perhaps we have come to admire a different group of people, those who set an example for us in doing something well, particularly for the benefit of others. Chances are there may be "ordinary" people that we know who are really quite "extraordinary" in the way they quietly seek to live out the Gospel.*
- *This quote is found in the Gospels (John 3:30), and it was said by John the Baptist, a prophet sent to let people know that Jesus was on the way. Once Jesus had arrived on the scene, John knew that the people now needed to pay attention to Jesus. He, John, had only been there to point the way. Now that he had done that job, he needed to take a step back and allow Jesus to take centre stage. John the Baptist has a unique role in the story of scripture, and we honour him as a saint, but one of the things that made him most extraordinary was his understanding that the greatest thing he could do would be to point others to Christ.*

## THE LESSON: ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD

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.

***“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord,  
plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”  
(Jeremiah 29:11)***

A new challenge had emerged in the early seventh century: Islam. Adherents to this new religion embarked on an aggressive military campaign which swept through many lands once dominated by Rome, conquering them one by one in a matter of decades. This included the Middle East, North Africa, Spain and parts of Eastern Europe. The Christian kingdoms of Europe became preoccupied with defending their lands against this new threat, and in the early 700s a successful defence against Islamic assaults was maintained in the cities of Constantinople and Tours. During these years, however, the Christian faith continued to spread in the north, particularly in what is now the United Kingdom, where Bede lived out his days.

***“Lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”  
(1 Timothy 2:2)***

Bede was born in northeast England in the year 673. As a child of seven he was sent to a local monastery where he was educated and grew to become a monk, scholar and author. By worldly standards Bede's life was not extraordinary. He lived the quiet, prayerful life of a monk. He studied scripture and the writings of the early Church fathers. He visited local monasteries and corresponded with friends. And he wrote books to aid in the teaching of scripture and Christian history.

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*“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”*

*(Matthew 23:12)*

In spite of its lack of drama, Bede’s quiet life made an impact all throughout the Middle Ages because of the care that he poured into everything he wrote. It was not till a century after his death that the extraordinary nature of his work became more apparent, and people began to refer to him with the title “The Venerable”.

Most of the books that Bede wrote were meant to help students study and understand scripture, but the book he is best remembered for is his “Ecclesiastical History of England” (about the expansion of the Christian Church in that country). His historical writing took as its model the biblical book of the Acts of the Apostles, which sees history through the lens of the Holy Spirit’s work in believers, to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Bede understood that it was not always smooth sailing for the Church, but he believed that God was in control of the past, present and future. “*Finally*”, wrote Bede, “Britain also attained to the great glory of bearing faithful witness to God.”

*“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*

*(1 Corinthians 10:31)*

Bede was not a man who sought glory for himself, but rather one who devoted his life to pointing others to God, specifically through the scriptures and the writings of the early Church fathers. In a brief autobiographical note found at the end of one of his books, we find this expressive prayer of supplication:

“I beseech Thee, good Jesus, that to whom Thou hast graciously granted sweetly to drink in the words of Thy knowledge, Thou wilt also vouchsafe in Thy loving-kindness that he may one day come to Thee, the Fountain of all wisdom, and appear for ever before Thy face.”

Bede died very much as he had lived; quietly in his monastery room, singing the words of the Gloria: “*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost*”.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: THE VENERABLE BEDE, “THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE”, TRANS. A.M. SELLAR | 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.

- How would you describe Bede’s life and work?
- How did Bede regard “knowledge”?
- What evidence did Bede find that God was still at work in the world?
- What can we learn from Bede’s example?

*A few notes and reflections for reference:*

- *Bede’s life was quiet, studious and prayerful. He was a humble monk who took his work seriously but who did not seek to elevate himself, rather to point others to God. Most people would not consider this sort of life to be “extraordinary”, but the fact that we are reading his words and discussing his example many centuries after he lived, proves otherwise.*
- *Bede looked for knowledge in scripture and in the writings of the early Church fathers. The wording of his prayer (“the words of Thy knowledge”, “the Fountain of all wisdom”) suggests that Bede saw Jesus as the source of truth, the one that he needed to seek in all that he did.*
- *Even though life in the seventh and eighth centuries posed very real challenges, and even though there were still obstacles and doctrinal debates in the Church, Bede saw God’s hand at work in history. Before ascending into heaven, Jesus said to his disciples, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and*

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*to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). It took a few centuries for the Gospel to begin to spread throughout Britain, but this was a part of that mission unfolding, so that, in Bede’s words, “Britain also attained to the great glory of bearing faithful witness to God”.*

- *Bede’s humility, devotion and conscientiousness in his work set a wonderful example for those of us that live quiet, seemingly ordinary lives. Like Bede, we can study the scriptures and seek to point others to God in all we do, taking the “Gloria” as the theme song for our life – right to its very end.*

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 Bede 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* share your reflections and your plan of action with a friend.

- 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 Bede, 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.