

COMMON GIFTS

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- 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
- A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: HANGMAN (THE CARETAKER VERSION)

This is the version of hangman you know but themed around verses related to God’s creation. Encourage your teens to make their stick person a “caretaker of the earth”, perhaps a gardener or a farmer – they can have artistic license to interpret this in their own way.

Ahead of time, write out some of the following scriptural phrases on scraps of paper. The teens take turns selecting one of the scraps and drawing out lines on a board or easel pad that correspond to the letters of the words in the phrase they have selected. The other teens take turns guessing letters and trying to guess what the full phrase is. Each time they guess a letter which is not there, part of the stick figure gets drawn until they have no more guesses left.

- The heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1)
- Every beast of the forest is mine (Psalm 50:10)
- You cause the grass to grow (Psalm 104:14)
- The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly (Psalm 104:16)
- The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth (Psalm 29:9)
- In his hand is the life of every living thing (Job 12:10)
- The trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12)
- You renew the face of the ground (Psalm 104:30)
- In him all things hold together (Colossians 1:17)
- He upholds the universe by the word of his power (Hebrews 1:3)

FOR LARGE GROUPS, PLAY IN TEAMS. FOR SMALL GROUPS PLAY AS INDIVIDUALS AND TAKE MULTIPLE TURNS. YOU MAY WANT TO ASSIGN BONUS POINTS IF THE TEENS CAN GUESS WHAT PART OF SCRIPTURE THE PHRASE COMES FROM.

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: BLESSINGS IN NATURE

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.

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- What is your favourite thing about nature? Why?
- Have you ever had an experience of nature that made you think about its Creator? What was it?

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

- *The created world is filled with goodness. Some of your teens may share their love of animals, others may enjoy gardening, camping, fresh food, certain kinds of weather, etc. There is a great deal for us to be thankful for in the natural world.*
- *This is a great chance to share a story of your own. It could be as simple as your first experience of growing something from seed, or your first time seeing stars at night away from the light pollution of a city. See what your teens come up with.*

THE LESSON: PSALM 65

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.)

In the beginning, God created. He created men and women in his image, and he created the earth, plants, animals, all of it – *good*. Though all of life is marred by human disobedience, the underlying goodness in creation still shines through. Romans 1:20 says that God's "invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made".

Whether we realize it or not, every one of us experiences God's generous benevolence – in the very air we breathe, the life in our veins, and the goodness that still exists in the created world. Jesus told us that God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Even those who refuse to acknowledge the source of these blessings benefit from them.

Believers, however, recognize that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). This is why we bring to him all of our concerns, no matter how "unspiritual" they may seem to us to be. And this is why we give thanks to God for each new day, for the beauty in creation, for the people in our lives, and for the food on our tables.

Refer to Psalm 65.

(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.

- What are some of the gifts bestowed by God that are mentioned in this passage?
- What does the passage tell us about what God is like?
- How should we respond to God?
- If you were to write your own psalm of praise, what are a few things that you would include?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *The passage opens with the mention of spiritual gifts, unique to God's people: he hears their prayers, atones for their transgressions, they can dwell in his courts, he answers them with awesome deeds, salvation and hope*
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(v2-5). The psalm then goes on to consider the gifts of God in nature: his creation of and control over the mountains, seas and people, the morning and the evening (v6-8). Finally, the passage considers the gifts of God in the harvest, providing water and blessing growth, bringing about bounty and abundance, so that the corn and the flocks “overflow” (v9-13).

- The psalm tell us that God is worthy of praise (v1). He is generous in all that he gives to his people. His deeds are awesome (v5, 8). He is the Creator, having established the mountains (v6), and he continues to be in control of nature (v6-13). His dwelling place is characterized by goodness and holiness (v4). He provides atonement, salvation, hope (v3-5), as well as the blessings of harvest (v9-13).
- All of this should cause us to praise God, to honour the vows we make, and to come to him in prayer (v1-2). His people can consider themselves “blessed” and the goodness of his presence should “satisfy” (v4). Our reflection on all that he has given should inspire us with awe (v8). The passage also describes nature itself as responding to God with joy (v8, 12, 13), something that his human creations can join with in praise.
- This is a chance to connect some of what was raised during the introductory discussion with the recognition that God is the one who gives all these good gifts. Your teens might want to try their hands at writing a song or poem of praise during the week, perhaps even sharing it with the group at your next meeting.

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).)

Spend some time reflecting on and praying with the words of these prayers:

O almighty and everlasting God, who crownest the year with thy goodness, and hast given unto us the fruits of the earth in their season: Give us grateful hearts, that we may unfeignedly thank thee for all thy loving-kindness, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(THE COLLECT FOR HARVEST THANKSGIVING, BCP PAGE 620)

Almighty God, whose loving hand hath given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honour thee with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of thy bounty; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(PRAYER FOR FAITHFULNESS IN THE USE OF THIS WORLD'S GOODS FROM FAMILY PRAYERS, BCP PAGE 734)

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 with you the words of the At-Home Challenge prayers.

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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.

PSALM 65: **WHERE TO DIRECT PRAISE**

¹Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion, and to you shall vows be performed.

²O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come.

³When iniquities prevail against me, you atone for our transgressions.

⁴Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts!

We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple!

⁵By awesome deeds you answer us with righteousness, O God of our salvation,

the hope of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest seas;

⁶the one who by his strength established the mountains, being girded with might;

⁷who stills the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, the tumult of the peoples,

⁸so that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs.

You make the going out of the morning and the evening to shout for joy.

⁹You visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it;

the river of God is full of water; you provide their corn, so you have prepared it.

¹⁰You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.

¹¹You crown the year with your bounty; your wagon tracks overflow with abundance.

¹²The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy,

¹³the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with corn,

they shout and sing together for joy.