

# GOD IS FAITHFUL

## CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Paper and pens
- 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: HOMOPHONES AND HOMONYMS

For this activity, the teens must come up with words that sound exactly the same (they may be spelled differently – *homophones* – or the same – *homonyms*), but mean different things depending on the context in which they are used.

For example:

- Knight/Night: “The knight wore his shining armour proudly as he rode his horse off into the night”
- Season/Season: “We love to season our food with cinnamon when the weather turns cold and the season of winter arrives”.

Ask your teens to compete to come up with as many examples as they can within the time allotted. When the time is up, pause to see what they came up with. Give a point for every pair of words listed by one person (or team); the person/team with the most points is the winner.

IF YOU HAVE THREE OR FEWER TEENS, HAVE THEM COMPETE AS INDIVIDUALS. IF YOU HAVE FOUR OR MORE, BREAK YOUR TEENS INTO TEAMS. (EACH TEAM SHOULD IDEALLY HAVE 2-5 PEOPLE IN IT TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE HAS THE CHANCE TO CONTRIBUTE IDEAS).

## 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: UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT

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.

- When you come across a word that has multiple meanings, how do you figure out which one is meant?
- What are some real life situations where we need to check the context before we can understand what’s going on?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you accidentally said the wrong thing? What happened? What could you have done differently?

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

- *The context in which we find a word is usually the best clue as to which meaning is intended.*
- *In many life situations, we can rush to speak without listening first. Sometimes this can lead us to be insensitive or embarrass ourselves. When we are reading our Bibles, we also need to pay attention to context. We can sometimes*

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read just a single verse without looking at the context. This can lead us to form the wrong conclusion about what that verse is communicating. (For an example, you might ask your teens to look up Exodus 1:16: “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live”. If you look at the verse by itself the instruction can sound like a blanket command, but of course this is part of a larger narrative in which the tyrannical Pharaoh plots to weaken the Israelites in this evil way.)

- This is a great chance to tell a story of your own. One example might relate to the tendency for people to immediately congratulate someone on a significant loss of weight without stopping to consider whether it was the result of conscious effort or the unhappy result of a life-threatening illness.

## THE LESSON: LAMENTATIONS 3

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.

(IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO HELP RESPOND TO QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE RAISED DURING THIS UNIT, WE RECOMMEND “DISCOVERING THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER: A HANDS-ON APPROACH, VOLUME 3: SPECIAL OCCASIONS” BY SUE CARELESS.)

There are times when life feels like a “valley of tears”. Sorrow and sickness are a part of the human experience, common to each one of us. It is during these challenging times that we must choose to turn *to* God rather than *away* from him. When we do, like so many before us, we will find that he is *faithful*.

Scripture is filled with role models for us in this respect. The Apostle Paul wrote about a “thorn in the flesh” which he begged God to remove, though he recognized that this source of pain kept him from becoming conceited, and that God’s grace was enough, and moreover, that God’s power was “made perfect” in Paul’s weakness (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). The Old Testament book of Job tells the story of a righteous man who went through great calamity and testing. In the middle of this, he still found the faith to say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

The book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah, a man sometimes referred to as the “weeping prophet”. The situation in which he wrote was grim: the people had ignored prophetic warnings about their sin and had fallen under the judgement of God. As a result, the city of Jerusalem had been subjected to a long siege and then conquered, the temple had been looted, and many people taken captive. Much of the book of Lamentations recounts the devastation and suffering of the people. But at the heart of the book, in the midst of all of this, we find the words that inspired the refrain of the famous Evangelical hymn, written in 1923, “Great is Thy Faithfulness”:

*“Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness! Morning by morning, new mercies I see.  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!”*

As we read these words of hope and praise, keep in mind the context in which those words are found.

Refer to Lamentations 3:19-26.

(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).

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.

- When Jeremiah’s focus is on his suffering, what is the result?
- What is the source of Jeremiah’s hope?
- When he speaks of God’s faithfulness, what do you think Jeremiah could be talking about?
- What do you think it means when the prophet writes, “The Lord is my portion”?

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- How can these words, written so long ago, help us today?

*A few notes and reflections for reference:*

- *Up to this point, Jeremiah has been detailing the calamity all around him. But verse 20 tells us that when his soul remembers the bitter circumstances surrounding him it is “bowed down”. His language is similar to that of Psalm 42:5: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” Our passage opens with a tone of “complaint, bordering on despair” before transitioning to hope (Keil & Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament).*
- *Jeremiah’s hope springs up when he “calls to mind” the character of God: steadfast love that never ceases, unending mercies, and great faithfulness (v21-23). Warren Wiersbe wrote, “Unbelief causes us to look at God through our circumstances, and this creates hopelessness; but faith enables us to look at our circumstances through the reality of God, and this gives us hope”.*
- *Throughout scripture we find praises that recount what God has done for us in the past. When we step back from our immediate circumstances, we’re able to refocus on “the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done” (Psalm 78:4). We can see a pattern of God’s love, mercy and faithfulness unfolding – not just in our own lives – but over centuries and millennia: his creation, his grace, and his sacrificial work of redemption in Christ.*
- *This phrase pops up throughout the Old Testament and points back to Numbers 18:20 when the Lord said to Aaron and the priests of Israel, “You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel”. The words of Jeremiah (who was himself a priest) affirm that God’s “steadfast love is better than life” (Psalm 63:3), better in fact than any temporal thing that this world has to offer.*
- *When life feels like a “valley of tears”, we can bring our grief and pain to God. He hears us and he cares, even if he does not always “remove the thorn”. We can choose to focus our eyes, not on our suffering, but on the unchanging character of our Lord. Passages of scripture like this one can be a great source of comfort during difficult times, reminding us of the example of the saints who suffered as we do and yet clung to faith and hope in God.*

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).)

**Whom do you know that is sick? Begin by praying for them, that God would comfort them and if it be his will, heal them. Ask him to show you what you might be able to do to be a source of encouragement to them.**

*Almighty and immortal God, the giver of life and health: We beseech thee to hear our prayers for thy servants, for whom we implore thy mercy, that by thy blessing upon them and upon those who minister to them of thy healing gifts, they may be restored, according to thy gracious will, to health of body and mind, and give thanks to thee in thy holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* (PRAYER FOR THE RECOVERY OF A SICK PERSON, BCP PAGE 55)

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## CLOSING PRAYERS (622 AGAIN)

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

*Before closing, ask the teens to pray the words of the At-Home Challenge prayer with you, for the sick people of your parish, and for any other sick people they may know. You may wish to pause after the words, “thy servants” to invite the teens to say aloud the names of those that come to mind.*

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.

Then finish with the “Grace”, the final prayer in the booklet.

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## LAMENTATIONS 3: **LOVE, MERCY, AND FAITHFULNESS**

<sup>19</sup>Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall!

<sup>20</sup>My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.

<sup>21</sup>But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:

<sup>22</sup>The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;

<sup>23</sup>they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

<sup>24</sup>“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”

<sup>25</sup>The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.

<sup>26</sup>It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.