

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- A stack of old newspapers and magazines, scissors, paper and glue, other 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: EVERY TRIBE, LANGUAGE, PEOPLE, NATION

Bring in a stack of old/unwanted newspapers and magazines, and other assorted craft supplies. Invite the teens to cut them up to create together a collage about heaven, themed around the words: **“Jesus has *ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*”** (Revelation 5:9).

IF YOU HAVE A GROUP OF SIX OR MORE, BREAK THEM INTO GROUPS OF THREE TO FIVE AND HAVE EACH GROUP PRESENT BRIEFLY WHEN THEIR COLLAGE IS COMPLETE.

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: WHO'S YOUR BROTHER?

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 sort of people do you have the most in common with?
- Share the following quote and ask your teens to respond: **“I have more in common with an Iranian Christian than I'll ever have with an unbelieving American because the two of us will be together for eternity, worshipping the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”** – Matt Chandler (*an American Pastor*)
- Imagine that each time you came across someone who seems strange to you, you mentally repeated to yourself: *“This person is made in God's image and loved by him just as I am”*. What kind of effect do you think it could have?

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

- *Perhaps your teens identify best with people who like the same sort of music or sports, or share the same political views. Speaking more generally, however, we might be inclined to say that we have the most in common with people who were born in the same time and place, speak the same language, and look and dress like ourselves.*
- *Chandler's quote is a reminder that although we may have many things in common with people who share superficial commonalities with us, being part of the Church brings us into a diverse family drawing together saints*

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of every age, language, ethnicity, etc. Sometimes, however, our loyalties can get confused, and we can forget that our identity in Christ is far more important than any other.

- *Many of those that we encounter are not believers, and sometimes this combined with a lack of commonalities can lead us to be indifferent or even antagonistic in our feelings towards them. Actively reminding ourselves of the preciousness of each person we meet (but especially of those we are tempted to be dismissive towards) can help us to see others the way God does, and act towards them in a loving manner.*

THE LESSON: PERSPECTIVE, PURPOSE, PERSEVERANCE

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.

*“Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice, who makes his neighbour serve him for nothing and does not give him his wages.”
(Jeremiah 22:13)*

From ancient times, the practice of slavery has existed, but during the European colonial period it took on an even more horrific form. England, Portugal, France, Spain, and Holland were competing over who could build the largest, strongest and richest colonies in the Americas. Fuelling this competition were unscrupulous traders who had discovered the immense profit that could be made by capturing people from West Africa and transporting them to the “new world” where they would then be sold as slaves. Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, millions of Africans were shipped across the Atlantic. Unknowable numbers of them died. Those who survived emerged from the cargo ships into a life of dehumanization within an established racial caste system. They and any children they might have were to be classified as the “property” of their owners – indefinitely.

*“Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”
(James 4:17)*

William was born to privilege in 1759 England. He was charming, eloquent, well-connected, and ambitious. By his early twenties he’d been elected to the British parliament, and he was on his way to achieving his goal of gaining as much distinction for himself as possible. But in the years that followed, William was moved to reflect on the vanity of his life, and he did not like the conclusions he came to. This period of reflection culminated in a spiritual rebirth, and with it, William found fresh purpose.

William placed himself under the spiritual guidance of John Newton, who had been the priest at William’s childhood parish. John knew firsthand about the horrors of the slave trade because he had once been a slave trader, before conversion and conscience had led him to repent of his involvement. With John’s help, William came to recognize that he was in a unique position from which he could work towards change. For the rest of his life, William would fight for the total abolition of slavery in Britain and its colonies. He put his considerable gifts to work with this in view, at one point writing,

“To all the inhabitants of the British Empire, who value the favour of God, or are alive to the interests or honour of their country – to all who have any respect for justice, or any feelings of humanity, I would solemnly address myself. I call upon them, as they shall hereafter answer, in the great day of account, for the use they shall have made of any power or influence with which Providence may have

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entrusted them, to employ their best endeavours, by all lawful and constitutional means, to mitigate, and, as soon as it may be safely done, to terminate the Negro Slavery of the British Colonies; a system of the grossest injustice, of the most heathenish irreligion and immorality, of the most unprecedented degradation, and unrelenting cruelty.”

*“Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”
 (Galatians 6:9)*

The fight William had taken up was not an easy one. Slavery had become crucial to numerous economic interests and his opponents were many. Not only did his opponents block the legislation he put forward, but they actively vilified him at every opportunity. Nevertheless, William carried on with his legislative efforts. And in the meantime, he kept busy. He gave money to the poor and advocated for a wide range of causes, both social and religious. He also met and married a young woman named Barbara, with whom he fathered six children.

In 1807, the first major victory was achieved: the abolition of the slave *trade* in the British Empire. Once the law was passed, implementation and enforcement was still needed. And yet another major injustice remained to be fought: those who had already been traded into slavery *remained* enslaved. In 1833 – more than a quarter of a century later – parliament passed legislation abolishing slavery completely. William, then in his 70s, received the good news. Three days later he died in the knowledge that his mission had been accomplished.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: CHRISTIANITYTODAY.COM, “WILLIAM WILBERFORCE: ANTISLAVERY POLITICIAN” | BRITANNICA.COM, “JOHN NEWTON” AND “WILLIAM WILBERFORCE” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 2” | WIKIPEDIA.ORG, “ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE” AND “WILLIAM WILBERFORCE” | WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, “AN APPEAL TO THE RELIGION, JUSTICE, AND HUMANITY OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE, IN BEHALF OF THE NEGRO SLAVES IN THE WEST INDIES”.)

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

- What were William’s goals in life initially? What changed?
- How do you think William saw people who were different from himself?
- Why were some people strongly opposed to abolishing slavery?
- What were some of the obstacles William faced?
- What can we learn from William’s example?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *William was pretty self-absorbed as a young man. He was very much wrapped up in his own ambition. After he’d succeeded in being elected to parliament, William realized how vain he was. He turned to God and he sought to use his gifts and his position to help others rather than to continue to serve his own interests.*
- *The causes that William championed tell us that he had compassion for those who were unlike himself: including those living in poverty in his own country, people being captured and trafficked by the slave industry, and those Africans who had been bought as slaves or born into slavery and were stuck in dehumanizing circumstances in the British colonies.*
- *The Atlantic slave trade had been going strong for a long time before William was born. The harm that was being done was generally out of the sight of the British people, and it was happening to people who seemed unlike themselves. Moreover, the slave trade was immensely profitable and many believed it was serving the national interests by enabling them to build colonies that were bigger and better than those of other European countries.*
- *Those who supported the slave trade for many of the reasons just stated were strongly opposed to what William was trying to accomplish. Those who stood to gain financially from the trade and the ongoing use of slaves were especially opposed, and blocked William’s legislation. But in addition to political challenges, William was also personally vilified for his work.*

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- *Like William, we can choose to put our gifts and advantages to use in working towards the freedom and dignity of others. Even when William hit roadblocks, he carried on. Even when he was vilified, he continued his work. It took many years before he saw the success of what he was working towards, but even when things looked hopeless, he persevered. In short, we can seek to follow William's example by having a godly perspective towards those who are unlike ourselves, we can give ourselves to purposeful work, and we can persevere even when things are difficult and slow to change.*

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 William that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen.

Discuss your reflections with a friend or a group of friends, and together commit to a concrete action you can take this week.

- 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 William, 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.