

MORE THAN WORDS PART ONE

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Copies of the downloadable “622 service” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copy of the leader’s notes - *note fifth page re ice breaker, you may want multiple copies*
- Copies of the lesson handout
- 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: QUIZ: WHICH PROPHET, WHICH QUOTE?

Distribute copies of the quiz (see page five) for your teens to complete. Give them a chance to score themselves to see how many answers they got right, and to share any thoughts they might have had on the content of the quotes.

You may wish to point out to your teens that the quiz is very hard. If they got any correct at all, they have done very well, and if not, they are in good company and shouldn’t feel badly. The quiz is just intended to bring up some of the names of the prophets and some examples of prophetic statements that we find recorded in scripture.

(Answer Key: 1-Obadiah, 2-Malachi, 3-Moses, 4-Jeremiah, 5-Hosea, 6-Isaiah, 7-Ezekiel, 8-Amos, 9-Samuel, 10-Zechariah, 11-Joel, 12-Elijah).

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: CHOICES AND CONSEQUENCES

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 choices did you already have to make today?
- Do you usually think about the consequences of your choices beforehand?
- Have you ever misjudged the consequences of a choice?

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

- *Each day we make numerous decisions, small and large. We choose whether to get up with the alarm or hit the “snooze” button, how to interact with our family, what to wear, what to eat, and so on. Sometimes by the time we arrive at church or school in the morning, we may already feel that we have made several bad (or good) choices.*
- *When we decide on what we will wear, perhaps we consider the weather and what we have to do that day so that we’ll be comfortable. But sometimes, when we speak harshly to someone out of irritability, we fail to consider the hurt this can cause, the possibility of retaliation, and the potential harm to the relationship over time.*
- *In many cases we can anticipate the consequences of a decision, but sometimes our best guesses are wrong. We think we know the best course of action, and later discover that we had totally failed to take into account the full consequences of our choice. This could be as simple as failing to realize that it will rain and having a favourite item*

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of clothing destroyed as a result, or it could be something like copying a friend's homework, getting caught, and having a note on your school record that goes on to cause trouble for years to come.

THE LESSON: MATTHEW 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.)

"Sin" is the word we use to describe human rebellion against God. Since the first man and woman sinned, all of humanity shares the "sin nature" – an inclination to disobey God. Scripture tells us that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We have all sinned, and the consequence is physical death as well as separation from God. This is bad news!

Moreover, when we try to set our own ethical course, we end up going down the very same path. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that *seems right* to a man, but its end is the way to death". If we want to be restored to *life*, then we must listen to the one who made us. God told his people through the law how they should live. His prophets called them back to holy living, generation after generation. And since none other could fulfill God's law, Jesus came and took upon himself our sin, suffering death on our behalf, so that we could know life beyond the grave.

On Ash Wednesday, believers all over the world will kneel while ashes are pressed to their foreheads and they hear these words: "*Remember that dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*". This is a reminder to those of us who are living today that one day each one of us will face death. The promise of eternal life in heaven is only possible because of the great price that Jesus paid for us. And this sacrifice must motivate us to repent sincerely – to confess and turn from our sin.

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John the Baptist was a prophet sent to prepare the way for Jesus. He followed in a long tradition of prophets who had the unpleasant task of calling God's people to repentance, and reminding them of the consequences should they turn away from the God who went to such lengths to make their redemption possible.

Refer to Matthew 3:1-12.

(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 was John's message? In what way was his message (and role) unique?
- What was John's problem with the Pharisees and Sadducees?
- What was John's warning about the future?
- What can we learn from this passage?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *John's message was an urgent call for the people of Israel to repent because "the kingdom of heaven" was "at hand" (v2). The choice between salvation and "unquenchable fire" was drawing nearer (v12). John is considered the*

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last of the Old Testament prophets. His role was similar to theirs in his call for the people to repent of their sins and return to God. Like them, he also pointed the way to the coming Messiah, though in John's case the arrival of Messiah – Jesus Christ – was imminent. John's "baptism", distinct from the Christian baptism that we are familiar with today, was a symbolic act of repentance (related to the Old Testament practices of ceremonial cleansing) and indicating the washing away of sins and stepping into a new way of living.

- John saw the Pharisees and Sadducees as people who did not "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (v8). Instead of sincere confession, they were adept at going through the motions, and relying on their heritage through Abraham for salvation (v9). This would not be enough (v10).
- John warned the Pharisees and Sadducees that "the axe is laid to the root of the trees" (v10) – their heritage would not save them if they did not "bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (v8). Salvation is contingent upon true repentance. John described Jesus as one who would separate those who belong to God ("the wheat"), from those who do not ("the chaff"). This imagery is consistent throughout scripture, indicating that there are two paths open to us, one that leads to life and another that leads to death (v12).
- Sometimes believers can become complacent about sin. We can be like the Pharisees and Sadducees, smug in our sense of security, placing our trust in church affiliations, family background, or personal accomplishments. But the only thing that can save us is the sacrifice of Christ. For this reason, we must humbly confess and turn from our sins, and accept the gift that only he can give. We must not go about our faith half-heartedly. ("You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5), and "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25).)

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).)

Ask God to bring to your mind the things in your life that you need to repent of. Spend some time quietly listening for his leading. Consider what the "fruits of repentance" should be in your life. Ask God for his help in bringing about true repentance in you, repentance that bears fruit. Close your time with the following prayer.

Turn thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned. Be favourable, O Lord, Be favourable to thy people, Who turn to thee in weeping, fasting, and praying. For thou art a merciful God, Full of compassion, long-suffering, and of great pity. Thou sparest when we deserve punishment, And in thy wrath thinkest upon mercy. Spare thy people, good Lord, Spare them, and let not thine heritage be brought to confusion. Hear us, O Lord, for thy mercy is great, And according to the multitude of thy mercies look upon us; Through the merits and mediation of thy blessed Son, 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.

MATTHEW 3: BEAR FRUIT IN KEEPING WITH REPENTANCE

¹In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ²"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ³For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

⁴Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹"I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

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QUIZ: WHICH PROPHET, WHICH QUOTE?

Which prophet delivered which message?

Try your hand at matching up the following scripture verses with the prophets who wrote them (without Bibles!).

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| Amos (AMOS 4:11) | Isaiah (ISAIAH 58:10) | Moses (LEVITICUS 26:41-42) |
| Elijah (1 KINGS 18:21) | Jeremiah (JEREMIAH 12:17) | Obadiah (OBADIAH 1:15) |
| Ezekiel (EZEKIEL 33:4) | Joel (JOEL 2:13) | Samuel (1 SAMUEL 12:15) |
| Hosea (HOSEA 14:1) | Malachi (MALACHI 2:2) | Zechariah (ZECHARIAH 10:9) |

- _____ : “As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head”.
- _____ : “If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honour to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings”.
- _____ : “If then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant...”
- _____ : “If any nation will not listen, then I will utterly pluck it up and destroy it”.
- _____ : “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity”.
- _____ : “If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday”.
- _____ : “If anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head”.
- _____ : “You were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me”.
- _____ : “If you will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king”.
- _____ : “Though I scattered them among the nations, yet in far countries they shall remember me, and with their children they shall live and return”.
- _____ : “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”.
- _____ : “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him”.

If you did not score very high, don't be discouraged. Many of the verses selected are somewhat obscure and even seasoned Bible scholars would be challenged to match them up.