Prayer Basics for Youth (Lesson 6: Why Should We Pray?)


The National Prayer Center

Equipping the Church... Answering the Call
LESSON 6: Stay Connected with God

STUDY TEXT:
Exodus 33:11-15; Psalm 143:1,8; Matthew 6:10; 9:37,38; Romans 8:26,27; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 1 Timothy 2:8; James 1:5; 1 John 1:9

OBJECTIVE:

WHAT is the point? Prayer makes our relationship with God stronger, helps us understand where He wants us to go, and enables us to be part of what He’s doing in our world.

WHY is it important? If we ignore prayer, we’ll grow cold in our walk with God and miss out on what He has planned for our lives.

HOW should I respond? Surrender your future to God, then pursue a strong, close relationship with Him that will keep you in step with His plans for your life.

KEY VERSE: Colossians 4:2
Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

Getting Started

ACTIVITY: Warning Labels
Read the following warning labels found on products. Talk about why each warning seems unnecessary, and why it might have been put into place. What would be the consequences of not heeding the warning? Have students ever seen such warnings, or do they usually ignore them?

- Drain Cleaner: Do not use bottle to store beverages.
- Toilet Plunger: Do not use near power lines.
- Curling Iron: For external use only.
- Hair Dryer: Do not use in shower.
- Electric Drill: Do not use as a dental drill.
- Cardboard Auto Sun Shield: Do not leave shield in place while driving.
- Toner Cartridge: Do not eat toner.
- Microwave Oven: Do not use to dry pets.
- Toilet Brush: Do not use orally.
- Package of Peanuts: May contain nuts.
- Lawn Mower: Do not attempt to remove blade while mower is running.
- Box of Matches: Contents may catch fire.
- Bottle Rockets: Do not put in mouth.
- Portable Stroller: Caution: Remove infant before folding stroller.
**EXPLAIN:**

We receive instructions every day. But some of those instructions seem so obvious, or we’ve heard them so many times, that we might be tempted to overlook them. This can be especially true when it comes to prayer. We know the Bible says we need to pray, or risk serious spiritual consequences. We’ve heard it and read it more times than we can count. But it’s so easy to cut corners in this area. After all, we can always say a quick prayer while we’re doing other things. And God knows what we’re thinking anyway. Yet the fact remains that prayer—sincere, focused, uninterrupted prayer—is among the most important things we can do as Christians. We should never lack for answers when we ask ourselves, “Why do I need to pray?”

**BRAINSTORM:**

Ask students to name as many reasons as possible why we need to pray. Challenge them to come up with very specific responses, noting their thoughts on the board. After you collect several answers, ask students to come up with one sentence that describes why prayer is important, based on what they’ve just noted about reasons to pray. Explain that we need to pray because there’s so much about life, faith, and God’s plan for us and the world that depend on our prayers.

**Digging Deeper**

1. God says, “Pray!”

**READ:**

Have a volunteer read 1 Timothy 2:8, then ask this question: “Why do you think God wants us to pray?” Explain that in this verse, the apostle Paul referred to the good relationships we will build with others as we unite in prayer. (He was talking about how some Christians in Ephesus had let bad feelings develop among them.) Prayer has to be a big priority in order for us to have good relationships with God and others. But we also experience a lot of personal benefits and blessings when we pray.

**DISCUSS:**

Talk about some of the personal benefits we can experience when we pray. Guide discussion so as not to view prayer as a means of “getting what we want,” but as a source of enhancing our lives and experiencing God’s blessings.

**READ:**

Have a volunteer read the following passages of Scripture, then discuss how each helps us understand the ways prayer will enrich our lives and help us live the way God intends.

- **Exodus 33:11-15** — Moses needed help to accomplish God’s plan for Him. It was something he could never do alone. And God responded with a promise that He would be there for Moses.
- **Romans 8:26,27** — When we find ourselves in situations where prayer is difficult or even confusing, it’s comforting to know the Holy Spirit prays with and for us. The bottom line is that God has called us to pray, and He enables us to fulfill that call no matter where we’re at in life.

**INVITE:**

Encourage students to respond to the following questions, then talk about how students’ lives can be personally and powerfully altered by a strong commitment to prayer.
• If you could talk face-to-face with God, what are some thing you would want to express to Him?
• What are some ways prayer has made a powerful impact on your life?
• How can you make prayer an even bigger priority? How might your life change if you did?

2. Be part of something big.

ACTIVITY:
Have a contest to see who can do the most push-ups in a minute, awarding a prize to the winner. Then discuss the benefits of doing push-ups every day (we would become stronger and more fit), as well as the drawbacks (it would take time and energy). Relate this to how prayer takes effort and sacrifice. But we will grow as we put in the time, challenging ourselves to go forward with God. And ultimately we will have opportunities to do great things for God that would not have been possible had we not devoted ourselves to prayer.

EXPLAIN:
Prayer gives us incredible opportunities to impact our world in two ways: First, when prayer is a top priority, we’re better equipped to respond when God places us in positions to make a difference, as well as more attuned to identifying those opportunities when they present themselves. Second, God has designed prayer in such a way that it can impact events we may never observe or even be aware of happening. The following are several examples.

• Prayer makes a difference in telling the world about Jesus.

READ:
Have a volunteer read Matthew 9:37,38, then talk about what it says concerning prayer and sharing our faith. Ask, “Why do you think prayer makes a difference when it comes to people sharing their faith and spreading the gospel?”

DISCUSS:
Emphasize that when we pray, we’re able to hear from God as well as become more focused on spiritual priorities. Prayer reminds us of the incredible spiritual need in our world as well as the horrible consequences of rejecting Jesus. When we talk to God, He begins calling us to do things for Him that we never imagined possible, and He will help us overcome the fear that often accompanies telling others about Christ. As a result, we will respond to Him when He sends us, whether it is across the hallway at school or around the world.

• Prayer helps us understand and follow God’s will.

READ:
Have a volunteer read Matthew 6:10, then have students repeat that verse using their own words. What do they think Jesus means when He says we should pray that God’s kingdom would come and His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven?

EXPLAIN:
Note that God wants us to pray that we become focused on His kingdom instead of this world. We look forward to eternity, and prepare ourselves for Christ’s return. We also pray that God’s will is fulfilled: people accept Christ and experience miracles, and spiritual victories take place. We want God’s will to be our will—no matter the sacrifices or changes we must make. Prayer helps us keep our priorities more in line with what’s happening in heaven than on earth.
CHALLENGE:
Invite students to examine their hearts to determine if they do in fact want God’s will to be done in their lives. What ways might they need to change their attitudes and actions? What will happen when they sincerely want and pray for God’s will to be done in them? Encourage them to pray this prayer regularly, noting how it impacts their lives.

• Prayer keeps our relationship with God strong.

READ:
Have a volunteer read 1 John 1:9.

DISCUSS:
Ask students if they think it’s possible to be completely perfect for the rest of their lives. Why or why not? Then explain that we should always make it our goal to honor God and do what He calls us to do. But there will be times when we do fail; life is filled with temptations and struggles, and we aren’t always able to live up to our best intentions.

ASK:
“What should we do when we realize that we’ve sinned?” (Note that we’re tempted to blame others, justify what we did, rationalize that our actions weren’t that bad, or deny ever doing it. Talk about what will happen if we cling to one of these responses. Then explain that the Bible tells us there’s only one right response when we sin: prayer. God wants us to talk to Him, to confess our wrongs and ask for help so we can change in the future. This conversation, which happens in prayer, is a big part of keeping a strong relationship with God.)

• Prayer helps us recognize our purpose in life.

READ:
Have a volunteer read 2 Thessalonians 1:11.

DISCUSS:
Talk about what the Bible means when it talks about our “calling.” Note that in one sense every Christian has the same calling: to honor God with their lives, reject temptation, persevere through hard times, and listen to God when they sense He is guiding them in a certain direction. At the same time, God has specific plans and intentions for each of us. We discover and follow these plans through prayer.

INVITE:
Ask if any students would like to share what they believe is their purpose in life, and talk about a time when they had a strong sense of God leading them to do something. Emphasize that this doesn’t have to be a big, life-encompassing example that involves the rest of their lives. Our purpose can be revealed every day, as God leads us to help someone find Jesus, encourage a hurting Christian, or use our talents for His sake. Have them describe how prayer made a difference in them finding their purpose.

3. Ask for directions.

ACTIVITY: Good Trip/Bad Trip
Display a world map or globe and invite volunteers to trace a route between two distant cities or countries they would like to visit. Have them describe some enjoyable things they could do or see during the trip. Examples could include visiting a famous amusement park, hiking in the mountains, or enjoying a cushy lifestyle on a trans-ocean cruise ship. Then ask the volunteer,
as well as the class, what would happen if they tried to go on this trip without any kind of map or directions. What could go wrong? Examples include getting lost in the mountains, running out of gas in the desert, and not being able to find the cruise ship, thus having to cross the ocean on a fishing boat. Compare this to life with and without prayer. God has a great journey planned for us, with many incredible experiences. But if we fail to ask for directions, we will find ourselves lost, misguided, frustrated, and even facing spiritual danger.

**READ:**

Have a volunteer read *Psalm 143:1,8.* Explain that David experienced a lot of difficult times, from life-destroying sins of adultery and conspiracy to murder, to dangerous moments when others threatened his life. It was during dark times like these that he wrote these verses. He needed help, hope, and direction.

**DISCUSS:**

Have students list the things David asked God for in these verses. Answers include God’s mercy, love, and faithfulness, as well as relief. Then he asked for direction. Talk about what these requests say about David’s priorities and desires. Note that he was humble, and he surrendered his will to God in hopes of receiving direction.

**EXPLAIN:**

Note that before we can ever sincerely ask God for direction, we must surrender ourselves completely to Him and recognize that His plans and ways are better than ours. This happens when, like David, we cry out in prayer. It’s only after we recognize our own limitations—and our incredible need for God—that we will truly trust God’s direction in big and small decisions we make every day.

**READ:**

Have two volunteers read the following verses, then talk about what the apostle Paul was praying for in each.

- **Ephesians 6:19** — Prayer doesn’t just help us personally. It also enables us to be more effective when we serve God. Paul prayed so he could be fearless when he preached the gospel. We, too, can pray that God will give us knowledge and boldness in telling others about Him. Note that Paul already knew how to preach, and he was already bold. This fearlessness involved supreme confidence that the words he used were from God. That kind of confidence only comes through prayer.

- **Colossians 4:3** — Sometimes we’re tempted to take matters into our own hands when telling others about Jesus. We’re overcome with zeal and try to open doors by ourselves. That’s why prayer is extremely important; it causes us to trust God’s direction and opportunities. Even the best of intentions can turn out bad when we try to do things in our own power. But when we ask God for direction, He will help us in ways we can’t even imagine.

**ASK:**

*Why is it important to trust God for the words, and to open the right doors, when telling others about Him? Why is it a bad idea to try to open our own doors, rely on our own words, or do things in our own strength?* (Talk about why we need God’s direction when we’re doing things to serve Him. Some responses might include not knowing where people’s hearts are at, saying the wrong thing or saying the right thing at the wrong time, and not understanding a situation like we would if we looked to God for guidance. From this you might discuss the importance of trusting God for direction, through prayer, in all the decisions of life.)
READ:
Have a volunteer read James 1:5.

ASK:
• What are some specific times in your life when you need wisdom from God?
  (Invite students to share personal stories of times when they didn’t know what to do,
  so they asked God for help. Discuss why wisdom from God is necessary. Note that we
don’t have all the answers and cannot see the future.)

• What do you think it means to say that God will give us wisdom “generously
to all without finding fault”? Why is this important? (Say: “Have you ever had
an adult give you some good guidance after you’ve made a mistake, but be-
gun their speech something like this: ‘I hope you finally learned your lesson.
These kinds of mistakes can really turn out bad. You’re going to have to be
smarter next time.’” Note that good advice isn’t such a good experience when the
person giving it makes you feel stupid for needing it or reminds you of past mistakes
you’ve made. Thankfully, God doesn’t hesitate to give us wisdom when we pray—and
He does so without “rubbing it in” or reminding us of past wrongs. That’s why we can
pray for direction every day, without hesitation.

EXPLAIN:
Everybody needs direction sometimes. In some cases we can feel desperate to receive it.
Other times the need is extremely urgent because we’re doing something that can make
a difference in eternity. The good news is that when we’re willing to humble ourselves by
submitting to God, and trust Him to give what we need, we can have confidence in God’s
guidance to take us wherever we need to go.

Making It Real

ACTIVITY: The Answer Is...

Explain that God responds to prayer requests different ways. Announce that you are going to read
some possible prayer requests. For each, the class will vote how they think God might answer. Note
that the answer isn’t always just the simple “yes” we’re looking for. There are even cases where
God sees that “no” is the best answer. After reading each, discuss the reasons for their responses.

• Please give me that new video game system everybody else has.
• Please make my brother sick until he stops acting like a jerk.
• Please give me the right words to say the next time my friend asks me what
  we do at church.
• Please tell me what you want me to do with my life. I’m really worried about
  getting into the right college.
• Please don’t let Mr. Beck see that I copied four answers off of Heather’s test. I’ll
  fail the class if I get caught cheating. And there goes my scholarship chances.
• Please help me do my best on the test I studied for last night.
• Please heal my mom of cancer.
• Please give me a job that pays well. I will be sure to give a lot to missions.
• Please forgive me for what I said, and help me keep from saying it next time.

Encourage students to think about what they pray for when they pray. And challenge them
to accept God’s answer, even when it is not what they wanted to hear.
MINISTRY ACTIVITY: Listen Up!

Have students name some big questions teens have about their futures, such as who they will marry, where they will go to college, and what they will do with their lives. List their ideas on the board, then use the questions below as points of discussion for each idea.

- **In what ways will this decision affect your life?** (The hardest thing about big decisions is that something you decide in a moment right now can change the whole course of your life. And the teen years contain several of these kinds of decisions.)

- **Why would it be important for you to talk to God before making this decision?** (Some big decisions, such as marriage, have permanent consequences and results. We especially need God’s help during these decisions.)

- **What might happen if you refuse to listen to God’s direction?** (Refusing to listen can lead to serious and even painful mistakes. Even worse, it hurts our relationship with God when we willfully go against His plans for us.)

- **How can you prevent pride or other issues from influencing how you make this decision and whether or not you listen to God?** (Submission to God is an act of the will. We need to decide every day that God takes first priority with us. This can be even more challenging when a big decision looms, since it’s easy to try figuring things out on our own. That’s why prayer is so important. It keeps us focused on God, tuned into His voice, and reminds us that He is listening and wants to help.)