# Questions of justice and mercy: Elizabeth and Lachlan Macquarie

## Lesson overview

Governor Lachlan Macquarie is viewed by some historians as the father of some of modern Australia’s key values, especially that of ‘a fair go’. Aided by his devout evangelical wife Elizabeth, he applied Christian principles to his governorship, giving many convicts the chance to begin a new life with their past put firmly behind them. However, some of Macquarie’s actions towards Indigenous people (especially his role in the Appin Massacre of 1816 – see ‘Further reading’ below) make him a divisive figure today.

### Learning intentions

Students will learn about:

* How Elizabeth Macquarie’s Bible reading informed her partnership with her husband
* How Lachlan Macquarie offered emancipated convicts a second chance
* Lachlan Macquarie’s significant role in the Appin Massacre of Indigenous people.

### Success criteria

Students will be able to:

* Reflect on human imperfection and the need for God’s mercy
* Consider viewpoints surrounding the commemoration of imperfect Christian people
* Articulate how they believe Christians should respond to the wrongs of the past.

### Note to teacher

This lesson begins with a general discussion of ‘cancel culture’, then moves to the Macquarie's Christian values and the good deeds they did, before ending in more provocative territory with a discussion of the Appin Massacre and the defacement of public monuments. Consider your audience (and your own position on these matters) before deciding how far to explore these issues. The aim is to draw the discussion back to biblical truths about human imperfection, deserved judgement, and the need for grace found in Jesus.

### Bible content

Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 1:16; Philippians 3:10–14; Titus 2:11–14; Hebrews 4:15; James 3:2.

### Link to Australian Curriculum

General capabilities – Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding; Intercultural Understanding.

## Lesson plan

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| Preparing the lesson* View the video content and read the questions that accompany each segment.
* Read through the material provided and select the activities and Bible content you wish to use with your students.

**Note:** there are quite a few activities and Scripture passages provided for this lesson. You may wish to give greater focus to some activities and/or some Bible verses than others. You can omit or modify content as appropriate for your class and the time you have available.* Use the resources listed in ‘Further reading’ if you wish to explore the topic more fully for your own reference before teaching.
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### A. Opening discussion (3 mins)

Ask students what they know about ‘cancel culture’. Once you have established that they know what this term means, encourage them to say what sort of actions they think people are (or should be) ‘cancelled’ for engaging in. (If necessary, come up with some hypothetical examples to prompt discussion: e.g. if Taylor Swift made a really inappropriate remark about a person/group of people on social media, would you still want to go to her concert? How bad would her behaviour have to be before you would ‘cancel’ her?)

Tell students that they will be listening to some historians talk about Australia’s history and having to deal with the fact that some people’s good and bad actions divide opinion about how they should be remembered – i.e. should they be ‘cancelled’? They will see that historian John Harris has especially had to grapple with this as he’s written about one person in particular: Governor Lachlan Macquarie. Ask students to be ready to consider whether they agree with John Harris’s position on this controversial figure.

### B. Check knowledge of historical context (1 min)

1. Quickly check that students remember what they have learned in earlier years at school about the following terms:

* colonisation
* transportation
* penal colony
* governor
* convict emancipation/emancipists

2. (Especially if in Sydney/NSW) Challenge students to brainstorm things and places named after Lachlan Macquarie. Ask them to speculate about why so many things are named after him. (If not appropriate for your students, just tell them that many things are named after Macquarie.)

### C. Show video segment 1 (approx. 8 mins including questions)

While the video is playing/after it has finished, ask students to answer the following viewing and listening question:

Both of the historians in the video believe that the Christian faith of Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie had a significant impact on them and on the colony of New South Wales. What are three ways in which their faith shaped their thinking and their actions?

### D. What does the Bible say? (6 mins)

Because they knew their Bibles, Lachlan and Elizabeth Macquarie understood that people did not need to be perfect in order to be shown grace and given a chance at a fresh start and a ‘fair go’. Read the following verses together and ask students what points they are making.

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| **Bible verses about human imperfection and the need for God’s grace** |
| Indeed, there is no-one on earth who is righteous, no-one who does what is right and never sins. (Ecclesiastes 7:20) |
| I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:10–14) |
| We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. (James 3:2) |
| For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11–14) |

### E. Show video segment 2 (approx. 5 mins including questions)

While the video is playing/after it has finished, ask students to write answers to the following viewing and listening questions:

1. Why was Macquarie’s statue in Sydney’s Hyde Park defaced?

2. To what extent do you agree with people who say that Macquarie’s legacy should no longer be celebrated?

### F. Taking a position (10 mins)

Say to students: *The plaque on Macquarie’s statue in Sydney’s Hyde Park says: “He was a perfect gentleman, a Christian and supreme legislator of the human heart.” How do you react to this description?*

Set up four signs in the four corners of the classroom, which read:

* Leave the statue of Macquarie and the plaque exactly as they are.
* Remove the statue of Macquarie and the plaque altogether.
* Leave the statue but replace the plaque with one that simply lists Macquarie’s major achievements.
* Leave the statue but put a memorial beside it telling the facts of the Appin massacre.

Ask students to go and stand near the sign they most agree with. Give each group 1–2 minutes to discuss why they took their position, then ask some students from each group to articulate why they believe this is the right choice. (**Teacher note:** The goal is to hear a range of viewpoints, not to ‘win’ a debate. If one sign has no students near it, you may wish to represent this viewpoint.)

### G. Closing discussion (7 mins)

Say to students: *The Macquaries applied their Christian principles to many areas of their work and life, including some aspects of their relationship with Indigenous people. Our social value of everyone being given ‘a fair go’ can be seen to stem from this time. Macquarie did some things well; but he also did some things that our contemporary society rightly views as evil.*

Choose one or two of the following questions to discuss as a whole class:

* How should Christians respond to knowing these things happened? Should we ‘cancel’ people who did wrong or made mistakes? Should we cancel the Christian message that they believed in? (Should we cancel *Jesus* because *people* do wrong?)
* How does God want us to relate to the events and actions of the past? What biblical principles might we apply to this?
* What should our Christian response be to these events of the past, and to the ongoing problems that are a legacy of this time? How can Christians of today play a part in reconciliation around these issues?

Finish with this, or similar: *The reality is that we may feel ashamed and angry about the actions of some Christian people. But that doesn’t mean we should feel ashamed of Jesus because of the errors of his sinful followers. God doesn’t ‘cancel’ us! But he does see the truth about us – and that’s why we need Jesus.*

If appropriate, read out the following verses, or others of your choosing about justice and mercy:

Romans 1:16 – “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”

Hebrews 4:15 – “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.”

### H. Going deeper: optional extension ideas

Depending on available lesson time, students’ interests and school priorities, teachers may wish to build on this lesson plan and further explore:

* Christian figures from history who have been the subject of statue toppling, defacement and ‘cancel culture’ – and further debate on whether this is deserved
* A study of imperfect people in the Bible – e.g. Peter, Moses – and how God used them in spite of their wrongdoings
* What churches have done to contribute positively towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
* A deeper study of how God is both a God of judgement who will not tolerate sin and a God of love who wants all to come back into right relationship with him
* The role of Christian organisations in prison reform (historical) and/or prison ministries (contemporary).

### I. Further reading

* Background reading on the Appin Massacre: <https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/appin_massacre>
* Karl Faase with George Marriot, *Faith Runs Deep Anthology: Unearthing stories of faith in Australia*, Olive Tree Media, 2022
* Article about cancel culture: <https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/real-life/true-stories/i-just-cant-stand-him-celebs-gen-z-is-happy-to-cancel/news-story/2201835a627ae25ae21738de4465f996>
* *The Sydney Morning Herald* 9 June 2023 editorial apologising for its reporting of the Myall Creek Massacre in 1838: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-herald-has-a-proud-history-of-telling-australia-s-story-but-on-myall-creek-we-failed-dismally-20230529-p5dc9y.html>