Prayer Basics for Youth
(Lesson 1: Introduction)


The National Prayer Center

© 2009 by Gospel Publishing House, 1445 N. Boonville Ave., Springfield, Missouri 65802. All rights reserved. Permission to replicate for personal, church and/or educational use only, may not be used for commercial intent. Electronic Edition published 2009 at www.prayer.ag.org
LESSON 1: You’re Designed for Eternity

STUDY TEXT:

Genesis 1:26,27; 2:7; Jeremiah 29:11; Matthew 6:33; John 16:13;
Romans 8:15-17; 1 John 5:14,15

OBJECTIVE:

WHAT is the point? We’ve been created in God’s image; He designed us for eternity, and He wants to have a close, personal relationship with us.

WHY is it important? Prayer is the most basic and important way we stay connected to God and His plans for us.

HOW should I respond? Make your spiritual priorities top priority by committing to prayer, building a stronger relationship with God, and following His will for your life.

KEY VERSE: Genesis 1:27

God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (NIV).

Getting Started

ACTIVITY: Keep in Touch

Divide the class into pairs and give each pair a sheet of paper. Have a contest to see who can list the most unique forms of communication. Remind them that there were many forms of communication used in history that have become obsolete. Examples include: E-mail, Internet chat rooms, blogging, cell phones, instant messaging, snail mail, smoke signals, telegraph, cave drawings, pantomime, talking, and sign language. After a couple minutes, compare their results and note some of the more unique answers. Consider awarding a prize to the team with the most answers. Then discuss these questions:

- Which of the examples we named would be the easiest ways to communicate? Which would be hardest? Why?
- What are the most common ways you communicate? Why do you think you choose these methods?

DISCUSS:

What would happen if we weren’t able to communicate with others easily, or at all? How would it affect our relationships with parents, friends, and teachers if we decided to avoid communicating with them? (Note that our relationship with them would be affected. We would grow apart from friends or family if we stopped talking with them. In a similar way, we’d struggle to do well in school if we ignored the teacher and acted as if we didn’t need to listen or interact. For that reason, when our usual method of communication is disrupted—such as a dead cell phone—we find another way to make contact. We know it’s important to stay in contact with the people closest to us.)
ASK:
What are some ways we communicate with God? (*While there might be several answers, at its root that question is answered in one word: prayer.*)

EXPLAIN:
God created us for one extremely important purpose: to have a close relationship with Him that will last for eternity. Everything we do as Christians—worship, telling others about Him, living according to His plans for us—flows out of that relationship. But it’s impossible to have that close relationship if we fail to—or refuse to—stay in regular communication with Him. That’s why prayer deserves top priority in our lives.

Digging Deeper

1. Prayer Is About Relationship

READ:
Genesis 1:26,27; 2:7

DISCUSS:
Ask students what they think it means to say that we are made in the “image of God.” How does that make us different from every other living thing? How will knowing we’re made in God’s image change the way we look at ourselves? How will it affect the way we relate to God? After noting students’ thoughts, explain the texts using the information below, then compare it with their responses.

EXPLAIN:
This “image” doesn’t refer to our physical appearance, but to who we are on the inside—our spiritual beings. Unlike every other living thing, we’re able to respond to God, have a relationship with Him, and experience a deep desire to know Him better. It also gives us the ability to see right and wrong. We’re capable of knowing how to set priorities and make decisions that line up with His plan for us. And He expects us to follow through.

In the very beginning, God created us differently than every other living thing (2:7). It was the ultimate “personal touch,” as He breathed life into humanity. As a result, we’re able to experience a real and powerful relationship with Him.

ASK:
How will prayer affect our relationship with God? (*Prayer is what connects us with God. It puts us in contact with the spiritual realm, where we get to know God better and discover His plans for our lives.*)

ACTIVITY:
Have a volunteer come to the front. (For this activity, it might be best to pick a “good sport”; that is, a student with a laid back, outgoing personality who is familiar to most of the class. Someone who is shy or struggles with self-esteem might find it uncomfortable.) Ask the class the following questions about the volunteer:

- Where was this person born?
- What is this person’s birthday?
- What is his/her favorite food?
• What does he/she want to do after college?
• Does he/she have a pet, and if so what is its name?
• How much money did he/she make last year?
• What is this person’s grade point average?
• Has this person ever had a major surgery, and if so, what was it?
• What is this person’s Social Security number?
• Does this person have a credit card, and, if so, how could you get the number?

(Note that no one could answer some of these questions. Talk about how students might find out the answers. Explaining that because many were quite personal, there are only two ways: they could hack into public records, spy on them, or threaten them to give the info or face the consequences. Or they could get to know him/her really well and learn the details through the course of a close friendship.)

BRAINSTORM:
Talk about some of the wrong ways people try to get to know God. Note that some use wrong methods like the occult, horoscopes, and other false forms of spirituality to reach the supernatural realm. Others try to get there by doing the good things they see Jesus commanding in the Bible. Discuss why these methods are flawed and even dangerous. Note that, at best, we can only learn some things about God when we’re missing a relationship with Him. Emphasize that God created one way to get to know Him: a close, personal relationship that is built through prayer.

READ:
Romans 8:15-17

DISCUSS:
Talk about what these verses tell us about God’s plan for us. Note that He wants to have the kind of relationship with us that a parent has with a child. That includes going to Him for help and direction. It means trusting Him enough to know that He’s taking care of us even in the worst of times, when we’re tempted, hurting, or confused. And it means staying focused on His good and eternal plans for us when the rest of the world tells us to live for the moment. This doesn’t happen when we take our relationship with Him lightly. We need to constantly build our relationship with Him.

2. Prayer Points You in the Right Direction

DISCUSS:
Ask students to define “true friendship.” How do they know if someone is truly their friend? What does a true friend do for them that no one else would do? What would a true friend never do to them? What are some of the “hard things” we have to do for each other when we are friends?

EXPLAIN:
True friendship means being there for someone, and knowing that person is there for you. It also means helping that person even when doing so is difficult or uncomfortable. For example, if we’re about to make a terrible mistake, we would expect—and appreciate—a true friend confronting us and giving advice on making a better choice. But in order for all this to happen, we have to build a strong, consistent, lasting relationship with our friends.

The same is true in our relationship with God. He helps us stay on track with His plans for us, and stops us when we’re about to make wrong choices. He’s also there for us in the best and worst of times. But this kind of relationship doesn’t just happen—any more than we’d be best friends with a
total stranger. It grows from solid communication. And that’s where prayer comes in. Talking with God points us in the right direction, whether we’re looking for answers, direction, or help.

• Pointed Toward the Right Perspective

READ: Matthew 6:33

EXPLAIN: Jesus promised us that as we seek God, making Him our top priority, we can be assured that He will take care of our needs and calm our worries. And seeking Him begins with simple communication: talking to Him in prayer.

DISCUSS: Ask students to name some of the most common needs and worries teens face, noting their responses on the board. Then, for each, talk about how and why prayer can make a difference when we’re facing those situations. Note that prayer keeps things in perspective; it helps us remember that we’re trusting Someone greater than the problems of this world. And through prayer, God reminds us of His incredible promises to take care of us. That doesn’t mean our problems will always magically disappear. But prayer keeps us focused on the God who will walk us through every situation, no matter how difficult.

• Pointed Toward Truth

READ: John 16:13

EXPLAIN: Through the Holy Spirit, God has made it possible for us to know and understand spiritual truth about things like sin, salvation, who God is, and His plan for how He wants us to live—no matter what we hear around us.

BRAINSTORM: Instruct students to think of false, deceptive ideas about God they’ve heard in school, the media, and elsewhere. Discuss whether or not they think Christians are affected by these false ideas. Then talk about why they might be deceived by them even though they come from non-Christian sources. For example, we might hear that there are many ways to salvation and it’s wrong to say someone else’s religion is false, be it Islam, Buddhist, or something else. Christians must beware of becoming sympathetic to such a teaching.

DISCUSS: Talk about how prayer can help us distinguish truth about God and spirituality from the many wrong and deceptive ideas we might hear every day.

ACTIVITY: Read the following warning labels found on actual products, then talk about why a company might have felt the need to put each on their product.

• This garment will not enable you to fly (on a superman costume)
• Do not reuse bottle to store beverages (on a bottle of drain cleaner)
• Do not use for drying pets (in a manual for a microwave oven)
• Remove infant before folding for storage (on a stroller)
• May contain nuts (on a package of peanuts)
• Do not put in mouth (on a package of bottle rockets)
• This product can burn eyes (on a curling iron)
• Recycled flush water unsafe for drinking (on a public toilet)
• Do not eat toner (on a printer cartridge)

EXPLAIN:
Some facts in life should be easy to figure out, and most people will agree on them. (The activity above offers some obvious examples.) But there will be times when we hear things about the spiritual realm that might threaten to deceive us. When we make prayer a regular part of life, we’re better equipped to recognize truth and error because we’ve stayed in touch with God and have a good understanding of who He is and what He expects of us.

• Pointed Toward God’s Plan for Us

READ:
Jeremiah 29:11; 1 John 5:14,15

DISCUSS:
Ask student what these verses tell them about what God has planned for their lives, and how they can discover that plan. Note that a lot of people think of His plan as something mysterious that we struggle to understand. Others might question if He really does have an important purpose for our lives. But through these verses we’re promised that God does have something great for our future no matter who we are. And we know that these plans can be discovered through prayer. When we pray to find His will for us, He answers.

EXPLAIN:
God intends for us to have a close relationship with Him. And prayer is a vital part of that relationship, just like communication is important to any close friendship. It’s vital that we know who God is and what He has in mind for us. But that will only come when we make prayer a big priority.

Making It Real

ACTIVITY:
Distribute paper and pens or pencils, and challenge students to make a list of the top five priorities in their lives. Emphasize that this involves an honest evaluation of how they use their time and resources, and what receives the greatest share of their attention. Encourage them to contemplate how each of these priorities will impact their relationship with God, and, as a result, how they might need to reorder these priorities. Finally, discuss as a class how prayer will affect the way they look at life, how they live, and the kind of focus they have on eternal things.

PRAY:
Bring the class together to pray for each other, either in pairs and small groups or in one large group. Focus the prayers on committing to build stronger relationships with God. Ask God to give them a greater passion for prayer. Pray that they will be reminded to seek Him when faced with questions about spiritual truth, decisions about their future, and temptations to compromise eternal priorities for immediate rewards. End with a time of worship, exalting God as close friend and faithful Father.