

# GIFTS FOR THE CHURCH

## CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Paper, pens, markers, pencil crayons, any other craft supplies available
- 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: HEAVENLY MINDS AND EARTHLY GOOD

Break into small groups of 2-3. Each team is tasked with producing a creative visual presentation. The presentation must explore the expression “too heavenly minded to be any earthly good”, which has sometimes been used to describe religiously devout people. The presentations should present a case for if/when “heavenly minded” people *do* bring about “earthly good”, in contrast with if/when they *do not*. The presentations can use lists, diagrams, brief skits, and any other visual aids they can come up with. Allow your teens a short time for discussion and preparation and then ask each team to present.

IF YOU'RE WORKING WITH A GROUP OF THREE OR LESS, HAVE YOUR TEENS WORK ON THEIR PRESENTATIONS INDIVIDUALLY. GROUPS OF FOUR OR MORE CAN BE SPLIT INTO TEAMS OF 2-4. IF YOU'RE WORKING WITH MORE THAN FIVE OR SIX TEAMS, PAIR THE TEAMS UP FOR CO-PRESENTATION, THEN ASK ALL THE TEENS TOGETHER TO COMMENT ON WHAT WAS PRESENTED.

## 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: SALT AND LIGHT

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 do you think it means to be “heavenly minded”? Do you know anyone who fits that description? What are they like? Do you think it's possible to be “too heavenly minded to be any earthly good?”
- Share the following quote and ask your teens to respond: **“If society deteriorates and its standards decline... the question to ask is, ‘Where is the Church? Why are the salt and light of Jesus Christ not permeating and changing our society?’”** – John Stott (*Issues Facing Christians Today*) What do you think he means?

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

- *The expression “too heavenly minded to be any earthly good” suggests the idea that it's possible for believers to be so preoccupied with eternal things that they are not helpful in practical ways in the here and now. But if we are truly “heavenly minded” then we will care about loving others and living for Christ every day that we have on this*

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earth. C. S. Lewis wrote, “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next” (*Mere Christianity*).

- Jesus, in his sermon on the mount, compared believers to salt and light tasked with preserving what is good and showing the truth. He said, “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?” (Matthew 5:13). Stott was referring to this passage of scripture and reminding believers that their collective faithfulness to the Gospel should have an impact on the world in which we live. When believers are truly “heavenly-minded” they will be ready to “let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

## THE LESSON: EPHESIANS 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.

(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.)

Have you ever heard of the “church visible” and the “Church invisible”? These terms may seem strange to you, but they point out an important distinction. The *real* Church, the Church invisible, encompasses all those who truly belong to Jesus. It is a reality that transcends time and space. The church visible refers to the local buildings and communities where people gather to worship. The church visible is an imperfect expression of the deeper spiritual reality. Keeping this in mind, believers do give thanks for the buildings where we meet and the human leaders who provide care for our communities. Our deepest gratitude, however, is in knowing that we *really* belong to something and someone greater: the body of Jesus Christ, the capital-C-Church.

Psalm 127:1 says, “unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain”. The Church is a house that the Lord is building. Those who belong to it find their identity and purpose in him. They are equipped by the Holy Spirit, and cared for by Jesus the true Shepherd. Though the Church faces many challenges along the way, we know that in the end even “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

*Thanks be to God for the Church: its mission, its equipping, and the glorious future by which it is consoled and inspired.*

Refer to Ephesians 1: 3-23.

(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 parts of this passage call our attention away from “visible” things?
- What are some of the spiritual blessings for believers mentioned in this passage?
- What impact do you think these “invisible” things can have on our “visible” lives?

*A few notes and reflections for reference:*

- *The whole passage is focused on the spiritual reality of the Christian. The Apostle Paul, writing to the church in Ephesus, emphasizes the spiritual blessings that we have received, that we are receiving and that we will receive. He speaks about “the heavenly places” (v3, 10, 20), things that happened “before the foundation of the world” (v4), and things that belong to “the fullness of time” (v10).*
- *When we count up the blessings mentioned in this passage, we end up with a very long list! We have been chosen, adopted, redeemed, and forgiven (v4-7). By God’s grace, through Christ’s work, and with the seal of the Holy*

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*Spirit, we have a secure future with him in glory (v9-13). Moreover, who we are now and where we ultimately belong are wrapped up in Christ, who loves us and who will reign forever (v21-22).*

- *In the words of Warren Wiersbe, “The Christian really operates in two spheres: the human and the divine, the visible and the invisible. Physically he is on the earth in a human body, but spiritually he is seated with Christ in the heavenly sphere – and it is this heavenly sphere that provides the power and direction for the earthly walk”. The Apostle Paul wants his readers to know God and to understand what has been done for us and where we are headed so that we will have a clear sense of identity and purpose in this life. Counting our blessings should make believers thankful, and give us hope and confidence as we face the challenges of this life. It should also motivate us to live “holy and blameless” lives, and share the Gospel with others.*

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 (below). (Note that “Prevent us” in the first prayer originates from an ancient Latin word meaning “Go before us”).**

*Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally by thy mercy obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

(PRAYER FROM THE LAYING OF A FOUNDATION STONE, BCP PAGE 680)

*Most merciful Father, we beseech thee to send down thy heavenly blessing upon thy Church in this Parish, that all its members may dwell together in unity and brotherly love. Keep far from us all self-will and discord. Endue thy Ministers with righteousness, and enable them faithfully to dispense thy holy Word and Sacraments, to bring again the outcasts, and to seek the lost. Grant that we may so receive their ministrations, and use thy means of grace, that in all our words and deeds we may seek thy glory and the advancement of thy kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* (PRAYER FOR THE PARISH FROM FAMILY PRAYERS, BCP PAGE 736)

## 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.**

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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## EPHESIANS 1: **EVERYTHING THE CHURCH NEEDS**

<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup>even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup>he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup>to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup>which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup>making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup>as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

<sup>11</sup>In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup>so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup>In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup>who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

<sup>15</sup>For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, <sup>16</sup>I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup>that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup>having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup>and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup>that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup>far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup>And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup>which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.