

Adult Lesson for Week of Prayer 2010

Tell It All to God

STUDY TEXT:

Psalm 34:18; 139:7-14; Matthew 6:9-13; 21:22; Luke 6:27-31; Ephesians 3:20,21; Philippians 4:6,14-19; James 1:5; 5:14-16; 1 John 5:14

OBJECTIVE:

God wants us to take every problem and crisis to Him in prayer—even when emotions like guilt, fear, and doubt leave us wondering if God really wants to listen to our prayers.

KEY VERSE: Philippians 4:6

In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God (KJV).

In everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God (NIV).

Introduction

The story is told of a man stumbling through the desert, dying of thirst. Literally hours from death, he came across a deserted town with an ancient, rusty pump in the middle of the square. Overjoyed, he grabbed the handle and began pumping the well. His enthusiasm died when he realized nothing was coming out. But then he saw a note carved into an old plank nearby. It read simply, "Under this board is a jug of water. To get water from the pump, prime it by pouring all the water into the pump shaft. Make sure you refill the jug for the next person."

The man lifted the plank, grabbed the jug, and sure enough, it was almost full of water. But now he had a dilemma. If he drank the water, he might live long enough to get back to the main road. But if he poured the water down the pump, he could end up with more water than he'd ever need. Or maybe the message was wrong and he'd have nothing at all.

Reluctantly, he poured the water down the pump and began working the handle. One minute... two minutes...nothing. What had he done? But then a little stream began to flow. Before long it was gushing pure, cool water. He drank all he could hold, then filled his empty canteen as well as another jug he found in a nearby building. Finally, he refilled the priming jug and replaced it. As he left, he added to the note on the plank: "This really does work. You just have to trust it."

DISCUSS:

Invite students to share specific moments in their lives when they've needed to trust God. Note that these situations can fall into many different categories, from immediate crises to ongoing concerns to inner struggles and doubts. Talk about why it can be hard to trust Him sometimes, and invite students to brainstorm some of the barriers we might face that cause us to struggle in trusting Him.

EXPLAIN:

Trust is an extremely important part of any relationship, and that's especially true in our relationship with God. But when we're faced with challenges, doubts, and distractions, trust can be a struggle. That's where prayer comes in. God wants to hear every issue, temptation, and problem we're facing. We can tell Him anything, then trust Him to respond.

1. God Cares About What You're Facing**ASK:**

"Do you ever struggle to understand how God could sincerely care about the problems and issues we face every day? What are some reasons we might face such a struggle?"
(Answers will vary.)

EXPLAIN:

We all face a lot of problems every day. And while some are known only to us or simply involve the struggles of everyday living, they are serious nonetheless. How we respond to those crises says a lot about where we've placed our hope and trust. When we turn to prayer, we will not be disappointed—no matter the size of the problem.

- **Nothing is too big for God.**

READ:

Ephesians 3:20,21

DISCUSS:

Ask students to name the biggest problems, fears, and worries they've ever faced—or sense they may someday face. Talk about how they responded. Finally, discuss why a Christian might hesitate to pray in the hardest of times. Explain that sometimes the issue seems so huge that we don't even understand what is happening or what could be done to change things. We're tempted to conclude that there are no answers; it's a hopeless cause.

ASK:

"What do you think verse 20 means when it says God is able to do 'more than all we ask or think'?" *(We shouldn't limit our prayers to what we understand. Nothing we ask is ever so great that it overwhelms His ability to respond effectively. He knows the future, sees the whole picture, and controls every circumstance. When life seems overwhelming or hopeless, put your trust in God by making prayer your first priority.)*

- **God cares no matter the situation.**

PONDER:

Invite students to think of a moment in their lives that was so shocking or frightening that it seemed to take their breath away. Maybe they received a terrible and unexpected medical report. Or perhaps a relationship they value, whether one of their own or someone close to them, was crumbling before their eyes. Were they tempted to look at the immensity of the problem and wonder if God still cared about them, and about the situation? Why might someone have that temptation, and what could be done to overcome it?

READ:

Psalm 139:7-13

EXPLAIN:

This psalm describes in poetic terms the wide spectrum of human experience, and culminates in verse 10. Whether we enjoy moments of victory higher than we imagined possible, or find ourselves in a valley lower than our worst nightmare could depict, God is there. And His presence is not passive. He is at work, guiding us out of the depths with wisdom and direction. (Similarly, His guidance is precious at life's high points, to guard us from selfish attitudes and thoughtless decisions.) And He is "[holding us] fast." His strength, protection, and mercy are assured.

DISCUSS:

Talk about the promises these verses give us: no matter what happens to us, no matter where we are in life, God is there. How can we be so sure? Because God himself made us, and did so carefully and with purpose. Then discuss how knowing these things will affect our prayers. Note that no matter our situation, our problem, or even our emotional state, God compassionately embraces us. He doesn't laugh us off if we sound desperate. He doesn't reject us because we're inadequate. We can freely approach Him with any need.

2. He Listens to the Small Things

DISCUSS:

Ask students to think about times when they've had a problem that really weighed them down, then shared that issue with a friend or relative, only to be brushed off with a response like, "Don't sweat it," or "It'll be all right," or maybe even "If you think that's bad, listen to what happened to me..." Talk about how they felt at that moment.

EXPLAIN:

It hurts when someone—especially someone close to us—ignores or minimizes our problems. What seems small to someone else can be anything but small to us. When people brush off issues that matter in our lives, or impact us in ways that no one else can completely understand, we might be tempted to wonder if anyone really cares. We might even ask if our feelings really matter. But we can know they matter to God—enough that He wants to hear all about them.

READ:

Read each of the following Scriptures: **Matthew 21:22; 1 John 5:14; Philippians 4:6.**

DISCUSS:

Talk about how each of the three Scriptures you just read can help us feel confident when we pray, even if these problems might not seem serious to others. Use the following as a guide:

- **Matthew 21:22:** Prayer gives us direct access to God. We can pray with confidence and assurance. Notice that there are no qualifiers in Christ's statement. No categories or topics are out of bounds. We don't have to limit our prayers to things we find important, others find important, or even things we wonder if God will find important. At the same time, we must be careful not to see this verse as a "blank check," allowing us to heap on ourselves personal conveniences and indulge in earthly luxuries. This is addressed in the next verse to be considered.

- **1 John 5:14:** The only “qualification” to our prayers is that we’re not violating God’s plan for us. We must pray according to His will. For this reason, God will answer our prayers in a number of different—and even surprising—ways. Yet discovering His will is not difficult, as our understanding of His plans will grow and be revealed as we cultivate a close relationship with Him. So while we must eliminate selfish and wrongly motivated prayers, we can know that God hears us when our hearts are focused on Him.
- **Philippians 4:6:** God gives us a clear invitation to pray that doesn’t depend on who we are or how important anyone thinks our needs are. Whatever makes us anxious can be taken to God with assurance and confidence, knowing that He wants to hear from us.

3. Nothing Is Off-Limits When We Pray

PONDER:

Have students complete these sentences. (Due to the personal nature, avoid a lot of discussion on the third question. You might talk about it in general, however.):

- **For me to trust someone, I have to know that they** _____ .
- **The things I value most in a relationship include** _____ .
- **The things that I find most difficult to discuss with others include** _____ .

EXPLAIN:

Our relationship with God is personal. While He’s the all-powerful Creator of the Universe, He’s also a close friend, trusted Counselor, and wise guide. And like our closest friend, nothing is out of bounds when we have conversation with Him. We can talk about needs, fears, hopes for the future, as well as problems and temptations. Because He’s the perfect friend, unable and unwilling to let us down or fail to honor His promises, we can talk to Him with full assurance that He listens, ready and willing to respond. It’s with this perspective on prayer that we can examine the most familiar prayer in the Bible: the Lord’s Prayer.

READ:

Read Matthew 6:9-13, then **DISCUSS** what each section of the Lord’s Prayer tells us about the conversation we can have with God. Talk specifically about how learning these principles frees us to take anything to the Lord in prayer without fear of rejection or disappointment.

- **Our Father in heaven...:** While we need to be respectful when we pray, prayer is a personal conversation between Father and child. Some people, however, struggle to see God as a Father. Perhaps they had no relationship or, maybe worse, a broken relationship with an earthly dad. For them, this prayer is a constant reminder that God is close by, and there is nothing they can’t tell Him.
- **...hallowed be your name...:** What an incredible concept: God wants to talk to us. Knowing we have this kind of personal access will transform the way we pray, including our attitude toward prayer.
- **...your kingdom come...:** God wants us to pray with an eternal perspective in mind. Yes, we face a lot of needs and issues every day. But our attitude and focus will remain godly when we pray consistently for Christ’s return, and to see God’s grace overcome evil in the world around us.

- **...your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...:** This prayer is two-fold: We pray that God's commands will be honored and obeyed, and we pray that His plans for the world, salvation, and eternity are accomplished. This isn't always easy; sometimes His will conflicts with what we want. So, in a sense, God is telling us to examine our priorities when we pray.
- **...give us today our daily bread...:** We all have needs. Some Christians around the world literally don't know where their next meal is coming from. But even for those of us not in that situation, this phrase is a reminder that God is in control of every need. We must surrender ourselves to His plans, knowing He will give us what we need—even if that means not having some of the luxuries and comforts we want.
- **...forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors...:** Forgiveness is central to the Christian life. It is because God graciously forgave our sins that we have the hope of eternal life through a relationship with Him. Thus, every day we need to confess our sins to God, then trust and accept His forgiveness. But we also need to forgive others, no matter what they've done. If we refuse we will build a destructive wall in our relationship with God.
- **...lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one...:** The Christian life is filled with spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-14). Whatever battles we might be facing, we need God's help. This part of the Lord's Prayer means we ask God to spare us from harsh tests, recognizing that we are weak. But it also involves trusting God (rather than relying on self) to see us through to a good conclusion when we have to do battle in the spiritual realm.

Conclusion

READ:

Have students read the following Scriptures as a class or in small groups. Note that the passages deal with specific situations when we need to pray. For each, talk about why we might be tempted to overlook prayer. Then discuss why it's important for us to pray in these settings. Note that God has invited us to pray in all situations, no matter how desperate or frightening.

- **James 5:14-16:** When praying for healing, we might worry how we will feel if a miracle doesn't happen. But sickness often places us in a desperate situation. And God wants to hear from us.
- **Philippians 4:14-19:** It can be embarrassing to pray about a financial need in our family, especially when praying with others. But true Christian friends won't look down on us when we have this kind of need. God has an unlimited supply, and He wants to take care of us.
- **Psalms 34:18; Luke 6:27-31:** Sadly, some people resist praying about broken relationships because they want to get even with someone who hurts them, or they fear God will tell them to go apologize to the other person. But God doesn't want us to have bad feelings against anyone. And He can restore any relationship.

- **James 1:5:** It's not uncommon to worry or be confused about the future. We might even be tempted to wonder if there's a lot we can accomplish with our lives. But God has incredible plans for us. And He offers to give us wisdom to follow those plans.

MINISTRY ACTIVITY:

Take specific prayer requests from students, perhaps noting the specific categories of prayer needs mentioned above. Note these needs on the board. Then gather together and have a time of intercession. You might also use this time to talk with one another about the fears or concerns they're feeling, as well as share some great things God has been doing. Encourage students to continue praying for these needs during the week.

*Prepared by the Assemblies of God National Prayer Center
www.prayer.ag.org*

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