

PRAYER: GETTING TO KNOW GOD

15+

BIBLE VERSES:

Matthew 6:5-13; Luke 1:46-49; Psalm 51:1-4; Philippians 1:3-6; 1 Kings 19:9-10; 1 Samuel 1:9-11; Luke 22:31-32; Acts 1:23-26; Daniel 9:1-3, 17-19; Nehemiah 2:1-5; Psalm 140:1-3; Psalm 13:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

To help young people understand that prayer is communication with God and a means of getting to know Him better.

To help young people think about how they can make prayer a part of their daily lives

LEADER'S NOTES

There are whole books written on prayer, and so there is only so much that you can communicate in one session on it! The aim of these activities is quite basic - to help young people understand that prayer is communication with God and a means to get to know him better. It also aims to help them think about how and when they can make prayer a part of their daily lives. But even if the young people in your group have been Christians for a while and have heard all about prayer before, it's good to revisit the basics again. I think there can be so many misunderstandings about prayer and so many myths to overcome that it's good to step back and remind yourself what it's all about.

At its most basic, prayer is communication with God. But it's not just about what we say to him that's important. Too often we focus on the end result of prayer - about whether we have got an answer or not, and then whether it's the answer we wanted. We need to remember that the process of praying is really important too, of being in God's presence, allowing him to love us, getting to know him better and allowing him to change us.

There are lots of examples in the Bible of people who prayed, but it's worth pointing out that Jesus prayed too. He needed to spend time with his father and several times in the gospels we read that he spent the night praying or went off to pray on his own (see Mark 1:35; Mark 6:45,46; Luke 6:12). And prayer was real for him, not just something he did to set a good example. Jesus wrestled in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane; he didn't want to die on the cross but submitted to God's will. He prayed for Simon to be able to resist temptation (Luke 22:32) and before he left his disciples he prayed a brilliant prayer for them, and us, to be united and to grow in faith. And he continues to pray for us (Romans 8:34)

It's interesting that the disciples went to Jesus and asked him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1-13). They saw him praying first and wanted to be like him. So, what is your prayer life like? Are you someone who is known for praying? Do you pray for your group by name? Do you set a regular time aside for prayer? That's not to say that you need to be a spiritual giant before you can do this subject with your group. If you struggle with prayer, then be honest and say so. A lot of youth work

is the process of leaders and young people learning together. But don't tell them to do anything that you are not prepared to do yourself.

Prayer engenders feelings of guilt in lots of us. We feel that we should be praying more or praying harder, or doing better so that our prayers get answered. Above all prayer is a relationship with God, like a father with a child; if we truly understand that then we'll learn to reject any false guilt that says we're not good enough to pray. But part of feeling guilty is because we don't all fit easily into the same patterns and 'flavours' of prayer.

If you think about the many different ways that we communicate with people because of our different personality types, it's no wonder that some of us struggle with the 'quiet time' that so many of us have been taught - setting aside a regular time to sit and pray. That suits lots of people, but other people need to be more active, or more verbal, or louder, or more spontaneous. There's no one right way to pray; what's important is that we are actually doing it!

DICTION CONSTERNATION

GAME |  WARMING UP

Get your group into pairs. Give one person in each pair some paper and a pen and get them to stand on the other side of the room, opposite their partner. Give the other person in each pair a newspaper article. The aim of the game is for the person with the article to dictate it to their partner across the room. But of course, with everyone shouting at once it's very difficult to hear what you need to write down! It doesn't matter if the articles are all very different as they will be judged on how many words they got correct.

Set a time limit and when that is up, get each pair to count the number of words they got correct. Award a prize to the best pair.

The Point: Mainly a fun activity but it could also be used to talk about how we communicate with God. Do we find it hard to hear what he's saying? Do we feel like we're shouting and there's no response?

EQUIPMENT

Newspaper articles, one for each pair in your group, paper and pens, prize.

DURATION: 10 MINS.

MR AND MRS

GAME |  WARMING UP

This works well if you have some good friends in the group - people who know each other really well. Ask for volunteers to play this game in pairs. They should team up with someone who knows them really well.

Ask for one person, contestant one, in the first pair to go outside the room. You may want to send an assistant leader out to check they don't try and eavesdrop. Then ask their partner, contestant two, three questions about contestant one. The questions need to uncover how well they know him or her. So for example you could ask:

- What does your friend want for Christmas/next birthday?
- If your friend's bedroom was on fire and they could only rescue one thing what would it be?
- What was the first CD they ever bought?
- Which film have they seen the most times?
- Who was their first crush on?

...and so on. Write down the answers that they give. Then bring back contestant one and send out contestant two. First ask contestant one the same questions that you asked contestant two about them, making a note of the answers - don't reveal whether the answers were the same or not at this point. You need your audience to help by not whispering or dropping hints! Then ask contestant one three different questions about contestant two and note down the answers.

Then bring back contestant two. Ask them the second set of questions that you have just asked contestant one and see how they answer. Contestant one can stay in the room this time, so you could get them to reveal how they answered. Then go back over the first three questions that you asked contestant two and reveal whether their answers were the same or not.

Award points according to how many questions this pair got correct. Put another two or three pairs through this same process and award a prize to the pair who knew each other best.

The Point: Mainly a fun activity but you could also talk about how prayer helps us to get to know God better.

EQUIPMENT

List of questions (see below), paper and pens, prize.

DURATION: 15 MINS.

FIND SOMEONE WHO...

GAME |  WARMING UP

This is a simple game that helps everyone talk to everyone else. Everyone has a copy of the sheet and a pen. They have to find someone in the room that fits each category and write their name in the same square. The first person to complete the sheet is the winner. If you have a large group, tell them that they can only use each person's name once - no standing by your best friend and asking them all the questions! If your group is smaller, use other restrictions, such as only using each name twice and/or not asking the same person two questions in a row.

You could create your own sheet with more relevant categories to your group. Hand out copies of the sheet to each person and make sure they each have a pen. Then stand back and let them get on with it!

The Point: A fun activity which helps groups to get to know each other better.

EQUIPMENT

Copies of the 'Find someone who..' sheet, pens.

DURATION: 10 MINS.

FIND SOMEONE WHO... WORKSHEET

GAME |  GETTING STARTED

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FRIENDSHIP RESEARCH

DISCUSSION |  GETTING STARTED

Ask everyone to think about their best friend for a moment. When did they meet that person? How did they first get to know them? What has helped their friendship grow? Were there any significant events or conversations that made the friendship deeper?

Explain that you want everyone to do some research into how friendships develop. You'll get them to talk to two other people, reflect on their own experience and come up with their three top tips for things that make friendships grow. Then pair people up and get them talking. After three or four minutes (or more if people still have plenty to talk about), get them to find another partner and discuss the same thing. When these conversations are finished, get them to reflect for a couple of minutes on their own and write their three top tips for things that make friendships grow.

Call the group back together and get them to share their tips, writing them on the flipchart. Which are the most popular overall? Expect things like - spending time together, having interests in common, having a similar sense of humour and going through difficult times.

Then get people to think about how do we deepen our friendship with God? Go through the list on the flip chart - are any of these things relevant to our relationship with God? If so how do we do them? In most of the cases, the answer will involve prayer of some sort.

Introduce prayer as the theme of the session. We often focus on the results of prayer - whether God answers our prayer or not. We also need to realise what's happening to us as we pray. Prayer is about getting to know God better and allowing our relationship with him to change us.

The Point: This activity will help young people realise that prayer is one of the key ways in which we get to know God better.

EQUIPMENT

Pens and paper, flipchart and pens.

DURATION: 20 MINS.

BART GETS AN F

VISUAL AND AUDIO CLIPS | GETTING STARTED

This clip comes in the fourth episode of the video/DVD, "Bart gets an F". In this episode, Bart keeps failing his history exam. Mrs Crabapple tells him that if he fails again he will be kept down and will have to repeat fourth grade. Bart tries everything - he fakes an illness, copies Millhouse's answers and even befriends Martin, the school swot to try and find out how to study.

The clip starts just after Martin runs off to the arcade with some of Bart's friends. At the start, Bart is studying and Marge comes to tell him it is time for bed. The clip ends right at the end of the episode when Bart says, 'Part of this D minus belongs to God.' Timings are from the title screen of the first episode.

Clip start time: 1:23:17

Clip end time: 1:29:46

Length of clip: about six and a half minutes

Show the clip and use it as a discussion starter about prayer:

- How closely does the clip show what prayer is really like?
- Bart says to God that he knows he hasn't been very good lately. Do we have to be good in order for God to hear our prayers and answer?
- Bart becomes part of the answer to his prayer by studying hard. How much do we need to be the answers to our own prayers?
- At the end Bart says, 'Part of this D minus belongs to God'. Do you agree, or was it all Bart's work?
- How often do you pray? What answers to prayer have you seen?
- What questions do you have about prayer? What parts of it do you not understand?

The Point: to introduce the theme of prayer and get people talking about it.

EQUIPMENT

A video/DVD of The Simpson's Greatest Hits and the means to show it.

DURATION: 15 MINS.

GET THE MESSAGE

DRAMA | GETTING STARTED

Divide the young people into small groups of two or three young people. Tell them that you want them to talk together and come up with ways to communicate without using words. You'll give them

three scenarios and for each they need to think about how they would get the message across by hinting, drawing, writing, doing something, miming, using actions - anything but speaking.

They should be ready to act them out or show them somehow to the rest of the group. Here are the scenarios:

- Communicate 'I'd like to get to know you better' to someone that you fancy
- Communicate 'I'm sorry I've been grumpy lately' to your Mum or Dad
- Communicate 'I wish you'd help me with my homework' to an older brother or sister.'

After five to ten minutes, get the small groups to show how they would communicate those things and discuss the different methods. Which was the most effective? Which was the most bizarre? Were any of them better than speaking? In which of these scenarios would you be better off using words? Affirm their creativity - we are all very creative communicators when we want to be.

Then ask them how they communicate with God. How do they tell God what they are thinking/feeling/need? Are they able to use that same creativity? Why or why not? Broaden the discussion about prayer - how do they feel about it? When do they do it? How did they learn to pray? What questions do they have about prayer? What would help them to communicate more effectively with God?

The Point: To get your young people thinking about how we communicate with each other and to introduce the theme of prayer

EQUIPMENT

None.

DURATION: 15 MINS.

CHARMED, I'M SURE

DRAMA | GETTING STARTED

You need a number of volunteers from your group, one each to play the following roles, and one to 'meet' them:

- the Queen
- the person's mother
- the Prime Minister
- a famous singer
- a Big Issue seller
- a teacher
- a policeman
- Jesus

Line up the characters at the front and bring up your last volunteer. They have to work along the row having a 30 second conversation with each character as if they really were the person they're pretending to be. Time them strictly and tell them to move on when the 30 seconds is up.

Introduce the theme for the session along the following lines:

"We may not all get to speak to the Queen, but we all meet all kinds of people every day, and depending on who they are we act differently with them and say different things.

It might be hard to imagine meeting God and having a conversation with him, but when we pray that's exactly what we get to do. Even though he is the Almighty God who made everything, he wants to spend time with us like that, because he is also our Father who loves us."

The Point: To introduce the idea of prayer as a particular and special thing: when we pray, we approach the Almighty God as our Lord, our Saviour, our Friend, our Father.

EQUIPMENT

Stop-watch.

DURATION: 10 MINS.

PRAYERS - A DRAMA

DRAMA |  BELIEVER |  GETTING STARTED

EQUIPMENT

Copies of the script

DURATION: 10 MINS.

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WHAT IS PRAYER LIKE?

BIBLE STUDY |  DIGGING IN

Write the following communication activities on a flip chart. Go through them one by one and ask people whether they think prayer is like that activity or not. This is a good way of exploring people's attitudes and thoughts about prayer. So for example, prayer is a bit like chatting to a friend on the phone because you are talking to someone you can't see; but you don't hear God like you would hear your friend - it's not an interactive conversation in that sense.

- ordering a pizza
- sending an email
- chatting to a friend on the phone
- dialling 999
- acting in a play
- writing a shopping list

- reciting a poem
- sending a birthday card
- writing a thank you letter
- giving someone a hug
- making a complaint

Can they think of any other models of communication that show what prayer is like or what it is not like? What do they understand prayer to be? Which metaphor works best for them?

Ask people to turn to Matthew 6:5-13 and get someone to read it out.

Discuss:

- What does this passage tell us prayer should be like? Make a list of the different things.
- These verses say that you should pray in secret - does that mean that it's wrong to pray in a group? What point do you think Jesus was trying to make?
- What issues are covered in the Lord's Prayer? (praise, request, forgiveness, protection)
- Do they ever pray the Lord's Prayer on their own? When do they pray? Who sets aside time for prayer in the day? Who prays as they go through the day?

Try to encourage the group to talk about their own practice of prayer without making it competitive. Stress that different patterns will suit different people, but point out that Jesus said 'When you pray...' not 'If you pray...' - it's something He expects us to do! Show them how the Lord's Prayer can be a useful model to help them pray if they pause after each phrase and add prayers of their own on that theme.

The Point: To discuss further what prayer is and to study some of Jesus' teaching on prayer.

EQUIPMENT

Bibles, flip chart and pens.

DURATION: 15 MINS.

WHO DO YOU PRAY TO?

BIBLE STUDY |  DIGGING IN

Start with a quick game. Ask them to say who in the group they would go to first if they wanted to:

- borrow something to wear
- have a good laugh
- get some help with Maths homework
- talk about something that was worrying you
- learn how to skateboard
- borrow a good video to watch
- get invited round for tea

You could get them to think about the key characteristics of other people in the group that haven't

been mentioned yet. Explain that when we know someone really well, we know whether they can help us with different things that are bothering us and we would choose who to go to accordingly.

So how well do they know God, who they pray to? Hand out Bibles and ask them to turn to Matthew 6:25-27 and 7:7-12; ask someone to read it. Discuss:

- What do these passages tell you about what God is like?
- Does verse 7 mean we will always get exactly what we pray for? (If we pray according to God's will, then yes! But this verse is more about God's attitude to our prayers - he wants to answer them, to respond to his children. We will get an answer it just may not be the answer we expect!)

(Be sensitive to members of your group here as some of them might have fathers who would give them the equivalent of a stone instead of bread.)

Brainstorm other characteristics of God, writing them up on a flipchart. Write God is... at the top and then get everyone to call out attributes such as loving, forgiving, just, a friend and so on.

Invite everyone to look at the list and think about those words for a moment. It's really good to remind yourself before you pray, just who you are praying to. God loves us more than the best mother or father loves their child. He is on our side, wanting us to grow and develop as his children. We can pray with confidence, knowing that he will hear us and respond.

If your group are used to praying aloud, invite everyone to take one of the characteristics on the board and to pray, thanking God that he is like that. Otherwise, lead the group in prayer.

The Point: To help young people think about who they are praying to.

EQUIPMENT

Bibles

DURATION: 20 MINS.

SAY WHAT YOU MEAN

BIBLE STUDY |  DIGGING IN

At the start of this activity, you will ask young people to look up Bible verses which show the different kinds of things that people prayed in the Bible. You need to put these references into pieces of card - don't put the word in brackets on the card. That's just there to show you the theme of each passage.

- Luke 1:46-49 (praise)
- Psalm 51:1-4 (sorry)
- Philippians 1:3-6 (thanks)
- 1 Kings 19:9-10 (whinging)
- 1 Samuel 1:9-11 (asking for a child)
- Luke 22:31-32 (protection)

Acts 1:23-26 (guidance)

Daniel 9:1-3, 17-19 (prayer for the city of Jerusalem)

Nehemiah 2:1-5 (prayer for help/support)

Psalm 140:1-3 (rescue)

Psalm 13:1-4 (depression/despair)

Split the group into twos and threes and give each group one or two of the Bible references to look up. Get them to read around the passage that they have been given to find out the context of the passage; if they don't know the story be ready to explain what is happening. For each passage get them to answer these questions:

- Who was praying?
- Who did they pray for?
- Why did they pray?
- What was their prayer about?

They may not be able to answer all the questions for each passage. After they have had time to look up their passages, get them to report back to the others in the group, giving them information about the passage and the answers to the questions. Can anyone think of other examples of different things people prayed for in the Bible? Discuss:

- Were they surprised at any of the things that people said to God?
- Do the things they talk to God about most fit into any of those categories?
- Is there anything that should be off-limits in our prayers to God - anything that we can't mention?

Draw out the fact that we can be completely honest with God in prayer. We can tell him how we feel, what we are concerned about and what we are struggling with. We don't have to dress up our prayers with religious language; we don't have to worry about offending God. He can cope with our most honest and real thoughts and feelings.

Give everyone a piece of writing paper, a pen and an envelope. Give them some space and time to write an honest letter to God, telling him how they feel. These letters will be completely confidential to them. When they have finished they can seal the letter in an envelope and take it home.

Close this activity with a prayer, thanking God that he has heard their prayers.

The Point: To help young people understand that they can be real with God in prayer.

EQUIPMENT

Bible references on card - see below, Bibles

DURATION: 20 MINS.

CREATIVE PRAYER

PRAYER | RESPONSE

This may take a bit of time to set up but is designed to allow young people to experience different ways of praying. You need to create four stations - four areas of the room that young people can visit in turn in order to pray. These are as follows:

Area one On a large sheet of card, write the words 'God is...' in the centre. Cut out headlines from newspapers and magazines, and supply scissors and glue sticks. At this station, young people will think of an aspect of God's character that they want to praise him for - for example, loving, forgiving, just. As they pray, they should cut out letters from the headlines to create that word and stick it onto the sheet.

Area two You need three or four small blackboards - borrow them from families with small children in the church - plus some chalks and a damp cloth or two. At this station, young people will sit and think about things that they need to confess to God, writing them in chalks on the boards as they pray. Then once they have prayed, they should wipe the slate clean with the cloth as a way of receiving God's forgiveness.

Area three At this station, young people will write the things that they want to thank God for on strips of paper, and then make them into paper chains. Write Thank you! in big letters on a large sheet of card. Attach two or three loops of paper to the bottom of the card, and then stick it on the wall. Young people will attach their loops of thanks to the loops at the bottom of the card using a stapler, creating a chain of thanks.

Area four On the third sheet of card, write Dear God... in large letters. Put the circles of coloured tissue paper nearby with pens and glue sticks. At this station, young people will think of something they want to ask God for and spend some time praying about it. They will then write a word or draw a symbol to represent that thing on a circle of tissue paper and stick it to the sheet.

You could write out some instructions telling people what to do at each station, or else spend time at the start of the session explaining what they need to do. Once you have set up the stations, think about how else you can create an environment conducive to prayer. You might want to have some worship music playing in the background.

Having explained to the group what they need to do let them get on with it! Let them know how much time they have got for prayer and encourage them to linger at each station. They can visit the stations in any order and can revisit them a number of times if they want to. Towards the end let them know when there are just a couple of minutes left.

Talk about the experience afterwards, although don't feel you have to analyse it too much. Explain that they have followed a classic pattern of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication (asking) They have prayed for 30 minutes (or however long it took) - did it feel like it? Encourage them to think about ways in which they could pray more creatively on their own.

The Point: To enable young people to experience different ways of praying.

EQUIPMENT

3 large sheets of card, newspaper and magazine headlines, scissors, glue sticks, three or four small blackboards, chalks, 2 damp cloths, marker pen, pens, strips of paper to make paper chains, staplers, circles of coloured tissue paper.

DURATION: 30 MINS.

PRAYER TAKEAWAY

DISCUSSION |  RESPONSE

This activity gets young people thinking about when they could make space for prayer during the week. It's really important that it's done in such a way so that young people don't feel guilty.

It's not a competition to fill up the sheet with as much prayer activity as possible. Stress during the activity that everyone's sheets will look different and that they need to decide what they want to do for themselves and what is achievable.

Someone who decides to spend ten minutes with God on Wednesday and does it is getting more prayer done than someone who fills up their sheet with impressive promises but doesn't actually do any of them.

And of course, individuals may decide that they don't want to fill in a sheet - that's fine, there's no point pressurising them to.

Introduce this activity by saying that we've done a lot of talking about prayer, but we also need to think about when we are actually going to do any praying and what we could pray about. Hand out copies of the sheet, stressing the points above. They should start by thinking of one thing to pray for in each of the categories at the top and write it in. They should then think about where they could make space for prayer during the week. Explain that the 'during the day' row in the bottom table, is for them to think if there is something happening during that day, or something they could do, to jog their memory to try and pray.

Give everyone five minutes on their own to think about when they could pray during the week. No one else needs to see their sheet - this is just between them and God. Remind them to make it achievable, but encourage them to try new things with God. Make sure you fill in a sheet too!

When everyone has finished, pray, committing these plans to God and asking him to meet with them during the week.

The Point: To get young people to think ahead about when they will pray during the week.

EQUIPMENT

Copies of the Prayer takeaway sheet, pens

DURATION: 10 MINS.

PRAYER TAKEAWAY WORKSHEET

DISCUSSION

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IN IT TOGETHER

PRAYER |  RESPONSE

Prayer is a great opportunity to get closer to God, but praying together as a group can also bring us closer as people in a community.

Take some time to pray together as a group, in a small way without any pressure. Ways you could do this are:

- In a big group, have a quiet time and encourage individuals to pray into themselves, or out loud. You could encourage short, one-sentence prayers.
- Split off into twos or threes to do something similar.

If it's appropriate for your group, and they are willing/ready to commit to praying together, you could set up 'prayer triplets'. This could be done by the young people themselves, or randomly by drawing names from a hat. Either way, this will work best if you can include a regular time in your programme (say 10 minutes before you start) for them to pray together.

Close the session with a brief prayer.

The Point: To encourage the young people to pray together, and to commit to do so regularly.

EQUIPMENT

Slips of paper, pens, hat or similar receptacle.

DURATION: 10 MINS.

PRAY CONTINUALLY

MEMORY VERSE |  RESPONSE

The memory verse this week is 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:

"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Invite people to do something different tomorrow that will remind them to pray during the day. They could wear their watch on the other arm to usual; they could paint a fingernail a bright colour; they could put a pebble in their pocket and so on. Every time they notice the thing that is different they could say the verse to themselves and spend a few moments praying.

The Point: To encourage your young people to learn the Bible.

EQUIPMENT

Bibles.

DURATION: 5 MINS.

PRAYER REQUESTS - A SKETCH ABOUT 'PRAYER'

SKETCH

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