

MINDFUL OF MORTALITY

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Pens, pencils, paper
- Copies of the downloadable “622 service” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader's notes
- A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: “ADAMAH”

Write this word on your board: “*Adamah*”. Ask the teens to see how many words they can come up with by rearranging the letters.

Tell your teens at the close of the activity that “adamah” is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for “ground” or “earth”, while “adam” is the word for man – which became the name of the first man. So in the creation account in the book of Genesis there is a play on words that highlights the relationship between the man and the dust of the earth from which he was made.

DEPENDING ON YOUR GROUP, YOU MIGHT ASK THE TEENS TO WORK ON THE WORDS INDIVIDUALLY ON THEIR OWN PAPER OR IN TEAMS TO COMPETE FOR THE LONGEST LIST, OR HAVE THEM WORK ALL TOGETHER.

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: A TIME FOR EVERY MATTER UNDER HEAVEN

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.

- Describe a time when you felt like time moved either very quickly or very slowly.
- Have you ever wished that you could have been born during a different period in history?
- What do you think your life expectancy will be?

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

- *We all have the sensation sometimes of time speeding up (especially when we are dreading something), or slowing down (especially when we are eager for something). Very likely most of us have been in a class or a meeting that seemed to stretch on for a very long time, or have been wondering where the time went when we had something important to prepare for.*
- *Historical fiction and fantasy genres do a great job of pulling us into another time, causing us to wonder how our lives might have been better (or worse) in such circumstances. Most of us would sorely miss technology, but*

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perhaps there are aspects of our personality and interests that we feel would thrive in a different setting. At the end of the day we must concede that our sovereign God knew exactly what he was doing when he placed us in this time and location.

- *Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 says, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die”. Each of us will die, and we do not know when, though it is a matter that we may speculate upon. We may consider the longevity and health of others in our family, whether our lifestyle and habits are likely to result in a long and healthy life, and how this may affect our plans for the future. Regardless of our speculations, only God knows when we will die. What we do know, however, is that some day our mortal lives will come to an end.*

THE LESSON: PSALM 90

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.)

In the beginning, the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, chose disobedience. That first sin polluted the goodness of the whole of creation, resulting in sickness, sorrow, and death. Now the story for each one of us is “dust to dust”.

Death is not something that the living often choose to think about. Many of us would rather live as though we will always be here, just as we are now, laughing in the sunlight. But each of us has a limited amount of time before we return to the dust from which we came. If we only pay attention, the reminder of death is constantly with us during life – we hear about it in the news, in our communities, and it even reaches into our families, refusing to be ignored. This is what the Prayer Book liturgy means when it says, “In the midst of life we are in death” (BCP p. 601).

*When we think about the inevitability of our own deaths, we are reminded of what *caused* it: human sin. This awareness should lead us to repent and to cling to the mercy of Christ. But being “mindful of mortality” is about more than sombre introspection. It should also lead us to *rejoice* in the blessings of each day, to *honour* God with all that we have now, and to joyfully *anticipate* our glorious future with him in eternity.*

Refer to Psalm 90.

(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 does this psalm tell us about God?
- What does this psalm tell us about human beings?
- Take a closer look at the portion of this psalm that is phrased as a supplication (v12-17). What does the writer ask for?
- What advice does this psalm offer us?

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A few notes and reflections for reference:

- The first six verses of the psalm focus on God’s unchanging, eternal nature, especially in contrast to human transience. The psalm goes on to highlight God’s holiness, omniscience and just wrath in the face of human iniquity (v7-11). The concluding verses of the psalm focus on God’s benevolence, his “steadfast love” (v14), and his “glorious power” (v16).
- The psalmist is very clear about the fact that in all circumstances we are in God’s hands. Verse 1 says that God has “been our dwelling place in all generations”. The psalm goes on to make clear that our times, our days, our years and ultimately our deaths are in his hands as well. We are sinful: our “iniquities” are not hidden from God. God’s just wrath causes us to be “dismayed” (v7). Our lives are filled with “toil and trouble” (v10), we are “afflicted” and we “have seen evil” (v15). And yet there is hope to be found in God’s teaching, in his mercy, his benevolence, and in the fact that ultimately, “the eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27)
- In verse 12, the writer links being “mindful of mortality” (or “numbering our days”) with a heart of wisdom. The prayer begins with a request that God might teach us wisdom, a wisdom which has its source in knowing that God is eternal and we are mortal. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge”. The supplication seeks God’s “return”, his “pity”, his “steadfast love”, his “favour” and his active, glorious and powerful work in the lives of his people. This renewed relationship with God brings satisfaction, rejoicing, gladness, and success – the establishment of “the work of our hands”.
- The psalm instructs us to contemplate God’s eternity and power in contrast with our own fragility and transience. There is wisdom to be found in knowing that God is our refuge, our teacher, our redeemer, and the one in whom blessing is to be found, now and always.

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 this truth: God is eternal, we are mortal. Next, take time to repent of your sins and rejoice in your blessings. Ask God to help you to honour him with all of your days and to look forward with hope to eternity. Close your time with the following prayer:

O God, whose days are without end, and whose mercies cannot be numbered: Make us, we beseech thee, deeply sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of human life; and let thy Holy Spirit lead us in holiness and righteousness, all our days; that, when we shall have served thee in our generation, we may be gathered unto our fathers, having the testimony of a good conscience; in the communion of the Catholic Church; in the confidence of a certain faith; in the comfort of a reasonable, religious, and holy hope; in favour with thee our God, and in perfect charity with all men. Grant this, we beseech thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(PRAYER FROM THE ORDER FOR THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD, P. 599)

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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.

PSALM 90: **TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS**

- ¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.
- ² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth
and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- ³ You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!"
- ⁴ For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.
- ⁵ You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning:
- ⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.
- ⁷ For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed.
- ⁸ You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.
- ⁹ For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.
- ¹⁰ The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty;
yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.
- ¹¹ Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?
- ¹² So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.
- ¹³ Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!
- ¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
- ¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.
- ¹⁶ Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.
- ¹⁷ Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work
of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!