

THRIVING IN EXILE

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Small opaque container, timer, pre-written papers for ice breaker
- 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: ON THE SPOT: THE “EXILE” VERSION

Write out some of the “would you rather” queries listed below on scraps of paper (you may wish to add your own), fold them, and place them in an opaque container. Have the teens sit in a circle. One at a time, ask each teen to select a question from the container and answer it, as well as giving a reason for the answer.

YOU MAY WANT TO ALLOW FOR ONE “PASS” PER TURN IF A TEEN IS UNCOMFORTABLE ABOUT ANSWERING THE SELECTED QUESTION. FOR SMALL GROUPS, YOU MAY WANT TO TAKE MULTIPLE TURNS. FOR LARGE (OR TALKATIVE) GROUPS, YOU MAY HAVE TO TIME RESPONSES (FOR EXAMPLE, EACH PERSON HAS THIRTY SECONDS TO ANSWER).

- Would you rather... have a career changing dirty diapers or plucking turkeys? Why?
- ... go without books or music? Why?
- ... live through a natural disaster or a war? Why?
- ... lose your ability to speak or your ability to hear? Why?
- ... spend a year without seeing another person or spend a year without a single moment of privacy? Why?
- ... meet the love of your life but be separated indefinitely, or never meet that person at all? Why?
- ... be thrown in a shark tank or get paper cuts every time you pick up paper for the rest of your life? Why?
- ... be locked in a room that’s too hot or too cold? Why?
- ... be lost in the Sahara Desert or Antarctica? Why?
- ... lose your memory or your sight? Why?

622: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the first part of the order of 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: TO BE EXPECTED IN EXILE

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 does “exile” mean?
- What sort of experience could somebody expect to have in exile?
What do you think would be the most difficult aspect for you of living in exile?
- Have you ever experienced a metaphorical (or literal) exile? What was it like?

THRIVING IN EXILE

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

- Exile refers to a state of being separated from one's homeland. The word can be used as a verb or a noun, so that a person who is separated from their homeland can be referred to as "an exile", or we might say they are "in exile", or we might say they "have been exiled".
- The experience of exile would mean being cut off from all of those familiar things that remind you of who you are and where you come from. Imagine suddenly finding yourself in a place that is unfamiliar, living among people who do not look, speak or act in a way that resonates with you. Even the things that you are used to taking for granted (such as food, wildlife, housing structures, customs) are different. Exile can often also mean being separated from loved ones and the loss of valued possessions and one's place within a community.
- Perhaps you've visited another country and found yourself feeling completely adrift. Even though it may be temporary and voluntary, it can still be disorienting. Or perhaps you've had to leave behind a place where you felt you belonged (such as a school, a team, or even a church), and experienced grief and loneliness in a new place where you don't quite fit in (yet!). Even though these situations may be mild when compared with a forced political exile, they can help us to understand a little bit of what that experience might be like.

THE LESSON: DANIEL 1

The first part of the lesson (below) can be read aloud. Then the teens are asked to read the Bible text (either silently to themselves or aloud together), followed by some additional questions for discussion.

The New Testament writers used the word "exile" to describe believers. They wanted to remind us that there's a disconnect between *who* we are and *where* we are: we don't really *belong* to this world, though we do have a purpose in being here. When we accepted God's call to be "set apart", we embraced an identity and mission that places us at odds with "the course of this world" and "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2).

In a way, this means living out our lives "behind enemy lines" – surrounded by pressures and temptations to align our thinking, speaking, and living with a world that is at root hostile to our faith. This tension that we live with means that we will be presented with many moments throughout life in which we must decide whether to conform to the world or hold fast to a way of living that shows who we truly are.

One of the gifts that we have in the Prayer Book tradition is a collection of devotional practices designed to keep us in alignment with God throughout our lives, both in the small daily things as well as in the big "milestone" moments. Throughout the coming year, we'll delve into many of these, exploring the spiritual realities that govern Christian living as well as touching on the devotional and liturgical patterns that can help to tether us to our true identity. We'll look at baptism, matrimony, and burial; times of sickness, penance and thanksgiving, as well as those times when we simply feel "at sea".

+++

Some amazing and inspirational stories come to us from the Old Testament book of Daniel. When he was just a youth, Daniel's city was conquered and pillaged and he along with his friends were taken into captivity. They were exiles in a very literal sense. Check out what happened next.

Refer to Daniel 1: 1-20.

(THE TEXT IS PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THE HANDOUTS AND IN THESE LEADERS' NOTES SO THAT EVERYONE CAN MARK IT UP AND MAKE NOTES ON IT IF DESIRED. ALTERNATIVELY, YOU CAN READ OUT OF A BIBLE).

THRIVING IN EXILE

Read through the text. 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 the four friends' circumstances?
- How would you describe the four friends' attitude?
- This is the first story that appears in the book of Daniel. Do you remember any of the other stories that come later on? What do you think makes this story important enough to act as an introduction to the others?
- What does this passage tell us about God?
- What can we learn from the example of Daniel and his friends?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *A preliminary note about food laws in the Old Testament: If you're familiar with the New Testament, then you know that one of the controversies in the early Church was about the new teaching freeing Christians from following the dietary laws of the Old Testament (Acts 11:1-18). However, during Daniel's time Israelites were called to set themselves apart from the surrounding cultures in several ways, one of which was by abstaining from certain foods and food combinations (Leviticus 11). This special diet was one of many signs which acted as a reminder of who they were and of the God they belonged to.*
- *Daniel and his friends were in a really challenging situation. They had watched as their city was invaded and conquered and then been carried off to a foreign land where they were to be forced to serve this enemy king. Many things had been done to attempt to strip them of their sense of identity, including assigning them new names. (Their Hebrew names all pointed to God, but their Babylonian names all referenced the false gods of the Babylonians). In these circumstances, the youths had little to no power.*
- *Remarkably, Daniel and his friends were not rude or disruptive. Instead, in making their request of Ashpenaz, they showed themselves to be "respectful, reasonable, and compassionate" (Sarah Dredge). Nevertheless, it required courage and boldness to make the request and it showed a trust in God's providential care to anticipate with confidence that the outcome of the "food trial" would support their case.*
- *Many of the stories that we find in the book of Daniel involve spectacular miracles and are well known. These stories include the divine interpretation of dreams (Daniel 2, 4, 5), and the miraculous survival after being thrown into a fiery furnace (Daniel 3) and a lion's den (Daniel 6). But this story in Daniel 1 is important because it tells us that right at the very beginning of their exile, Daniel "resolves". He makes a decision not to forget his true identity. Sarah Dredge puts it this way: "They were sending a message to themselves. You see, this was not a public demonstration. The only people outside of the four boys who would know about the decision were the guard and possibly Ashpenaz. This was a private stand – a declaration to their own hearts... In one sense, this was a small test of resolve – a simple request for different food. But like working a muscle, this small act strengthened their future capacity to stand firm".*
- *This passage reminds us that God is ultimately in control, even when it may seem otherwise to us. With the opening words of verse 2, "And the Lord gave", the text makes it clear that the conquest of Jerusalem was not outside of God's control. Yet even though the wicked king Jehoiakim and the kingdom of Judah had come under God's judgement, still God had not abandoned his people. He was with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah during their years of exile and intervened repeatedly and often miraculously, showing his grace and his glory.*
- *The example of Daniel and his friends is so important for us. Like them, we are spiritual exiles, and the world around us seeks to press us into its mould. Like them, we need to resolve to remember who we truly are and remain faithful to our God no matter what may come. We can do this knowing that our God is ultimately in control and that he cares for us. This doesn't mean things will always be smooth or turn out the way we want them*

THRIVING IN EXILE

to, but we may rest in the knowledge of a good God, whose plans for us are for our “welfare and not for evil; to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

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))

1 Peter 2:11 says, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul”. Have you “resolved” in your heart to remain faithful to God and to your identity in him? Take some time to consider and pray about whether there are any areas of your life where you’ve allowed the world to define and direct you. Present those areas to God and ask him to help you resolve to remain faithful to him now and throughout your life.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through this collect.

O God, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (THE SECOND COLLECT, FOR PEACE, FROM MORNING PRAYER, BCP PAGE 11)

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.

THRIVING IN EXILE

DANIEL 1: A HOLY RESOLVE

¹In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ²And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. ³Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, ⁴youths without blemish, of good appearance and skilful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. ⁵The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. ⁶Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. ⁷And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

⁸But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. ⁹And God gave Daniel favour and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." ¹¹Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹²"Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." ¹⁴So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. ¹⁶So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

¹⁷As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. ¹⁸At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. ²⁰And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.