

Lesson 1: It's Personal

What we want students to learn: That your students would understand that prayer is an essential component of a personal relationship with God.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To examine their own prayer lives and evaluate when and why they approach God in prayer.

Scripture Focus: Psalm 102:1-2; Psalm 61:1-3; Psalm 55:22; Psalm 117; and Psalm 37:4

Overview:

Whether we're introverts or extroverts, we all desire to be loved and cared for. Part of being made in God's image means that we have been created with a relational capacity. God desires to have a relationship with us. Like all relationships, a necessary part of a growing relationship with God is communication. From school to friends to sports and everything in between, there's so much going on in our students' lives that their communication with God often gets pushed aside. But, God's desire isn't just to be called upon when your teenagers' are in a bind and need something. He wants them to consistently walk with Him, communicating with Him along their journey. The idea is to help students understand that prayer is talking to and listening to God as they grow in their relationship with him.

In Lesson 1 we'll look at the Old Testament and see how God's desire was (and is) for His people to draw near to Him in prayer. In Lesson 2 we'll learn about how students can approach God confidently because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Finally, in Lesson 3 we'll look at the model Jesus gives us to follow in our prayer lives.

Teacher Prep Video

The *elements Teacher Prep Videos* are short videos designed to help you grasp the main points of the lessons as you prepare to teach.

To access your "Prayer Teacher Prep Video," click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/prayer-teacher-prep>
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Bible Background

The **Bible Background** is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. *The Details* gives you background info for each book, while *The Main Point* gives you an overview of how the passages are used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every **ym360** Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know *who* wrote the book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **What's The Big Deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

The Details

Psalms

- **Author:** God inspired various authors to write a majority of the Psalms in their era, including seventy-three by David, twelve by Asaph, eleven by the Korahites and two by Solomon. Heman, Ethan and Moses each wrote one, while the authorship of fifty other Psalms remain unknown.
- **Time frame:** The Psalms were written during different eras of Israel's history, spanning from 1100 BC (i.e Psalm 29, 68) to 400 BC (i.e. Psalm 119).
- **Purpose:** The Psalms are inspired by God to poetically reflect humanity's journey with Him. Each psalm serves a different purpose, such as a personal or communal lament, hymn, song, reflection or declaration. Many of these were set to music and intended to be shared publicly, even when sharing a revealing confession (i.e. Psalm 51).

The Main Point

Prayer is the number one way in which we communicate with God. Communication is how we build relationship. And while many students may be able to articulate this fact, it is the type of relationship that we are nurturing that we will be exploring in this week's lesson. This week we will examine how we communicate with God and what that says about our relationship and encourage students to move toward a deepening friendship where their lives begin to reflect God's more and more.

Lesson Plan

The **Lesson Plan** contains three elements: An introductory activity called *The Lead In*; the Bible study section called *The Main Event*; an application-focused segment called *The Last Word*.

The Lead In

- **Goal:** The idea is for students to reflect on the natural communication patterns in their life and examine when and why they pray.
- **Set-Up:** You will need a white board and pens to facilitate conversation.

FIRST, explain to students that they are about to jump into a three-week discussion on prayer. Ask your students, "When you boil it all down, what really is prayer?" Your students will most likely say that prayer is how we talk to God. Even if it takes a little coaxing, this is where we want to land; prayer is how we talk to God.

THEN, bring home the point that really, these three weeks we are going to explore how to talk with God in a way that actually builds our faith and friendship with God and even transforms our lives. (Pretty cool in just three weeks!)

NEXT, tell your students that you're going to examine when and why we pray by looking a number of the Psalms. Say:

- **Psalms is a book in the Bible that's kind of like a prayer journal of people who have come before us. They are prayers that are written down documenting various people's different interactions with God. Some of these interactions could even be called friendship with God. But before we dig in to the Bible study part of the lesson, let's look at how you document your friendship with other people.**

THEN, ask students to consider how they document their friendship with people. Explain to the students that you want them to take out their phones for this part of the discussion. Ask them to go to their text message app and first, ask them to text something nice to a friend, or text bomb someone who isn't there. Then, tell them that you will ask them a series of questions and they will need to look through their texts to find the answers:

- **How many different people did you text so far today?**
- **How many texts do you send and receive in a month?**
- **For what purpose do you text people?**
- **How would you categorize your texts?**

NEXT, on a white board write down a list of categories of how your students use texting to communicate. Through discussion, brainstorming, or you simply teaching, you will want to get your students to land on 4 different categories for texts, similar to the following:

1. Friendship
2. Duty
3. Ignoring
4. Transactional

(Most students' categories will fit nicely under Friendship. But we also want to highlight that some texts, usually from their parents, include **Duty**, **Ignoring**, and **Transactional**. **Duty** is when you are asked to be home at a certain time, pick something up at the grocery store, etc. **Ignoring** is what your students do when you text them and they pretend they didn't get it, or when they are invited to something that they don't want to do. Instead of responding, they pretend they never got it. 😊 And **transactional** is simply trading favors. This happens with friends and parents.)

FINALLY, explain to students that these four categories are also how we communicate with God. Ask the students how these four categories look like in their prayer life: (Answers will vary for each. Don't correct their answers much here. Just let them talk.)

- **How are your prayers transactional?**
- **How are your prayers Duty?**
- **When do you ignore God? Why?**
- **When are your prayers like that of a friend?**

Transition into your time of Bible study by saying something like this:

- **We communicate by asking God for favors or helping us out of a jam. We also communicate by asking God for the strength or blessing to do the things that we think He is asking us to do. We also are pretty good at simply ignoring God in our communication, like a text from an annoying friend that we don't want to deal with. But God's heart is that our communication with Him develops into something much deeper. With that in mind, let's jump into the Psalms, the Bible's prayer journal, to see what we can glean by looking at how and why people before us have prayed.**

The Main Event

- **Goal:** The idea is for students to understand that prayer is an essential component of a personal relationship with God.
- **Set Up:** You will need a dry-erase board to highlight the 3 main points of the lesson.

FIRST, ask your students a question to get them thinking about their prayer-lives. Ask:

- **If someone hasn't prayed in a long time, what would be the reason to start now?**

- Answers will vary. They may answer that someone may have a need for help of some sort, or any variety of answers. Encourage them to respond, though don't redirect their answers. Just let them speak pretty freely.

Then explain that there are a lot of reasons for praying to God. One of the main ones is that we often cry out to God when we're needy. Tell your students that many prayers in the book of Psalms are simply that, prayers for help.

THEN, have your students open up their Bibles and turn to the book of Psalms, and let them know that we are going to spend the rest of the lesson thumbing around this book. While students are turning to Psalm 102:1-2, give them a little context for the Book of Psalms using the Bible Background. When students have found Psalm 102, call on a student to read verses 1-2. Then have another student read Psalm 61:1-3. When they've finished reading these verses, lead them in a brief discussion. Ask:

- **What do you think is the purpose of these prayers? What is the thing that the author needs from God?**
 - *Answer:* HELP!
- **Is there a time you'd talk about that you asked God for help? If so, what were you feeling when you called out to God?**
 - Answers will vary, but you'll need to be ready to share a time when you asked God for help.

Explain that at times, our cries for help can seem self-centered, the simple act of asking God for help shows we have some sort of trust or faith in Him. Go to the white board and write your first point, "In prayer we acknowledge our position before God." Say something like:

- **In the simple prayer of asking for help we articulate a need and recognize that God is someone who might be able to meet that need. We recognize God as the source of our peace and comfort. This speaks volumes of our relationship with Him.**

NEXT, ask students what sort of image comes to mind when they think of a person or being that you ask something of and they dispense with granting your request. Tell them that you'll give them a hint: this person usually lives in a magic lamp and gives you three wishes. (*A genie*) Explain to students that many of us treat God simply as a genie, a "goodie" dispensing being who is there at our whim, but otherwise stays out of sight. Say something like:

- **The problem with this is that God is not a genie. God is not some powerful servant who exists to wait on our every need. God is our Master. He's the Creator. We're alive only because He wants us to be. And amazingly enough, He longs to be in relationship with us. We need to move past our understanding of God in this light. But the problem is that God isn't exactly someone we can just walk up to and ask a favor. So, how are we to get to know God? How do we know how exactly He wants to be approached? The good thing is that we have the answers in the Bible. We can know God through His Word.**

Have your students turn to Psalm 117. Read or have a student read the entire psalm. Explain that this psalm is clear and straightforward. Ask:

- **What is the psalmist praising God for?**
 - *Answer:* Not for something He's done, but for His character.
- **What are the two characteristics that are praised?**
 - *Answer:* His great love and His faithfulness

THEN, write on the whiteboard the second point: "**In Scripture we see that God loves us with an unfailing love!**" Ask the students to brainstorm as many Bible verses as they can come up with that says something

about how God loves them, even if they don't know the exact Scripture references. If they're having trouble coming up with verses, allow them to search for them on their Bible apps, or Google them on their phones or tablets.

Tie this activity together with the Scripture you just read by saying something similar to the following:

- **We can acknowledge that we need God, and through Scripture discover that God actually loves us. We've examined these two points so far. The next step is moving forward from a prayer-life that's purely "need-driven," or motivated by duty, to one that is truly relational.**

NEXT, go to the write board and write down the third point, **"In prayer we connect with God on a relational level."** Ask students to find Psalm 55:22 in their Bibles and have someone read the verse. Then lead students in a short discussion. Ask:

- **What does this verse mean to you?**
 - *Answers will vary.*
- **How can we cast our cares and concerns on God but still do so in a way that is relational (as opposed to treating God like a genie)?**
 - Answers will vary, but lead students to see that it is all about their motivation and what lies in their hearts. If they see God as their Savior whom they love and are devoted to, then casting their cares on Him will be in the context of a relationship. It's all about their attitude.
- **When you share something difficult with a friend, what does that do for your friendship?**
 - Answers will vary, but generally, this type of intimacy brings friends closer together. The same is true with God.
- **If casting cares implies that God helps carry the burden, how does having God carry your burdens, cares, fears, anxieties, sustain you?**
 - Answers will vary, but it is a matter of realizing this is the only way it was ever intended to work. We cannot carry our own burdens like God can carry them. When we give our cares over to God through prayer, He and He alone can take away the pain and uncertainty. He alone can sustain us.

FINALLY, explain that the goal is to realize that God is not only someone we can turn to for help, but that God actually wants to carry our burdens for us. Explain that when we realize this, only then can we begin leaning into the reality that God wants genuine friendship with us.

The Last Word

- **Goal:** To help students examine their own prayer lives and evaluate when and why they approach God in prayer.
- **Set Up:** Index cards and pens.

FIRST, lead your students in a short discussion. Ask:

- **Think about their different group of friends they have had over the years. Can you identify the things that united each group of friends?**
 - Answers will vary, but examples might be cheerleading, gymnastics, football, skating, video games, etc.
- **How did these activities contribute to each of you becoming more and more like one another?**
 - *Answers will vary.*

Make the following parallel: Just like we become more like our friends, and they like us, when we all share common experiences with one another, the same is true with us and God. Say:

- **You see, just like we learn more about certain sports or TV shows, or take on certain mannerisms and have inside jokes with our friends, we can have the same thing happen in our friendship with God. We come to know God in a much more personal way when we actually devote ourselves to our relationship with Him. And prayer is the language of this relationship.**

Tell students you're going to try an experiment with them to see if friendship with God might actually impact them as people, like their real life friendships do.

NEXT, distribute an index card and a pen to every student and have them write down Psalm 37:4 on that card with the date. On the back of the card have them draw a line down the center. Instruct students to think about their prayer lives. Ask them to think about how well you are satisfied with it. Ask if it's where they want it to be? Or if they know it needs help. On the left hand side of the back of their card, instruct them to write down the main challenge or obstacle that keeps them from having the prayer relationship with God they want to have. When they've had time to come up with this, ask if anyone wants to share.

THEN, instruct students to think of how this one particular obstacle might be overcome. Ask them to consider what they might do to break through this obstacle or challenge to improve their prayer life. Have them write this on the right side of the back of their card. Again, if anyone would like to share, allow them to do so.

When you've finished, remind students of the three points of the lesson that you've written on the board:

- **In prayer we acknowledge our position before God**
- **In scripture we see that God loves us with an unfailing love.**
- **In prayer we connect with God on a relational level.**

CLOSE the lesson by challenging them to hold on to these cards and to do the work required to overcome the obstacle they wrote down. Make sure you remind them that God longs to be in relationship with them. The question is, what kind of relationship are we going to have with God?

- Don't forget to distribute the "Prayer Lesson 1" devotions to your students. If you're printing them, have them available for students as you wrap up class. If you're texting a link, posting them on Facebook, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.
- Consider texting students a couple of times during the week to encourage them to follow through with reading the devotions.

We Want To Hear From You . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.

