

The Lord waits for us; the Lord who makes all things new, is there, waiting to forgive, if only we will turn to him and seek his healing love.

# The Light is On

*Integration lessons to be used in conjunction with  
"The Light is On" by Cardinal Donald Wuerl.*

This resource is designed to be used in conjunction with “The Light is On” by Cardinal Donald Wuerl.

The format of the lessons (short discussion and activity components) allows for use of several components to develop a single one-hour lesson or as supplemental pieces to be used at appropriate points throughout the teaching year. It is encouraged that the activities will be used in preparation for celebrating the Sacrament of Penance.

Each activity has a corresponding mini lesson to lay the foundation for discussion. It is presumed that students have read the book and have a fundamental understanding of the sacraments. A review lesson is included for use should supplemental teaching on sacraments be necessary.

### **Lesson Resources:**

#### Scripture:

Psalm 51	Acts 17:30-31
Sirach 4:26	Romans 7:15, 18-20
Luke 15	2 Corinthians 5:18-19
John 20:21-23	James 5:14-16
Acts 2:38	1 John 1:8-9

#### Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Part II, Chapter 2, Article 4: Paragraphs 1422 – 1498

#### United States Catholic Catechism for Adults:

Chapter 18: Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation:  
God is Rich in Mercy

### **Optional Prayer:**

Litany of the Sacred Heart

### **Lesson Objectives:**

- Understand that the goal of Confession is conversion – turning from self to God.
- Recognize the power of God’s mercy so that we can fully understand why Confession is a gift.
- Appreciate the Sacrament of Reconciliation as God’s love that never turns away from us.
- Understand that while Jesus gave authority to his apostles to reconcile the sinner with God and the Church, it is God who forgives our sins through the priest acting in the person of Jesus Christ.
- Realize that repentance is sorrow for sin that leads to a conversion of life.
- Understand that we cannot earn God’s forgiveness or overcome sin by our own efforts; the grace of confession is unmerited and underserved.
- Recognize the power of a daily examination of conscience to overcome vice and acquire virtue.
- Identify the steps in celebrating the sacrament.
- Comprehend the sacred trust of the seal of the confessional
- Articulate that Penance is the sacrament of the new evangelization because it offers a new and personal encounter with Christ and his Church.

## *Wisdom From the Saints*

St. Ambrose says of the two conversions that, in the Church, “there are water and tears; the water of Baptism and the tears of repentance.”

- St. Ambrose (CCC 1429)

The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works. You do the truth and come to the light.

- St. Augustine

In the life of the body a man is sometimes sick, and unless he takes medicine, he will die. Even so in the spiritual life a man is sick on account of sin. For that reason he needs medicine so that he may be restored to health; and this grace is bestowed in the Sacrament of Penance.

- St. Thomas Aquinas

A soul does not benefit from the sacrament of confession if it is not humble. Pride keeps it in darkness. The soul neither knows how, nor is it willing, to probe with precision the depths of its own misery. It puts on a mask and avoids everything that might bring it recovery.

--St. Faustina

Confession is an act of honesty and courage – an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God.

- Blessed John Paul II

### **The Light is On Overview:**

Chapter 1 begins with the question, Why Go to Confession? The BEST REASON is that confession satisfies a genuine and profound human need. Confession (Penance) serves a real human need as it allows us to rest from the burden of our transgressions. We confess because we have sinned and sin brings about a decisive rupture in our relationship with God.

God wants us to share in His divine nature. He created us in His own image. He made us good, but as the Cardinal reminds us, “our goodness has been wounded, injured, and weakened by original sin.” God does not expect us to overcome this condition alone. The Cardinal writes, “God created us as social animals – creatures who need one another. He created us to live in community, and when we wrecked our human community, he redeemed us to live in His Church, a great communion of persons, a communion of saints.”

The Church believes in “two lighthouses of salvation” – Baptism and Penance. In Baptism our sins are wiped away; yet, through the traces of original sin that are part of our human nature there lies within each person countless personal sins. Penance is the “second plank of salvation” where we can find absolution for our sins and restoration to new life in Christ. The sacraments, including Penance, are the visible signs through which the Lord confers his gift of Grace.

Yet, Confession has no place in a worldview that sees moral truths as relative, leaving it up to each individual to decide what is right and wrong. The *National Directory for Catechesis* states that, “Catechesis for the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation first depends on the person’s acknowledgement of God’s faithful love, of the existence of sin, of the capacity to commit sin, and of God’s power to forgive sin and reconcile the sinner with himself and with the Church” (NDC, 36B, 1). Indifference to right and wrong, and living within a depersonalized relationship with God, allow us to let go of our awareness of the personal responsibility of our actions.

We cannot understand the grace of the sacrament of Penance unless we have a better understanding of God’s mercy. God is merciful and always ready to forgive us, but he will not compel us to love or be reconciled. God created us to be free – and he respects our freedom. The sacrament is a safe place where people can *break their unbearable silences* and lay down their heavy burdens. It is a place where we can speak in certain trust and receive good counsel.

Acknowledging that Confession has natural benefits, Cardinal Wuerl points out that the primary benefit is supernatural (Chap 1) as he explores the following spiritual effects of Sacrament of Penance: reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace; Reconciliation with the Church; remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins; remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin; peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation; an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle (CCC, 1496).

In the simple actions of contrition, confession, absolution, and satisfaction, we are restored to a whole new life. The goal of Confession is not merely to have our sins forgiven (which they are) but also to turn from self to God. While the process itself is simple, it does require the virtues of humility and fortitude. A daily examination of conscience raises our sensitivity to the sinful patterns in our lives and strengthens us in virtue.

The great fruit that the celebration of this sacrament bears is conversion to a deeper relationship with Christ.

## Activity Discussion Texts

### Lesson Activity: The Church's Sacraments

God gave us the great gift of the Church, a community of persons dedicated to following Christ and building up the Kingdom of God.

Have students develop a top five list of the most distinctive things about the Roman Catholic Faith. Students should then get share their list with three different people. The teacher should then list several of these responses on the board.

(Whether or not students name them specifically focus on the role of the sacraments as being distinct to the Catholic faith)

Cardinal Wuerl writes, "Jesus shares his life with us, and that is the gift we call *divine grace*. He shares his life in many ways, and we receive actual graces through the everyday events of our lives. The ordinary and primary channels of his grace, however, are the sacred "signs" he established in the New Testament and entrusted to the Church. We call them the *sacraments*, and there are seven of them: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Matrimony, Holy Orders, Anointing of the Sick, and Confession.

A sacrament is, by definition, an efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church. A sacrament dispenses divine life to us through the action of the Holy Spirit.

Work through the text, having the students follow along with filling in the blanks on "The Church's Sacraments Lecture Notes" as review.

### Lesson Activity: Give Thanks to the Lord

The Catechism of the Catholic Church does not say that sin sets God against us. It doesn't say that sin turns His heart away from us. No, the Catechism says that sin sets itself against God's love for us and turns our hearts away from it (1850).

All four Gospel recount the stories of both Judas betrayal and Peter denying Jesus.

- For Judas' betrayal see, Matthew 26:47-56, Mark 14:43-52, Luke 22:47-53 and John 18: 1 -14.
- For Peter's denial of Jesus see Matthew 26:69-75, Mark 14:66-72, Luke 22:54-62 and John 18:15-27.

Both men were apostles of Jesus. Both spent three years devoted the life and teachings of Christ. In the end, both used their free will to make choices. Both had the opportunity to seek forgiveness. As a class, discuss the power of accepting God's forgiveness as reflected in the lives of these two men.

The choices we make do have consequences: both our sinful actions and our response after we sin. The sacrament of Penance really does restore our baptismal holiness.

St. Faustina, had mystical experiences with the Lord and has recorded these experiences in her Diary. In one encounter she hears the Lord telling her: “All your sins have not wounded my heart as painfully as your present lack of trust does - that after so many efforts of my love and mercy, you should still doubt My goodness” (Diary of St. Faustina, 1486).

Do you trust the power of God’s mercy and forgiveness? If so, your life should be marked with gratitude – Give thanks to the Lord for he is good!

Have the student complete the “Give Thanks to the Lord” worksheet as a reflection on the words of absolution given in the sacrament to help appreciate God’s mercy more fully.

### **Lesson Activity: Sorrow of the Soul**

Perfect contrition arises from love for God, imperfect contrition results from some other motive. Often we go to confession wanting our sins forgiven, and they are. However God wants much more from this encounter. Our contrition is important; God wants to heal us of the attitudes, disordered desires and wounds that cause us to commit these sins. When we approach confession with more perfect contrition we open the door for God’s grace and mercy to heal the root of our sin.

Read the story of the Prodigal Son – Luke 15: 11-32. As a class discuss the sorrow of the son and the response of the Father. Are they relational? If so, how?

The son was sorry because he was hungry. We can be sorry for many reasons, but often, we are sorry because we fear the consequence (hell) as the result of our sin. Just as the father of the prodigal, loved by his sons, God loves all of us. At the same time he loves each of us. He loves you differently than he has ever loved anyone else.

We are often like the Prodigal Son who had imperfect, yet real sorrow for his sin. You cannot receive forgiveness of sin if there is not at least some regret over it, and some resolve not to repeat the sin as we strive to turn toward God.

In his book “The Seven Secrets of Confession” Vinny Flynn offers the following comment for reflection: “

It is really a matter of focus. If you're sorry for your sins because you're afraid of the consequences, then who are you focused on? Who do you love? Yourself. If you're sorry because you've hurt God, who are you focused on? Who do you love? God.”

Have the students complete the “How Contrite am I” worksheet as they reflect on their general feeling about the sinfulness in their lives.

### **Lesson Activity: Praying an Act of Contrition**

As Cardinal Wuerl noted in Chapter 7, sometimes we may not feel especially sorry for our sins. We speak the words of the Act of Contrition, but without perfect contrition. There is power in this act though. Mindful of the Prodigal Son, we recall that the Father ran to his son before the words of repentance were spoken. It is all the more so with our loving God even as we make our simple deed of love by approaching the Lord in the Sacrament of Penance. As the text notes: “We are expressing our sorrow as an act of will rather than emotion, and that can be a far greater expression of love.”

Combining act of will and emotion adds to the growth in grace that comes from the sacrament. Using the “Praying an Act of Contrition” worksheet, have the students reflect and compose their own prayer of contrition.

### **Lesson Activity: What’s Stopping You?**

Review, as a class Chapter 8: Obstacles, Real and Imagined. Ask the students which reasons, explanations, and excuses they find most compelling. Discuss and clarify additional concerns the students may have about the sacrament.

Often, students have not celebrated the sacrament often enough to be comfortable with the process. Their anxieties arise not only for the prospect of confessing their sins but of not celebrating the sacrament the “right way.” Reassure the students that this is a minimally scripted liturgical rite and that the priest can and will guide them if they forget the process.

From the text: “Confession is not a symphony or ballet that requires precision from every player. It moves forward even with interruptions, even with improvisations, and with plenty of back and forth. It’s scripted, but in a minimal way. It is the only rite that is intended to be a conversation.”

Review the Ten Steps of Confession outlined in Chapter 7, have the students identify which step is most difficult for them. Then, using the “What’s Stopping You” worksheet, have the students write a note to self that will help them over this obstacle.

### **Lesson Activity: Examine your Conscience**

While each of the sacraments brings healing and holiness, the sacrament of Penance, along with the sacrament of Anointing are the two sacraments specifically directed to that goal. The central reality of every sacrament is personal encounter with God the Father of mercy. Therefore, sin is not the central reality. Confession is intended to be a process of healing and education leading us to conversion and helping us to grow so we don’t simply keep repeating the same sins.

You do not need to limit yourself to examining your conscience for preparation for the Sacrament of Penance. A daily examination of conscience helps you to see the patterns in your life that may be the root of sins that would otherwise seem unrelated. This daily reflection helps us to see our day not only

from the human perspective but also from God's perspective. Such regular reflection also helps us to grow into our prayer.

This activity can be used as preparation for the Sacrament of Penance, but could also be used as a model for a daily examination of conscience.

### **Lesson Activity: Made for Divine Communion**

Read 2 Peter 1: 1-4

Students should read the passage quietly to themselves.

Students should offer a written response to the following questions:

1. Based on the passage, what does God want to "share" with us? What does this mean and why would God want to do that?
2. What is the "corruption that is in the world" from which people need to escape? What things "corrupt" people in your age group?
3. How would life look if verse 4 was a reality? What keeps people from making this a reality?

Review Student Responses

End with the Prayer to the Holy Spirit found in the appendix of the Cardinal's book.

# The Church's Sacraments Lecture Notes

"Jesus shares his \_\_\_\_\_ with us, and that is the gift we call *divine* \_\_\_\_\_.

The ordinary and primary \_\_\_\_\_ of his grace, however, are the sacred " \_\_\_\_\_ " he established in the New Testament and entrusted to the Church.

We call them the \_\_\_\_\_, and there are \_\_\_\_\_ of them: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Matrimony, Holy Orders, Anointing of the Sick, and \_\_\_\_\_.

A sacrament is, by definition, an efficacious \_\_\_\_\_ of grace, instituted by \_\_\_\_\_ and entrusted to the \_\_\_\_\_. A sacrament dispenses divine \_\_\_\_\_ to us through the action of the \_\_\_\_\_.

Though Confession has many natural benefits, its primary benefits are \_\_\_\_\_.

Confession can \_\_\_\_\_ our sins and \_\_\_\_\_ us with supernatural strength.



## **Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good..... His mercy endures forever. Psalm 118:1**

....Let us go back to the Lord. The Lord never tires of forgiving, never! It is we who tire for asking his forgiveness. Let us ask for the grace not to tire of asking forgiveness, because he never tires of forgiving. Let us ask for this grace.”

*Pope Francis, Homily, March 17, 2013*

In the Sacrament of Penance, the priest says the following words of absolution:

You may not really hear them in the moment of the sacrament. Read and reflect on the words of God’s forgiveness spoken by the priest:

God, the Father of mercies,  
Through the death and the resurrection of his Son  
Has reconciled the world to himself  
And sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins;  
Through the ministry of the Church  
May God give you pardon and peace,  
and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father,  
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

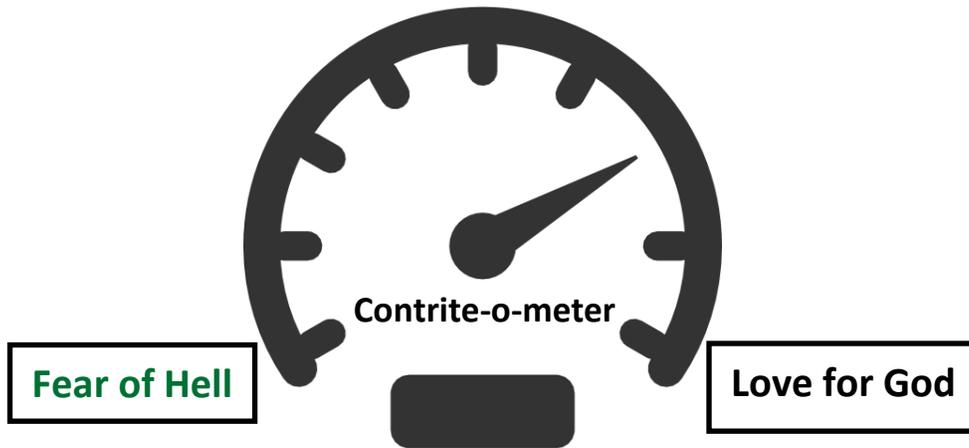
Read the word again. Underline the word(s) you find most powerful.

Write a response to God for his great mercy.

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# Sorrow of the Soul and Hatred for the Sin Committed – How Contrite am I?

“The Act of Contrition might sometimes feel like an ‘act’ when we say it, because our love is human and mixed with fear now and then.” *Cardinal Donald Wuerl*



Think about your most recent experience with the Sacrament of Penance, where are you on the contrite-o-meter?

Remember the story of the Prodigal Son, the Father shows his son mercy before the son can even speak his words asking for forgiveness.

None of us deserve God’s grace, and yet He gives us His grace. On the lines below, describe a time when you experienced God your Father’s grace in your life.

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The next time you celebrate the Sacrament of Confession recall this experience of grace and mercy. Pray that your Act of Contrition may be motivated by a greater love for God.

# Praying an Act of Contrition

The prodigal son offers us a model of prayer for an Act of Contrition in his simple prayer:  
"Father, I have sinned against you and am not worthy to be called your son." *Luke 15:18*

*I confess to almighty God, and to you,  
my brothers and sisters,  
that I have greatly sinned,  
in my thoughts and in my words,  
in what I have done  
and in what I have failed to do;  
through my fault, through my fault, through  
my most grievous fault; (strike breast)  
therefore I ask blessed Mary, ever Virgin,  
all the angels and saints,  
and you my brothers and sisters,  
to pray for me to the Lord our God.*

*O my God,  
I am heartily sorry for having offended you,  
and I detest all my sins,  
because of your just punishments;  
but most of all because they offend you,  
my God who are all good  
and deserving of all my love.  
I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace  
to confess my sins, to do penance,  
and to amend my life. Amen.*

Sometimes memorized prayers are not as prayerful as a spontaneous expression of our contrition and sorrow. Using the words of the Prodigal Son, the *Confiteor* and a traditional Act of Contrition we pray at Mass for guidance, reflect silently; then compose your own Act of Contrition.

At a minimum your prayer should include your sense of sorrow to God, a statement to that effect and show the intent to sin no more.

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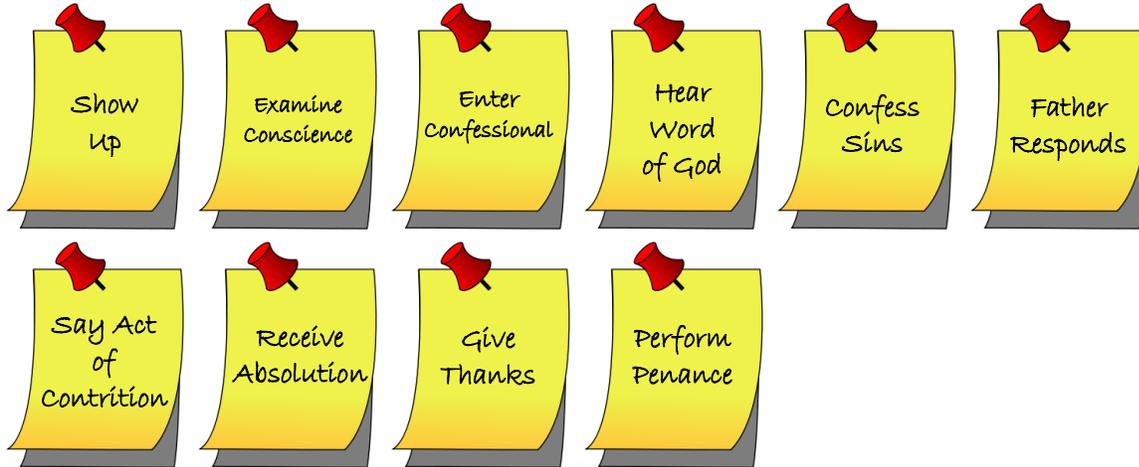
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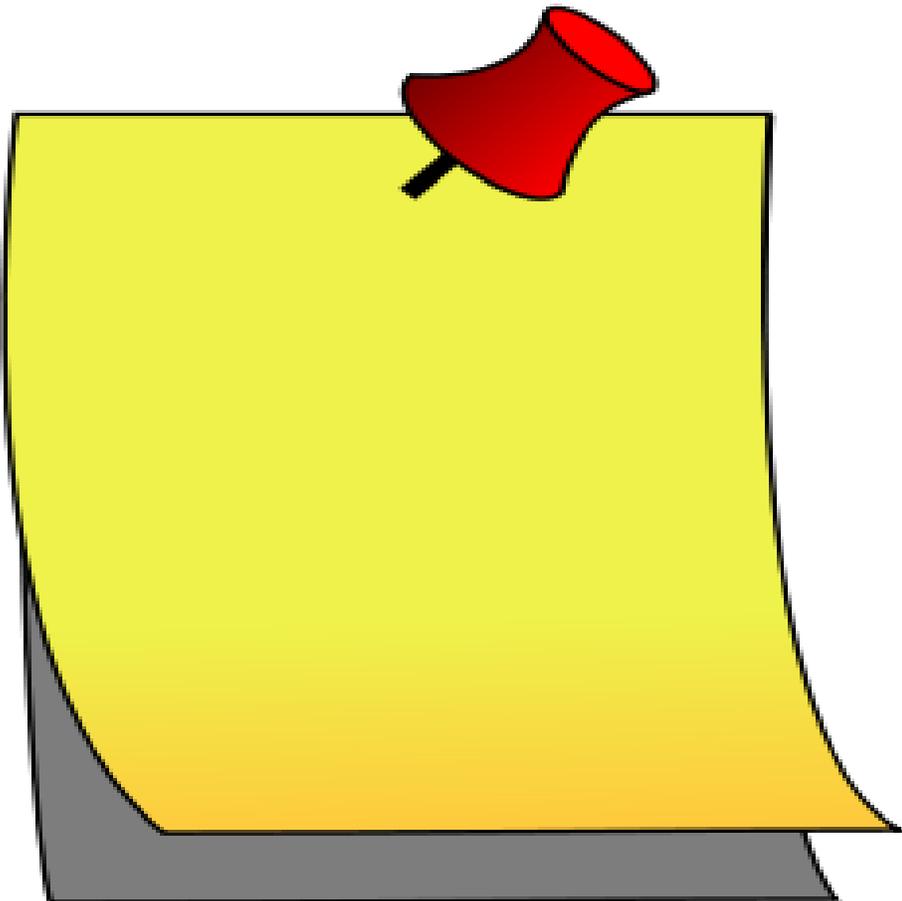
# What's Stopping You?

Do you have a reason, explanation or excuse for staying away?



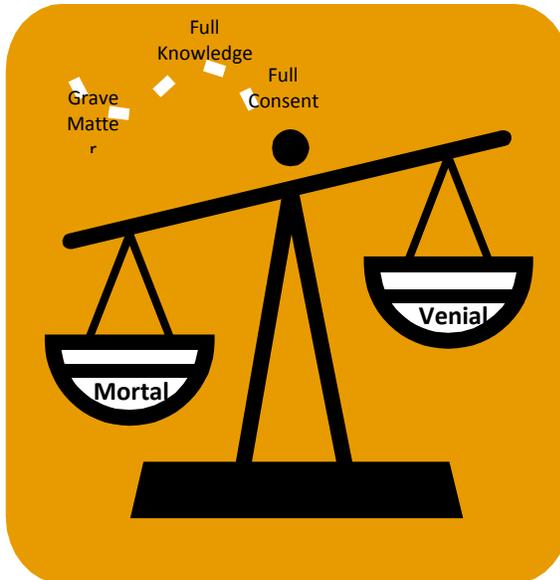
Which of these poses the greatest obstacle for you in celebrating the Sacrament of Penance?

Write a note to self that will help you overcome this obstacle.



## Examine your Conscience

Many recent popes observed that the greatest loss of our time is the loss of the sense of sin  
“Only God can accurately judge whether this sin – for you – is mortal or venial” (1862).



Rather than ask whether a sin is mortal or venial, it is important to ask yourself:

**To what degree does this action separate me from a right relationship with God?**

As you further examine your conscience, don't reflect exclusively on Thou Shalt Not, ask:

**What would God want me to do that I'm not doing?**

**In what way am I most *unlike* Jesus?**

# Made for Divine Communion

Read the following passage quietly to yourself

2 Peter 1: 1-4

Symeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of equal value to ours through the righteousness of our God and savior Jesus Christ: may grace and peace be yours in abundance through knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.

Write a brief response to the following questions:

1. Based on the passage, what does God want to “share” with us? What does this mean and why would God want to do that?

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2. What is the “corruption that is in the world” from which people need to escape? What things “corrupt” people your age?

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3. How would life look if verse 4 were a reality? What keeps you from making this a reality?

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