

# THOMAS CRANMER

## CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- 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: UNSCRAMBLE (WEAK THINGS)

Write out the following scrambled words for the teens to unscramble together as they arrive. (The words describe the sorts of people that scripture says God is able to use, especially referring to 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 and Psalm 51).

DEPENDING ON YOUR GROUP, YOU MIGHT ASK YOUR STUDENTS TO WORK ON THE WORDS INDIVIDUALLY ON THEIR OWN PAPER AND COMPETE FOR SPEED, OR HAVE THEM WORK TOGETHER ON DIFFERENT WORDS AS TEAMS.

- OOFSHLI (Foolish)
- KAWWE (Weak)
- YOWLL (Lowly)
- SIPEDEDS (Despised)
- FLUINS (Sinful)
- SERARTSRONGS (Transgressor)
- KNORBE (Broken)
- TIERNOCT (Contrite)

## 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: STUCK IN ROMANS 7

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.

- Can you remember any of the saints of scripture who did not seem to be ideal candidates for God to use?  
List together any that you can remember.
- St. Paul once wrote, “*For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate*” (Romans 7:15). Have you ever felt that way?

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

- *Your list might include: Peter denied ever knowing Jesus; Thomas doubted the resurrection; Moses was “not eloquent”; Rahab had been a prostitute; Jonah ran away from God; David had an affair and then had the woman's husband murdered – if time allowed, one could compile a very long list!*

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- Scripture tells us that we have all sinned (Romans 3:23). Although believers strive to live in “newness of life”, we sometimes find ourselves feeling stuck in Romans 7 – a situation where we do the things that we do not wish to do. St. Paul’s reflections on this point go on to say, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25) If any of your teens choose to confide their struggles to the group, take the time to pray for God to give them victory in those situations.

## THE LESSON: GOD’S POWER MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS

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.

*“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,  
 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”  
 (Ephesians 5:15-16)*

The fire of reformation lit by Martin Luther in 1517 did not take long to reach the shores of England. In England, as throughout the west, there was a sense that the Roman Catholic Church had strayed in its theology and become corrupt in its political interventions. Although these concerns were widespread, it was for reasons of state rather than of faith that the English Church initially rejected the authority of Rome. The English King, Henry VIII, wanted a new wife to produce a male heir and he wanted a church that would sanction this for him. It was in the throes of this separation that reformers found their opportunity to begin to realign the Church in England with its roots.

*“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”  
 (2 Corinthians 12:9)*

Thomas was a “second son” born in 1489 in Nottinghamshire, England. His older brother was destined to inherit and so Thomas was pointed towards a career in the Church; an arrangement which was very common at that time. While still at his studies, Thomas was very drawn to the reformation, being inspired by what was coming out of Germany in those years. In fact, he and his group of friends were sometimes called “Little Germany”.

Thomas, having become a priest and teacher, saw legitimacy in King Henry VIII’s complaint with Rome and supported him in the annulment process of his first marriage. Then, in 1532, Thomas went to Germany, where he secretly married the niece of one of the theologians he met. The marriage had to be secret because priests were not permitted to marry. Thomas was made Archbishop of Canterbury in the next year, and would go on to support Henry VIII in the notorious decade during which the king married five different women in succession (for a total of six wives).

While Thomas’ convictions were for reform, the king’s were not – once he had obtained his goal of severing England from papal authority. But when Henry VIII died in 1547 and his son Edward VI was made king, Thomas was given an opportunity to make a lasting contribution in the Book of Common Prayer, which was largely written and revised by him during these years, along with what would become the “39 Articles”, the core Anglican statement of faith in response to both Catholic and Protestant challenges. In the words of eminent Canadian theologian Robert Crouse, Cranmer’s 1549 prayer book produced “a liturgy at once Catholic and Protestant:

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Catholic in its continuities and in its general character as liturgy; Protestant in its care to subject every element to the judgement of the Word of God in Scripture.”

*“Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”  
 (1 Peter 4:19)*

Edward VI’s reign was brief. He died in 1553, and after a failed attempt to place his cousin on the throne, Mary I, a staunch Roman Catholic, became queen. She immediately set about trying to undo the English Reformation. Thomas was arrested and tried for treason. He was forced to watch the execution of his friends. His imprisonment was a long one. Thomas’s captors wished to make an example of him, coercing him to sign statements taking back the work he’d done in reforming the English Church. But in 1556, Thomas was given an opportunity to make a statement before being executed. His enemies expected a public recantation, but instead Thomas, strengthened by the nearness of his death, affirmed his beliefs and disavowed his recantations, declaring that the first part of his body to burn should be the hand that had signed them. When Thomas reached out his hand to be burned, the powerful symbolism of this act gave fresh courage to the reformers.

Thomas’s life was not without mistakes. Nevertheless, he was often a voice speaking for mercy during bloodthirsty times. He had the humility to recognize his own need for grace, and when the opportunity arose for him to use his gifts in the service of the Church, he took up the task with dedication. The Prayer Book, which he in large part authored, is a work of devotion, combining orthodox theology with linguistic beauty. Of his liturgical work, the renowned theologian J.I. Packer wrote:

“Cranmer’s services first make us face our present badness; then they tell us of the new life of grace; finally they lead us into the right response, which is multiple – prayer and praise for pardon; joyful trust in God’s promises of mercy; learning of God from his Word; asking for help both for ourselves and for others, professing our own faith, and giving ourselves directly to God out of gratitude for all he has given to us”.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: BRITANNICA.COM, “THOMAS CRANMER” | ROBERT D. CROUSE, “THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS: THE CATHOLICITY OF THE PRAYER BOOK” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 2” | J.I. PACKER, “ROOTED AND BUILT UP IN CHRIST: THE PRAYER BOOK PATH” | WIKIPEDIA.ORG, “HENRY VIII OF ENGLAND” AND “THOMAS CRANMER”.)

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

- What are some of the things that show Thomas’s weakness?
- What are some of the things that show God was at work in Thomas’s life and through his work?
- What can we learn from Thomas’s example?

*A few notes and reflections for reference:*

- *Thomas did not always make good choices. His position meant engaging in the politics of his day, and sometimes he did this in ways that were unwise or hard to defend. We may find it most disappointing that Thomas caved in under pressure and recanted his work, though if we are disappointed with this, Thomas was clearly even more disappointed with himself.*
- *When opportunity allowed Thomas to produce a prayer book to serve the needs of the English Church, he undertook the task with dedication and the result was something that has had lasting value for Christians around the world. In the end, Thomas used what strength he had to speak clearly, confessing his error in recanting and underlining the importance of the work that had been done. His final act encouraged the reformers, who were at that time experiencing persecution under the reign of Mary I.*

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- *Like Thomas, we too make mistakes. Perhaps we even make mistakes that we feel cannot be undone. Yet if we will place our hope and our trust in God, he can take the smallest effort and use it to do something that is beyond our imagining.*

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 Thomas 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* come back next week prepared to share a bit about your reflections and the action you took.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

*Almighty God, by whose grace and power thy Martyr Thomas was enabled to witness to the truth and to be faithful unto death: Grant that we, who now remember him before thee, may likewise so bear witness unto thee in this world, that we may receive with him the crown of glory that fadeth not away; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Spirit liveth and reigneth, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

(SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A MARTYR, P. 310)

## 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.