

PRAYER

Intro

Prayer is the way a disciple enjoys being in an intimate relationship with God. Prayer can be public and private. It can be a conversation with God or a ritual. It can be silent, loud, spoken or sung or even an action like dance. Prayer can be simple or profound. No matter, prayer is powerful. Prayer involves listening: listening to God, listening to others, and listening for God's purpose for us.

Jesus modeled the importance of prayer. Throughout the Gospels, we read how Jesus prayed. Whatever the opportunity or challenge, Jesus turned to God first and sought guidance. As his disciples, we should too.

Small Group Activities and Discussion

Say: So we are going learn some different ways to pray.

Say: Okay, first an easy one! Say you're stuck in a situation, and you and your friends know you need to pray, but no one wants to offer a long prayer. This is a great way for friends who aren't used to praying to join in with you. Let's stand up for this:

One word prayers: All you do is say one word that represents a prayer request. It could be a person's name. It could be a situation. It could be your church. Just one word. Let's try it.

Say: God hears us and knows our hearts! Even if we just speak one word or think one word, God knows it all. God knows our prayer. That was easy huh?

Say: Let's try another. This one is called palms up-palms down. This one is done silently but I'm going to lead you through it the first time. Begin by placing your palms down as a symbolic indication of your desire to turn over any concerns you may have to God. Inwardly you may pray, "Lord, I give you my anger toward my sister." I release my fear about the upcoming test." Whatever it is that weighs on your mind or is a concern to you, just say silently with your palms down. [PAUSE: Give them one minute for this part of the prayer.]

Now release your concerns. Shake out your hands/fingers. Now turn your palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from the Lord. Perhaps you will pray silently, "Lord I would like to be more patient." Lord, I beg for the grace to be more peaceful when I get home." "Give me joy so that I can share it with others." Whatever you need, you say, with your palms up silently. (PAUSE: Give them a minute to pray.)

Now take your hands and wrap them around yourself. Spend a few seconds in God's embrace. Listen as God reminds you of how much you are loved. (PAUSE)

(You may have the group sit again if you choose.)

Ask: When do you pray most?

Ask: What do you think should be included in prayers?

Ask: What are things that distract you from praying?

Ask: What are other ways you've found to pray?

(Journaling. Write your praises or requests and draw images of your praises. Write names on a piece of paper and post it to the refrigerator so that every time you open the fridge door, you pray for that person or request. Pray every time you hear the siren of an ambulance. Create a poem, or write a story. Pray as you get in the car before you go somewhere. Prayer beads. Walk a Labyrinth.)

Can I have a volunteer to read Mark 1:35?

Ask: Why do you think it was important for Jesus to go away and pray?

Say: Praying for each other is important too. Have you noticed in many of the openings of Paul's letters in the New Testament, he mentions that he is praying for the church and its people? The apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:9: "It is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers."

In 1 Corinthians 4 he writes: "I give thanks to my God always for you."

And in Ephesians 1:16 he writes: "I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of Glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him."

Philippians 1:3, Paul writes: "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now."

Paul was a real pray-er!

Say: Turn to another person and discuss an experience you've had when praying.

(Give participants time to do this.)

Now share with each other something that you need prayers for.

(Give participants time to discuss.)

Finally, pray for each other remembering first to thank God for the other person.

[There may be some resistance to this activity, especially if your group hasn't established trust. Don't force anyone to do this activity, but encourage them to try it when they are with someone with whom they feel safe.]