

# GOD IS FORGIVING

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## CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- 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: EMBARRASSING INJURIES

Divide your teens into groups of 2-5 and ask each group to come up with a brief skit based on one of the scenarios below (or one of their own devising). Each scenario involves a person with an embarrassing injury who is trying to conceal it from the hospital admission staff. Give your teens a few minutes to plan their skit, and to make it as entertaining as possible. If you have multiple groups, allow them to perform for one another. If you only have one group, allow a longer performance time.

Some scenarios might include:

- Sprayed window cleaning fluid into eyes while trying to clean windows with spray bottle wrong way round
- Distracted while drinking and straw went up nose too far
- Stapled self while trying to fix stapler
- Sat down on a fork
- Walked into a glass wall

## 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: DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

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.

- Why do you think people sometimes avoid seeking a medical diagnosis and/or treatment?
- Why do you think people sometimes hide their sin?

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

- *People might avoid seeking a diagnosis because they are in denial about the fact that there is a problem, or they may be embarrassed or fearful of what will happen if they do. They may be worried that a course of treatment will be set for them which seems worse than the medical problem itself. We may balk at the treatment that is suggested to us, but if we are serious about dealing with the problem, then it is usually the best and wisest decision to accept that some form of treatment will be necessary.*

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- *In some ways sin is like sickness. We may hide our sin because we do not wish to acknowledge that it really is sin – because repentance will mean changing our ways. But we may also be fearful of allowing God (or other people) to see our sin. We may doubt that God can forgive us and love us after what we have done. But all of scripture points us to a God whose mercy abounds, a God who will not turn away “a broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17).*

## THE LESSON: JOEL 2

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.)

It has always been God’s desire to make a way home for his wayward children. In the book of Genesis we find what theologians call the “protoevangelium” – the first hint of the Gospel. When that first act of human disobedience (sin) brought about such catastrophe, and the dire consequences were laid out to Adam and Eve, a tiny glimmer of hope also appeared (Genesis 3:15). From the very beginning God’s plan was to send Jesus to the cross so that he could triumph over sin and death.

Throughout the Old Testament, the plan became clearer. The law showed God’s people when they had gone wrong, and provided a way to return to him in repentance and obtain forgiveness through repeated sacrifice. (These sacrifices only offered a glimpse of the *real* sacrifice that was yet to come). But too often God’s people rebelled instead of turning to their Father, who kept longing for them to return.

And so “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). He “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins” (Hebrews 10:12). And now we know that “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The Father, who has always longed to forgive his wayward children, has made a way home for us. And when we *do* repent and return to him, there is great joy in heaven as a result (Luke 15:7, 10).

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The Book of Joel contains the message of one of the Old Testament prophets, whose task it was to speak God’s word to his people, reminding them of how they should live and calling them to repentance. The passage we’re about to look at is traditionally read on Ash Wednesday, a day on which we prepare our hearts for the penitential season of Lent.

Refer to Joel 2:12-18.

(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.

- Why were the people being called to repent?
- What do you think it means to “rend your hearts and not your garments”?
- What positive motivation does this passage offer toward repentance?
- What specific acts of repentance were the people called to in this passage?
- What was to be the consequence of the people’s repentance?

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A few notes and reflections for reference:

- The prophet Joel was calling the people to repentance in the strongest terms. This tells us that there was serious corporate sin, which was alienating them from their God. Joel’s voice was a warning, letting people know that some of the challenges they’d already experienced were nothing compared to the judgement that was on the way if they continued down the same road.
- In Old Testament times, putting on “sackcloth and ashes” along with “rending of garments” was an outward sign of grief and repentance. Sometimes people can put on an outward show of repentance without really meaning it, and without any intention of reforming their ways. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus spoke against those who made a hypocritical show of fasting. Instead, he said, “when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (6: 17-18). God wanted the people to be truly sorry in their hearts, not just to put on a show of appearing to be sorry.
- Joel 2:13 tells us that God “is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster”. The kindness of God is meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4). Knowing that our God is loving, merciful, and longing to forgive us, is the reassurance we often need to come to him humbly, confess our sins, and seek to make a fresh start.
- The people were called to return to the Lord whole-heartedly. The situation called for fasting, weeping and mourning (v12). Moreover, the prophet was calling them to corporate acts of penance as well as private ones: a solemn assembly, and praying to God to save them from the judgement to come (v15-17).
- The passage hints in verse 14 that the impending judgement may be averted. Then, in verse 18, we read, “Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people”. God is merciful. We see this play out over and over again in the narratives of scripture. He longs for us to return to him so that he may forgive us, spare us from the judgement to come, and ultimately bless us.

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).)

Set aside some time this week to reflect on God’s forgiving nature, and to bring to him your sins in sincere repentance. Close your time with this prayer:

*O most mighty God, and merciful Father, who hast compassion upon all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made; who wouldest not the death of a sinner, but that he should rather turn from his sin, and be saved: Mercifully forgive our trespasses; receive and comfort us, who are grieved and wearied with the burden of our sins. Thy property is always to have mercy; to thee only it appertaineth to forgive sins. Spare, O Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed; enter not into judgement with thy servants, who truly repent us of our faults, but so make haste to help us in this world, that we may ever live with thee in the world to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (FROM THE PENITENTIAL SERVICE, BCP, P. 613)*

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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.

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.

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## JOEL 2: A REASON TO RETURN

<sup>12</sup>"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; <sup>13</sup>and rend your hearts and not your garments."

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. <sup>14</sup>Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?

<sup>15</sup>Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; <sup>16</sup>gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. <sup>17</sup>Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep and say, "Spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

<sup>18</sup>Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.