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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: CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

“Choose Your Own Adventure” refers to a series of children’s stories, written in the second person, where the reader is cast as the protagonist. Every few pages, the reader faces two or three options. Depending on which option is chosen, the reader is directed to a different page where the story continues.

Have your group break into teams of 2-4. Each team is tasked with creating a brief “Choose Your Own Adventure” skit with at least two “choice points”. For example, a team might act out a brother and sister walking to school when they come across someone who needs help. They pause the skit and ask the “audience” whether they choose to help or to go on without helping. The skit then continues, along the lines of what the performing team has planned for the option selected.

IF YOU’RE WORKING WITH A GROUP OF THREE OR LESS, HAVE EACH TEEN PREPARE A BRIEF WRITTEN STORY RATHER THAN AN ACTED OUT VERSION TO PRESENT. 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 HOW IT WENT.

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: WHAT IF... (GOD WRITES NEW ENDINGS)

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.

- Do you ever wonder how things would be different now if you had made a different choice in your past? Share an example of a time when you felt you took a “wrong turn” in decision making.
- How do you think God sees your “what if” moments?

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

- We all ask “what if” sometimes. It’s natural to wonder if/how a different choice could have taken you down a different road. What if I had taken Drama instead of Accounting? What if I had (or hadn’t) spoken to the person I had a crush on? What if I had studied for that test instead of playing video games? Considering past choices can be helpful if we’re able to determine that we chose poorly and then make it our purpose to choose better in future. But we can never really know the answer to these “what if” questions, and if we spend too much time obsessing over

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choices that we have made (and cannot now change), we may find ourselves sinking into despair or apathy, unable to move forward with the faith and hope which ought to characterize our outlook.

- *If your life were a “Choose Your Own Adventure” story, God would be the writer. He is the only one who knows, each time you make a choice (whether bad or good), which doors have been closed and which crises now lie ahead. But the Author of our story loves us. He loved his children enough to write Jesus into our story when the first man and woman sinned, so that there would be a road home. And he is still at work, writing new endings for us when we go astray, redeeming and restoring the wayward children he loves so much.*

THE LESSON: LUKE 15

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.)

God is holy. And our sin is a problem. It has fractured the relationship we ought to have with our Creator. But God is a good Father. He has never given up on us.

Though the consequence of our sin is death, God made a way for us to come back home: Jesus. Many of us do not respond to God’s mercy quickly. We shy away from our Father, living in sin and separated from him. And yet, God “is patient... not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

God did not want us to go down the road of sin that we chose. But he is always watching, waiting, working and longing for our return. If and when we do return, it will not matter how many times we went wrong. It will only matter that he, our loving Creator, is the one writing our story. And he is able to write a good ending for us no matter what sort of a mess we hand over to him. In the end, our story can end with him.

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Jesus loved to tell “parables” – stories that helped his hearers to understand spiritual truths. In the narrative we’re looking at today, he told not one, but three parables in order to convey the same point. We’re going to look at the first two.

Refer to Luke 15:1-10.

(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 prompted Jesus to tell these parables?
- What sort of value do the sheep and coin have to their owners in these parables?
- What did Jesus want his hearers to understand?
- What does this mean for us today?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *The Pharisees and scribes were complaining that Jesus was associating with “sinners” (v2). Jesus told these parables specifically to respond to the charge, and to challenge his critics to examine themselves honestly and reconsider their attitude towards those that they were so quick to dismiss and disassociate themselves from.*

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- *The sheep and coin are deeply cared about by their owners. They are precious. In each case the loss of a single one causes the owner to set upon an arduous search. When the lost item is recovered, the result is joy. In the case of the shepherd, we are given an image that shows real tenderness. He carries the sheep home on his shoulders. In the case of both the shepherd and the woman, their joy overflows so that they want to share it with everyone – friends and neighbours are invited to celebrate with them.*
- *Sinners are like these precious items that have been lost. They have never been unloved. The Father never stopped caring about them and longing for them to return. The dismissive attitude of the Pharisees and scribes could not be further from the attitude of God towards these people that he loves. If they can be brought home, the Father will welcome them with joy. And the Pharisees must consider whether their attitude towards the Father is really any better than that of the sinners. This question is looked at more fully in the third parable, the parable of the prodigal son (sometimes called the parable of the forgiving father).*
- *The parable tells us that our God has never given up on sinners. If we feel that we are undeserving sinners, then this is good news. God loves us and is seeking us and longing to celebrate our return. In fact, our return to him would bring about “joy in heaven” and “joy before the angels” (v7, 10). If we find the sins of others to be particularly offensive, then the parable challenges us to remember that these people are also loved by God, and we ought to strive to see them as he does, and to hope with him for their return.*

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 these truths: God loves you and wants you to return to him so that he can forgive you. You, like every other human being in the world, have sinned. Your sin grieves God and separates you from him. Any unforgiveness of others that you may be harbouring is also a blockage in your relationship with God. God is the one who made you and loves you. He is the Great Redeemer, always ready to make a way for you to come home. Close your time of reflection with the following prayer:

We humbly beseech thee, O Father, mercifully to look upon our infirmities; and, for the glory of thy Name, turn from us all those evils that we most justly have deserved; and grant that in all our troubles we may put our whole trust and confidence in thy mercy, and evermore serve thee in holiness and pureness of living, to thy honour and glory; through our only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(FROM THE LITANY, BCP, P. 36)

CLOSING PRAYERS (622 AGAIN)

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

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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. 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.

LUKE 15: **THE THING THAT MAKES HEAVEN REJOICE**

¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

³So he told them this parable: ⁴“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

⁸“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”