

GEORGE HERBERT

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Paper, pens, assorted craft supplies
- 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: NOW YOU'RE SPEAKING MY LANGUAGE

As your teens arrive, hand each one a piece of paper and something to write with. On their page they must write their name, along with at least three things that would help someone “speak their language”. These should include things like the types of music or entertainment that they enjoy, what they like to do in their spare time, things that are important to them. After a brief time, collect the papers together, fold them up and redistribute them. Each teen's task is to create something special for the person whose page they received. It should be something that is encouraging, inspiring or fun. It can be a note, a drawing or anything else that they can create using the craft supplies available and taking into consideration the information provided by the recipient. Allow your teens a moment to give their work to the person it was made for.

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: WOULD YOU RATHER...?

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 did the ice breaker: What part of creating something especially for another person was most challenging?
- Would you rather look at a painting, read a book, or watch a movie? Why?
(If time permits, you may wish to add a few additional “Would you rather...” questions for your teens to respond to. For example, would you rather visit a beach or the mountains; would you rather give up bathing or internet access, etc.)
- George Herbert once wrote, “**A verse may find him who a sermon flies**”. What do you think he meant? What other things could we substitute into this quote in place of the word “verse”?

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

- *Trying to create something with someone else's likes, wishes, and needs in mind does not come easily to most of us, especially if that person is very different from ourselves. If our goal is to convey something effectively, however, then being able to empathize with the other person is important.*

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- *Each one of us is unique, each one of us has a personal “language” so to speak – not a literal language, but preferences and approaches that help us to understand or appreciate various things.*
- *Herbert realized that it’s possible to reach people through poetry, who might not be reachable through a sermon. The same could be said of many other things: music, visual art, even friendship. See how many ideas your teens can come up with.*

THE LESSON: A LIFE’S WITNESS IN POETRY

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.

“Blessed are the peacemakers.”
(Matthew 5:9)

Three different monarchs ruled England during the life of George Herbert: Elizabeth I, James I, and Charles I. It was a time of comparative stability, though tensions between Catholic and Protestant factions remained strong. Elizabeth I had established a “middle road” in the English Church, one which unified worship, but allowed for varying opinions on secondary theological matters. Thus, the Book of Common Prayer was updated, and Cranmer’s 42 Articles of Religion became the 39 Articles that we still have today. Many of those who had fled England under the persecutions of Mary I now returned. Then in 1603, James VI of Scotland became King James I of England, uniting Scotland, Ireland and England under one rule. During his reign the colonization of America began, literary culture flourished, and the Authorized King James Version of the Bible was written. James I’s son, Charles I, came to the throne in 1625, and his reign was more acrimonious, though things did not reach a crisis during George Herbert’s lifetime.

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”
(Joshua 24:15)

George was born in Wales in 1593 into a noble family. He was a gifted poet, and as a young man was elected to the position of orator at Trinity College in Cambridge. Even in those early days he believed it was more worthwhile to write about the love of God than about human romance. To the surprise of many of his friends, George chose to leave his post as orator and the many opportunities that were open to him, in order to become an ordained priest, marry, and take up ministry at an obscure country parish.

George would only be rector of his little rural parish for three years before succumbing to an early death, but during that time he preached, extended pastoral care to the poor and sick of his community, rebuilt the church (using his own money), and wrote a guide for parish ministry in the country. He and his wife Jane also took in three orphaned nieces. George would become known as “Holy Mr. Herbert”. During these years, he also became good friends with Nicholas Ferrar, who had founded a small informal Anglican religious community two miles away at Little Gidding.

“To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.”
(Psalm 25:1)

George died of tuberculosis at the age of 39. But on his deathbed, he reached out to his friend Nicholas and entrusted to him a collection of poetry, asking him to determine whether it should be burned – or published.

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George described this work as “a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed between God and my soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus, my Master, in whose service I have now found perfect freedom”. The poems were published in the same year that George died.

George’s poetry was technically brilliant, but its value goes beyond that. His life and poetry set an example of devotion, order and harmony in an age of controversy and division. In his poetry, George invites readers into his own experience of faith, sharing with them his struggles and his insights. One example of his work is the beautiful poem “Love (III)”, which speaks of the divine invitation extended to us all.

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
 Guilty of dust and sin.
 But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
 I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.
 Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
 And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
 My dear, then I will serve.
 You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
 So I did sit and eat.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: BRITANNICA.COM, “GEORGE HERBERT” AND “NICHOLAS FERRAR” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 2” | GEORGE HERBERT, “LETTER TO NICHOLAS FERRAR” | GEORGE HERBERT, “THE TEMPLE” | POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG, “GEORGE HERBERT” | WIKIPEDIA.ORG, “CHARLES I OF ENGLAND”, “ELIZABETH I OF ENGLAND”, “NICHOLAS FERRAR”, “GEORGE HERBERT” AND “JAMES VI AND I”.)

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

- What stands out to you the most about the poem “Love (III)”? Why?
- What do you think influenced George’s decision-making in life?
- How do you think George’s life and priorities might have been different from others living at that time?
- What can we learn from George’s example?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *Perhaps your teens are struck by the use of the word “Love” to speak about God. Perhaps they identified with the writer’s sense of shame and guilt. Perhaps they were intrigued by the image of hospitality. Leave the question open and see what they come up with.*
- *George began life with distinct advantages, coming as he did from a noble family and having a gifted mind, but he wanted to lead a holy life. He wanted to speak of the love of God not just in his sermons and in his poetry, but in how he lived. Though he might have gone far at Cambridge and taken a path of prestige and worldly success, George instead chose to be faithful in obscurity. His fame only came after he’d died and his work was published.*

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- *George led a peaceful life in an age of sectarian division. He focussed on personal holiness and the love of God rather than engaging in political intrigue. And he chose to be faithful in obscurity rather than pursue worldly success. Had it not been for his remarkable poetry, we might never have come to know about this extraordinary saint who lived a quiet and short life in tense times.*
- *Like George, we can find creative ways to witness to the Gospel. We can be peacemakers in an age of division. We can be content to live faithfully, whether we become public figures or live out our lives in obscurity. We can take up his example of love and holiness, caring for those around us and using our gifts to tell others about our Saviour.*

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 George 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.

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 George, 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.