

# NOT IF BUT WHEN

---

## CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Small 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 “JUDGEMENT” VERSION

Write out some of the questions listed below on scraps of paper (you may wish to add a few of 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, giving an explanation for the answer.

YOU MAY WANT TO ALLOW FOR ONE “PASS” PER TURN IF A TEEN SELECTS A QUESTION AND WOULD RATHER NOT SPEAK ABOUT IT. 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 MIGHT HAVE THIRTY SECONDS TO ANSWER).

- If you could choose one author or book to be removed from school reading lists, what would it be and why?
- Tell about a time when you felt someone had been falsely accused of something.
- Have you ever chosen not to see a movie because you disliked one of the lead actors? Which one and why?
- If you could vote to have one of your teachers replaced, which teacher would it be and why?
- Which car would you never want to drive? Why?
- Which place would you never want to visit on holiday? Why?
- If you could eliminate one thing from the world, what would it be? Why?
- What song do you hope you never have to hear again? Why?
- What is a “deal breaker” for you in a boyfriend/girlfriend? Why?
- Would you rather have to say whatever comes to your mind, or never speak again?

## 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: IT COULD HAVE BEEN ME

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 see someone who has really messed up, what is your response?
- Have you ever heard the old fashioned expression, “**There, but for the grace of God, go I**”? What do you think it means? What can it teach us?

# NOT IF BUT WHEN

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

- Judging others comes naturally to most of us. We can see other people's flaws and perhaps they are different from our own, or they may be similar to our own. Either way, it can be easier to point our fingers at someone else than to come clean about our own failings. Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). The scriptures are clear about the danger of condemning others hypocritically. Christians are to exercise discernment. We should be able to "distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:14), and make wise decisions. But, like our Lord, when we recognize sin in others, we should not take it upon ourselves to condemn them, but should rather pray that they might "reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).
- In modern times this expression is sometimes used by people who don't really understand what it means. Sometimes people may use the expression in a complacent and self-congratulatory manner, but if used sincerely its meaning is very different. It means that the only thing that stands between the person speaking and someone else who has really made a mess of things is the grace of God. It is a statement appropriate for moments when we see someone mired in sin or misfortune or the consequences of their own folly. In these moments, when it would be easy to become judgemental, this expression can be a statement of humility, compassion and gratitude – that recognizes that under the right circumstances we could be brought just as low.

## THE LESSON: JOHN 8

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.)

From the time of the early Church to the present day, there has always been a Christian practice of observing days and seasons of "penance": times of sober reflection and repentance. The reason for this lies at the very heart of the Gospel: all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). *We all need to repent, because we all sin.*

If you belong to a church that observes the Christian calendar this will sound familiar, and it probably makes you think of Lent, the 40 days (not counting Sundays), leading up to Easter. During this time, we focus on remembering that our sin had to be paid for by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. On Ash Wednesday, the Prayer Book calls believers to observe a "holy Lent" by "self-examination and repentance, by prayer, fasting, and self-denial, and by reading and meditation upon God's holy Word" (BCP, p. 612).

But these spiritual disciplines are not *just* for the season of Lent. They are for any time in our personal or communal lives when the awareness of our sin or the challenge of our circumstances moves us to seek God more diligently. Indeed, "God has given us the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace" (Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*). The disciplines should be the ongoing "healthy habits" of the Christian life – not intended to weigh us down with a new kind of law, but as a means by which we are drawn into greater intimacy with our Lord, the one who loves us and paid the price for our sin.

Refer to John 8: 2-11.

(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.

# NOT IF BUT WHEN

- What does this passage tell us about the woman?
- What does this passage tell us about the scribes and Pharisees?
- What does this passage tell us about Jesus?
- With whom do you identify most in this narrative? What can we learn from it?

*A few notes and reflections for reference:*

- *We know very little about the woman in this passage, except that she had been caught in the act of adultery and dragged before the religious leaders to face stoning. We may guess that she knew that her actions were sinful and could have this result, but she did them anyway. We don't know why. It should also be noted that the Law called for both participants of adultery to be stoned (Leviticus 20:10), yet the man with whom she'd been caught had not been condemned with her. She must have been terrified, facing the shame and the violence of these religious leaders. When Jesus saved her and spoke to her, she responded simply and addressed him with respect. And we know that Jesus chose not to condemn her, but rather to release her with the charge that she "sin no more" (v11). He himself would pay for her sin (and ours).*
- *The scribes and Pharisees had orchestrated this scenario in order to trip Jesus up. In fact, they wanted to arrest him (John 7:45). Perhaps they had seen his compassion for sinners previously and wanted to see whether he would contradict the law. Their total disregard for the woman they had captured is remarkable. Shaming her, condemning her and killing her was a means to another end for them. But Jesus' words roused their consciences and forced them to acknowledge that they, too, were not without sin.*
- *Jesus loved to be in his Father's house. He loved to teach the people. (v2) He was wise and alert to the motives of the scribes and Pharisees and he was not going to act or speak according to their plan. As he often did, Jesus turned their trick into an opportunity to teach them something about their own hearts. We do not know what Jesus wrote on the ground. It has been suggested that he wrote out the ten commandments or perhaps even a list of the specific sins of the men present, but whatever it was that he wrote, it seems to have stopped the scribes and Pharisees in their tracks. Jesus made the soul-searching statement, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (v7). The would-be judges had to redirect their judgement away from this woman and towards themselves. But Jesus was also concerned about their victim. As the only one without sin, he could have condemned her, but instead he addressed her kindly, releasing her from condemnation and commissioning her to start afresh.*
- *Perhaps you identify with the woman who had been singled out for shame and condemnation by this crowd of bloodthirsty men. You know that you have sinned, and you know that what you've done is wrong. Maybe others have even found out about it and decided to punish you by withdrawing their friendship or mocking you. If that is the case, and if there is contrition in your heart (Psalm 51: 17), then know that Jesus can free you from the penalty for your sin, and commission you to go forward in newness of life. On the other hand, if you identify with the scribes and Pharisees, this passage is a challenge to recognize that we, too, have sinned. It is so easy for us to look at others, to point out what they have done wrong, and to want to see punishment. But Jesus, in this narrative, challenges us to remember that we are not so very different from the person we would condemn. We also stand in need of God's grace. And having received that grace, we should seek to see other sinners differently, not with condemnation but with compassion, praying that they might have true contrition and might be freed from their sin.*

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.

# NOT IF BUT WHEN

## 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 confess your own sins and to ask God to turn the hearts of sinners to repentance. Close your time with this prayer:

*Lord, for thy tender mercies' sake, lay not our sins to our charge; But forgive that is past, and give us grace to amend our sinful lives; To decline from sin, and incline to virtue, That we may walk with a perfect heart before thee, now and evermore.* (FROM THE PENITENTIAL SERVICE, BCP, P. 614)

## 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.

### JOHN 8: WHO IS WITHOUT SIN?

<sup>2</sup>Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. <sup>3</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst <sup>4</sup>they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup>Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” <sup>6</sup>This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup>And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” <sup>8</sup>And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup>Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” <sup>11</sup>She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”