

BIBLE STUDY



**Rainbow Trail**  
LUTHERAN CAMP

2011

Livin' ON A PRAYER



Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**

# Livin' On A Prayer

## INTRODUCTION:

Prayer is a challenging part of the Christian lifestyle and may even be a harder subject to talk about. There is no clear-cut understanding of how prayers works in, or on, our lives. All of us pray and experience the power of prayer differently. Because prayer is a common and central part of our Christian life and community, it is worth the struggle to explore its purpose in our life.

Jesus experienced struggles and challenges in life, and also experienced accomplishment and celebration. Jesus knew that it was important for him to share the joys and sorrows of life with others and maintain a relationship with his father through prayer. He knew that it was important to take everything to God in prayer. Regular daily prayer was an integral part of Jesus' life and he frequently took time away and went up the mountain to pray. This rhythm of intentional daily prayer and special times of stepping away from the world for solitude and reflection is found in many of God's faithful people. These people prayed in many ways- they loved God, struggled in there relationship with God, at times were angry with God, and ultimately found God acting through their lives in amazing and unexpected ways.

The days of this study address tough questions that youth (and adults) have about prayer:

1. **Why Would God Listen To Me Anyway?:** Why am I important to God? Of all the people in the world, why would God listen to me? Our focus this day is to understand how much God loves us and wants to be in relationship with us.
2. **Does Prayer Change God? Or Does Prayer Change Us?:** Do our prayers change the will and mind of God? Conversely, does God already have a master plan for our lives? So, do our prayers actually make a difference?
3. **The Situation is Impossible, So Why Should I Even Pray?:** Often our prayers are not answered the way we expect; even so, a relationship with God means continuing to trust and be faithful. And it is in our persistence in prayer, even when the situation seems impossible, that keeps us close to God.
4. **What If I Am Too Angry To Pray?:** Sometimes life throws so much at us that we are just angry with God – to the point where we can't even prayer. It is then that the community that surrounds us supports us and prays for us when we can't.
5. **Living A Life Of Prayer:** The ultimate goal is to move from "Livin' on a Prayer" to living a Life of Prayer. If we allow our prayer life to touch every corner of our life, our life will be a life in which our relationship with God is fulfilling and pushes us out into the world to be faithful servants to God and one another. So how will life be different when we return home?

Morning Watch is an important part of our day at camp. This year we will use the time to explore different prayer practices. Each day, villages will have the opportunity to experience different ways of praying including the labyrinth, journaling, and prayer flags to name a few. We hope that this discipline of quiet time during the day is one that many will take home with them as they seek daily time with God.

I am very excited about this study. It is a tough, tough study. But I think it will make us all examine how prayer fits into our relationship with God. We want campers to grow in their prayer life.

I hope this study will also help you to continue to grow in your own faith journey. Thank you for the opportunity to be partners with you as we serve the youth, adults, and families of the Rocky Mountain Synod and beyond.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dave". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dave Jarvis,  
Executive Director

We are grateful to the following writers of the 2011 Bible Study for Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp:

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## 2011 RTLC SUMMER BIBLE STUDY DAY 1

# Why Would God Want To Listen To Me Anyway?

### A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

God's love for us is immense. More immense than we can even imagine. God will chase and pursue us because God WANTS to be in a relationship with us. God will literally drop everything to spend time with us. And when we stray, God pursues us looks for us even harder. God loves me enough to leave everything to come find me.

### B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

1. Answer the question "Why would God want to listen to me?"
2. Establish that we are children of God
3. God's love for us is deeper than we could ever measure
4. Teach the parable of the Lost Sheep
5. Learn the discipline of prayer through journaling

### C. MORNING WATCH

Morning Watch will focus on five different prayer disciplines. Each morning camper representatives from each village will meet to decide which discipline their village wants to focus on that morning. The disciplines to choose from are:

1. Prayer Labyrinth
2. Prayer Journaling
3. Breath In, Breath Out, Say Thank You Centering Prayer
4. Prayer Bracelets/Prayers Cords/Prayer Knots/ Prayer Flags
5. Stretching Prayer
6. Prayer Stations
7. Prayer Partners

### D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

#### Starting Discussion Questions

1. What is something that you lost that was super important to you? Why was it important? Did you find it?
2. How did you feel when that item was missing, and you were looking for it? What were the feelings you had when you found it?
3. Have you ever been lost before? On a hike? In a car? In a store? Share what you experienced,
4. What did it feel like to be lost?
5. How did it feel when you were found, or you found your way?

Share the Jesse Stevens story.

#### Jesse Stevens Story

I want to tell you a true story about man from Dallas that got lost one night one his way home. Listen to this true story and you may gain a new perspective on what it may look like to be lost, and how it feels to be found.

Jesse Stevens was only 14 miles from home when he took a wrong turn in his SUV and soon found himself lost in the woods. It was Saturday night and Jesse had been to a funeral for a school buddy in East Texas. On the way home, he found himself on what he thought was a service road but it became a dead-end street. It was dark and before he knew it, his SUV was off the paved road and into a wooded area. Perhaps Jesse was confused when he stepped out of his vehicle and ventured into the heavily wooded area. As he wandered about in the dark, he tripped and fell into the thick brush and tall grass. Jesse tried to get up and find his way back to his SUV when he fell again, and again. Every time he attempted to get up, he used all his strength and fell back down. After a while, he couldn't get up again. The next morning, everything

looked completely different. Jesse had walked about 150 feet from his SUV but he couldn't see it through all the thick brush.

So there he lay, in the middle of about 20 acres of a thick forest from Saturday night, all day Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. "Every day I screamed, hoping somebody would hear me", Jesse said. Then he lost his voice. "I thought that maybe I'll just lay here and die, and that's the way it's supposed to be", he said. Early Sunday morning, it rained for the first time in a few months in North Texas and Jesse was able to catch a few trickles in his mouth. He survived on rainwater.

For the next four days, Jesse could hear the cars on Interstate 20 driving by, but no one was able to hear him. There he was, still wearing shiny black shoes and his nice dark slacks that he wore to his friend's funeral. "It looked like at night there was a blanket of stars over me," said Jesse. "It kind of comforted me." Jesse didn't feel alone, he had faith.

Finally, on Wednesday, two bicyclists told police they noticed an SUV abandoned in the Mountain Creek Lake Park in Grand Prairie, several hundred yards south of Interstate 20. When the police ran the license plate number through a state database, they learned that the SUV belonged to Jesse Stevens, who had been reported missing.

### **Questions for Conversation**

Officer Daughtery was one of the first on the scene and he started scouring the woods on foot. About an eighth of a mile from the truck, Officer Daughtery saw a small metal shack and a body lying near it. Jesse wasn't moving at all and the Officer didn't think it was going to be a good outcome. When he ran toward Jesse, he remembers the man's first words: "Boy, am I glad to see you!" Although hungry and dehydrated, Jesse was otherwise OK.

1. How would you feel like if you were lost for 4 days in the woods?
2. What types of things would you think about?
3. Who do you think would notice that you are missing first? (This question is very important, as we will later relate it to God's love for us, and God noticing us and finding us.)
4. How do you think you would feel when someone finally found and rescued you?

Our theme for this week at camp is "Livin' on a Prayer". Today and the rest of the week we are going to talk about what prayer looks like in our life, and what prayer is really all about. Today we are asking ourselves the question "Why would God want to listen to me anyway?"

Have you ever heard yourself say something like, "God doesn't have time for me or my prayers" or "God has so much to worry about that God doesn't care about my little problems." These kinds of statements can become barriers keeping us from building a closer relationship with God through prayer. These kinds of barriers can make us unstable in our relationship with God, and they often come out of a something that we are disappointed with in our own lives.

Let's play a game.

Have the campers get a partner and stand about foot to a foot and a half apart facing each other. Their feet must be about shoulder width apart and the object of the game is to knock the other person off balance. The person who does not move their feet will win the game. Both players will raise their hands to about chest high, and the only way a person can knock someone off balance is to push the other player's hands.

This game illustrates what can be wrong with our understanding of prayer, and how God loves us. We must build a stronger foundation, and repair the balance in order to move forward into a deeper relationship with God through prayer. God loves us deeply and wants to talk with us. God is willing to look past all of our faults in order to love us, so if God will look past them, why can't we?

### **Scripture**

In Luke 15:1-7 we read a story about a shepherd that has lost a sheep. The shepherd has 100 sheep in the flock, but one of them goes missing. After realizing what happened the shepherd left the 99 sheep that were safe and went to look for the 1 sheep that had lost its way. Let's read Luke 15:1-7. Have your campers open their Bibles and read. Get them used to opening their Bibles.

1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open

country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Background information about the text Luke 15:1-7

- The scandal in the beginning of this passage is that Jesus receives outcast like tax collectors, shares meals with them, and even plays host to them. This does not sit well with the Pharisees and scribes.
- Interesting points to note when reading this text:
- The average weight of a sheep is 125lbs
- Tax collectors were hated people because they have absolute power to take money from people. The money went to maintain the Roman Empire. The Jews treated the tax collectors as the scum of the earth.
- The Pharisees are an important Jewish group. They believed in a pure Jewish race and religion, and belong to the Roman government. Their goal is to live a perfect life, and because of this they developed hundreds of rules to govern every aspect of human life. They were considered religious snobs. Their ambitions were sincere, and they tried to keep Jewish people holy.

### **Questions For Conversation**

1. What do you think the job of a shepherd is?
2. List the character traits that a good shepherd would have.
3. Describe the level of love that you would feel if someone would leave everything to find you when you were lost.

God's love for us is so broad, so immense that we cannot even fathom the depth and breadth of that love. The true measure of God's love is the ultimate sacrifice of giving his only son Jesus to die for each and everyone of us and for our salvation. This is how much God wants to be in relationship with us.

### **Read Romans 5:6-11**

<sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

**So, if you were God Almighty would you want to get involved with us?** No way. There is no reason to. Why would we want to put ourselves through that? We usually steer clear of people like that. **So then, why in the world does God want to encounter us and be in relationship?** Solicit answers. You're looking for "pure grace", "because God is love." **There is no rational reason that God would want to encounter us. Only God's unconditional love for us, and that is crazy. But that is the Gospel/good news. There is nothing we can do to earn it, deserve it, manipulate it, buy it. God just does it because God is love.**

### **Questions For Conversation**

1. Is there anything or anybody that is worth giving up your life? Tell us more.
2. What does this tell you about God and God's relationship with you?
3. Why do you think God wants to be so close to us?

**Our identity is that each of us is a child of God. And God treasures every minute God gets to have with us.**

### **The Prodigal Son**

Read Luke 15:11-24

### **Questions For Conversation**

1. What are your reactions to this story?
2. What do you think of the father's response to the son returning home?
3. Who do you think is the son? Who do you think is the father?

Let's look closely at a few of these verses. Re-read verses 18-20. Verses 18 and 19 talk about how we see God responding to us when we have made mistakes. But verse 20 is God's response. It is in prayer that we can turn back to God. And God is not just listening, but God is waiting and watching for our return. No matter what we do, God will continue to pursue us and chase us to be in relationship with him.

As you prepare to close your study, share this story.

The story is told about an early explorer who set out to map the Atlantic Ocean. After they had been sailing for several days, he told his crew to drop a weighted measuring line into the water to measure the depth of the Ocean. After dropping the line the explorer asked his crew member how deep the ocean was, and because the line never hit the bottom, he said "deeper than that." He then instructed the crew to tie two of their measuring lines together, and then measure once again. After dropping the two lines connected together the crew once again recorded the depth of the ocean as "deeper than that." The captain finally instructed the crew to tie all of their measuring lines together and measure one last time. However, even with all the lines they had they still could not measure the depth of the ocean, and once again recorded a depth of "deeper than that."

When we ask ourselves the question "why would God want to listen to me", the answer is pretty simple. Because God's love for us is "deeper than that". We could never measure how much God loves us. If you were the lost sheep in the story, God would leave everyone else to find you and bring you back home. I John 3:1a says "see what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." God loves you so much he calls you one of his children. God wants to listen to you.

#### **Close with Prayer**

Lord God, Father, Abba, dad, we know that we will never understand how deep your love is for us. Help us not build up barriers between that keep us from experiencing your love. We know that you will search for us like a shepherd who is looking for his lost sheep. God, thank you for loving us that much. Amen.

#### **E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS**

- **Action Idea**  
"Accidentally" lose your Bible in your cabin before Bible study starts. Have the kids look everywhere for it. Tie this in to the lesson when talking about the story of the Lost Sheep.
- **Supporting Game**  
You can play the game of Marco Polo using a blindfold or having one person just close their eyes. This can be tied into the Bible study as an object lesson for the story of the Lost Sheep. Ask questions like: how did you feel trying to find everyone? What was it like to be so close to someone but not be able to touch them? ...
- **What to do if the Bible study is not connecting with the campers**
  - If the connection with God's love is not being made with the campers using the parable of the Lost Sheep – abandon the parable. In fact run from it. The point being driven home is not the parable, but rather that God loves us as his child. Move from the parable of the Lost Sheep into a discussion about how the campers have experienced love – from anyone not just God. As you establish what love is and how we experience it, help them to understand that God loves us more than any earthly relationship could ever show. This might be a good time to read the "supporting story" below about the Love Letter From God.
- **Advanced idea that may stimulate discussion for a more advanced group**
  - Put the study into practice. Help the campers to realize ways to make this study applicable to them. Talk about their personal relationships with God. Ask them where they struggle, when they feel a strong connection with God, how they know that God loves them. Help them to put those answers into a prayer/talk with God.

## F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

### Activities

1. Games that include the participants searching for things will help drive home the point of the parable of the Lost Sheep.
2. Capture the Flag
3. Hide and Go Seek
4. Sardines

### Morning and Evening Worship Ideas

1. Foot Washing
2. Communion

### All Camp Ideas

1. Capture the flag
2. Romans and Centurions

### Round-Up Ideas

Top Gun flashback – Have someone or the entire village sing You Lost That Lovin Feeling Maverick and Goose style

## G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

### Songs From the Camp Song Sheet

Dance With Me	Love Round
Humble Thyself	Unashamed Love
I love You	You are My All in All
Jesus Lover of My Soul	Jesus Loves Me
Lord Listen to Your Children Praying	

### Additional Scriptures

Matthew 10:30-31 (New International Version)

30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Ezekiel 36:9 (New International Version)

I am concerned for you and will look on you with favor

John 15:16 (New International Version)

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

Matthew 7:7-11 (New International Version)

7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? 11 If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

John 3:16 (New International Version)

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

### Letter from God (with scriptural references)

Your heavenly Father has written a beautiful love letter to us as his kids - the Bible. Here are some pieces from that letter. (read without putting in the scripture references)

My Child,

You may not know me, but I know everything about you. (Psalm 139:1) I know when you sit down and when you rise up. (Psalm 139:2) I am familiar with all your ways. (Psalm 139:3) Even the very hairs on your head are numbered. (Matthew 10:29-31) For you were made in my image. (Genesis 1:27) In me you live and move and have your being. (Acts 17:28) For you are my offspring. (Acts 17:28) I knew you even before you were conceived. (Jeremiah 1:4-5) I chose you when I planned creation. (Ephesians 1:11-12) You were not a mistake, for all your days are written in my book. (Psalm 139:15-16) I determined the exact time of your birth and where you would live. (Acts 17:26) You are fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:14) I knit you together in your mother's womb. (Psalm 139:13) And brought you forth on the day you were born. (Psalm 71:6)

I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me. (John 8:41-44) I am not distant and angry, but am the complete expression of love. (1 John 4:16) And it is my desire to lavish my love on you. (1 John 3:1) Simply because you are my child and I am your Father. (1 John 3:1) I offer you more than your earthly father ever could. (Matthew 7:11) For I am the perfect father. (Matthew 5:48) Every good gift that you receive comes from my hand. (James 1:17) For I am your provider and I meet all your needs. (Matthew 6:31-33) My plan for your future has always been filled with hope. (Jeremiah 29:11) Because I love you with an everlasting love. (Jeremiah 31:3)

My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore. (Psalms 139:17-18) And I rejoice over you with singing. (Zephaniah 3:17) I will never stop doing good to you. (Jeremiah 32:40) For you are my treasured possession. (Exodus 19:5) I desire to establish you with all my heart and all my soul. (Jeremiah 32:4) And I want to show you great and marvelous things. (Jeremiah 33:3) If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me. (Deuteronomy 4:29) Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4) For it is I who gave you those desires. (Philippians 2:13) I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine. (Ephesians 3:20) For I am your greatest encourager. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)

I am also the Father who comforts you in all your troubles. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4) When you are brokenhearted, I am close to you. (Psalm 34:18) As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart. (Isaiah 40:11) One day I will wipe away every tear from your eyes. (Revelation 21:3-4) And I'll take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth. (Revelation 21:3-4) I am your Father, and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus. (John 17:23) For in Jesus, my love for you is revealed. (John 17:26) He is the exact representation of my being. (Hebrews 1:3) He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you. (Romans 8:31) And to tell you that I am not counting your sins. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19) Jesus died so that you and I could be reconciled. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19) His death was the ultimate expression of my love for you. (1 John 4:10) I gave up everything I loved that I might gain your love. (Romans 8:31-32) If you receive the gift of my son Jesus, you receive me. (1 John 2:23) And nothing will ever separate you from my love again. (Romans 8:38-39)

Come home and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen. (Luke 15:7) I have always been Father, and will always be Father. (Ephesians 3:14-15) My question is...Will you be my child? (John 1:12-13) I am waiting for you. (Luke 15:11-32)

With Love,  
Your Daddy, God

## Letter from God (no scriptural references)

My Child,

You may not know me, but I know everything about you. I know when you sit down and when you rise up. I am familiar with all your ways. Even the very hairs on your head are numbered. For you were made in my image. In me you live and move and have your being. For you are my offspring. I knew you even before you were conceived. I chose you when I planned creation. You were not a mistake, for all your days are written in my book. I determined the exact time of your birth and where you would live. (Acts 17:26) You are fearfully and wonderfully made. I knit you together in your mother's womb. And brought you forth on the day you were born.

I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me. I am not distant and angry, but am the complete expression of love. And it is my desire to lavish my love on you. Simply because you are my child and I am your Father. I offer you more than your earthly father ever could. For I am the perfect father. Every good gift that you receive comes from my hand. For I am your provider and I meet all your needs. My plan for your future has always been filled with hope. Because I love you with an everlasting love.

My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore. And I rejoice over you with singing. I will never stop doing good to you. For you are my treasured possession. I desire to establish you with all my heart and all my soul. And I want to show you great and marvelous things. If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me. Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart. For it is I who gave you those desires. I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine. For I am your greatest encourager.

I am also the Father who comforts you in all your troubles. When you are brokenhearted, I am close to you. As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart. One day I will wipe away every tear from your eyes. And I'll take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth. I am your Father, and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus. For in Jesus, my love for you is revealed. He is the exact representation of my being. He came to demonstrate that I am for you, not against you. And to tell you that I am not counting your sins. Jesus died so that you and I could be reconciled. His death was the ultimate expression of my love for you. I gave up everything I loved that I might gain your love. If you receive the gift of my son Jesus, you receive me. And nothing will ever separate you from my love again.

Come home and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen. I have always been Father, and will always be Father. My question is... Will you be my child? I am waiting for you!

With Love,  
Your Daddy, God

## **H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS**

Play the game of Eye-spy. When it is your turn to spy something, pick something hard for them to find. Keep them guessing for a while. Talk to them about what it was like trying to guess what they were looking for. Relate this exercise to the parable of the Lost Sheep. God is going to keep looking for you until God finds you. God loves you so much that God will never stop looking until God finds you.

## **I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS**

Talk about what keeps us from experiencing God's love. Is there something in our life that we are ashamed to take before God? This can be a time for healing for many of the students. If there is something they feel that keeping a barrier between them and God, help them to put that into a prayer. Allow them the opportunity to give that to God so that they can begin to experience God's love more fully.

## **J. STAFF STUDY**

### **Something to ponder**

In his teens, George Matheson's eyesight began to fail him. This made studying in college and later seminary very difficult. He was completely blind by the time he graduated from seminary. Because of his loss of sight, his fiancée gave back her engagement ring and called off the relationship. Matheson enjoyed a full career as a pastor, but he suffered from a

broken heart. Reflecting on God's love he wrote this hymn: "O love that wilt not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be."

Is there something your soul is holding onto that is keeping you from experiencing God's full and deep love?

Is there something that may be holding you back from being able to share God's full and deep love with others? Sometimes the hardest thing about the experiencing God's love is, as simple as allowing ourselves to be loved.

## **K. PARENT DEVOTIONAL**

### **Activity**

Hide something (a piece of candy, money, child's favorite toy...) and have the kids search for it before reading Luke 15:1-7

### **Text for the Day**

Luke 15:1-7

### **Reflection**

In today's study, we talked about how immense God's love is for us and how much God wants to be in relationship with us. It's hard for us to even fathom how huge God's love really is. But God showed his love for us in the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus for each of us for our salvation. God wants to talk with us daily and to build our relationship with him. And God will pursue and chase and will be willing to come and find us when we stray.

If we are honest with ourselves we are sinners and are not worthy of God. So when it comes to prayer, why would God listen to us? The answer becomes clear as we study the parable of the Lost Sheep. God wants to have a relationship with us. We are God's children and God loves us. Just like the shepherd cared enough to risk everything to go out and bring his lost sheep back, God seeks to bring us back as lost children. God listens to our prayers because God loves us so deeply.

### **Prayer**

God our shepherd and daddy, thank you for being more willing to listen to us than we are to pray. You have made it simple for us to love you because of the love that you have first given us. In your merciful loving name we pray, Amen.

## 2011 RTLC SUMMER BIBLE STUDY DAY 2

# Does Prayer Change God? Or Does Prayer Change Us?

### A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

What does prayer accomplish? Do our prayers change the will and mind of God? Are we bold enough to imagine that God wants our help in figuring out what to do? Conversely, does God have a master plan for our lives? Are the events and circumstances of our experiences already mapped out in such a way that our prayers can't make a difference? Or is God's will so profound, that nothing we contribute could ever shift it?

These are questions that people of all ages have asked. There is scriptural support for the claim that our prayers can change God's mind. There is scriptural support for the claim that God's plan is in place, and that our praying has more of an impact on us than on God.

Today we will study two texts that inform our understanding of prayer: In Genesis 18, Father Abraham convinces God to spare the city of Sodom if ten righteous people can be found there. In Matthew 26, Jesus asks God to spare him from the cross, but is willing to stay the course if God's will requires it.

So which is it? Do our fervent prayers have the capacity to change God's mind? Or is God's will solidly in place, and our praying is one way to line up our will with God's will?

### B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

1. Participants will explore these two seemingly contradictory notions about prayer.
2. Participants will examine an example of one whose prayers changed the mind of God (Abraham), and one who was willing to put his own desires aside and submit to God's will (Jesus).
3. Participants will consider the possibility that if prayer is an expression of our relationship with God, then sharing our deepest concerns and desires with God will affect both sides of that relationship: God will respond to our prayers in concrete ways, and offering our hearts to God in prayer will shape the way we think about what concerns us most.
4. Lutherans are fond of holding theological and philosophical concepts in tension (Jesus is fully human and fully divine; God is three and God is one; God is immanent and God is transcendent; humans are simultaneously sinner and saint; God is a God of justice and a God of mercy...). There is value in holding these concepts in tension, without attempting to resolve them artificially. Considering (but not resolving) the question as to whether prayer changes God or the one who prays, creates the possibility for us to have a deeper, more profound understanding and experience of how God meets us in prayer.
5. Participants will consider that a path towards understanding these two notions may be found in St. Matthew 18:15-20. Jesus teaches that, "if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, It will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." What prayers are granted by God? Prayers that are grounded in the hopes and dreams and desires shared between two or three believers and God.

### C. MORNING WATCH

Morning Watch will focus on five different prayer disciplines. Each morning camper representatives from each village will meet to decide which discipline their village wants to focus on that morning. The disciplines to choose from are:

1. Prayer Labyrinth
2. Prayer Journaling
3. Breath In, Breath Out, Say Thank You Centering Prayer
4. Prayer Bracelets/Prayers Cords/Prayer Knots/ Prayer Flags

5. Stretching Prayer
6. Prayer Stations
7. Prayer Partners

## D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

### **For the Bible Study Leader**

This study will focus on three Bible passages. Genesis 18:20-33 presents Father Abraham who, when he learned that God was about to destroy the city of Sodom because of their wickedness, argued with God until God agreed to spare the city if ten righteous citizens could be found. St. Matthew 26:36-46 presents Jesus, who prayed during the last week of his life that God might “take this cup away from him” – a prayer that ended with these words: “yet not what I want, but what you want.” St. Matthew 18:15-20 suggests that God answers prayers when two or three believers (and Jesus) agree on what they are requesting.

### **Warm Up**

It is early in the week, and most of our campers don’t know each other very well. That makes this an important time to work on building a sense of community in our cabin group. Start by checking in with one another. Use one of these devices (or something similar that you prefer).

1. **Highs and Lows:** Have campers pair up, and share a high and low with each other. Then give them each a couple minutes to share with the rest of the group the highs and lows they heard from their partner. Close with a prayer that names some of the highs and lows that have been shared.
2. **What Did You Notice:** We have spent two days together in camp so far, and today we have been with each other hiking for most of the day. Have each camper share something positive that they have noticed this week about another camper in the cabin group.
3. **Where Have You Seen God:** The campers just spent the day hiking. They saw beautiful landscapes. They watched communities of hikers work together to accomplish a goal. Where did they see God involved in all of this? Each one can share an insight or two.

### **Review**

Remind the campers that this week’s study is about prayer. Prayer is a central aspect of our relationship with God. Yesterday we discussed the relationship we have with God – a relationship that begins with God’s love for us. Give the campers a few minutes to reflect on some of these questions:

1. Do you have any relationships in your life that began with love?
2. Have you experienced a relationship where someone loved (or loves) you so much, that this love became the heart of the relationship?
3. Have you experienced what it is like to trust another person completely – even to the point of talking about what you wish was different in life, or in your relationship?

That’s the kind of relationship we have with God. We are fortunate to have a God who loves us enough to listen to our prayers at any time, and from any place.

### **Types of Prayer**

Share with your campers that there are a variety of types of prayers that believers offer to God. A healthy and balanced prayer life is not one that only asks God for help. In order to accomplish this, some believers organize themselves around the ACTS principle, which describes four distinct types of prayer (to extend this introduction, you may want to ask your campers to offer examples of each of these kinds of prayers, or to write out prayers of these types, to be used in closing prayer at the end of the Bible study). If you are gathering outside, you might trace the four letters A, C, T and S in the dirt. If you are gathering inside, you might prepare a poster that has these four letters on it. Then describe for your campers each of the four types of prayer (use these words, or your own).

1. **Adoration:** Prayers where we adore God are important for us: You are so great. You are so mighty. You are so loving. You are so gracious. These prayers are like love letters. Their only purpose is to communicate with the other how we feel. We adore God, and a balanced prayer life includes prayers of adoration.

2. **Confession:** Honesty stands at the heart of a healthy and balanced prayer life. We don't make our prayer of confession only on Sunday morning with the congregation. Every time we turn to God, we begin with humility, and confess that we are not the people God has called us to be.
3. **Thanksgiving:** There is much in our life that causes us to be thankful (including the forgiveness God grants us every time we confess our sin). A healthy and balanced prayer life shares with God those things that make our hearts sing. We remember the positive impact God has had on our lives, and we are thankful.
4. **Supplication:** The most common type of prayer, when we ask God for something (these prayers are also known as prayers of intercession). Sometimes we ask for ourselves. Sometimes we ask for others. We remember that God has invited us to ask, and promised that we will receive. A healthy and balanced prayer life includes prayers of supplication.

Inform your campers that today's study is going to focus on prayers of supplication. What happens when we ask God for something? Do our prayers change God's mind? Do our prayers change God's plan? Or is prayer a way that we try to connect with the mind of God, so that we begin to hope for what God wants? These are the questions that we'll focus on today.

### **Prayer that Changes God's Mind**

Prayer, most simply put, is conversation with God. In Genesis 18, Abraham has a conversation with God in which Abraham intercedes on the behalf of others. Before we listen to this story, let's ask some questions about Abraham's relationship with God.

1. Abraham is nearly 100 years old in this passage, and has been praying to / speaking with God for most of his life – what do you think his relationship with God is like at this time? (*They have grown closer over the years. They have come to trust one another. They have come to understand each other's mind.*)
2. What has God done for Abraham over the years – do you remember anything from his story in the Bible? (*God promised to make him a great nation. God called him to leave his home, and follow. God helped Abraham to become fabulously wealthy. God promised him he would have many descendants.*)
3. Do you think there is anything that Abraham believed he couldn't say to God at this point? (*Probably not.*)
4. Do you think Abraham knows God (and God's mind) by this point? (*Possibly better than anyone else ever has. That's what happens when two people are in a long, close relationship.*)

Now let's have someone read Genesis 18:21-33.

<sup>18:21</sup> Then the LORD said, "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! <sup>21</sup> I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know."

<sup>22</sup> So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham came near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? <sup>25</sup> Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" <sup>26</sup> And the LORD said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake." <sup>27</sup> Abraham answered, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. <sup>28</sup> Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." <sup>29</sup> Again he spoke to him, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." <sup>30</sup> Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." <sup>31</sup> He said, "Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." <sup>32</sup> Then he said, "Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." <sup>33</sup> And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. [Genesis 18:21-33]

Provide some background for your campers, using words like these: In this passage, God appears to Abraham and Sarah in the form of three travelers (they are on their way to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because the sin of the people in those cities is "very grave"). They announce to Abraham and Sarah that they will have a child in their old age – a son who will be the answer to their prayers, and a sign of God's intent to fulfill the promise made to Abraham long ago. The three men set out for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and God decides to reveal to Abraham what is about to happen. Abraham is immediately concerned, and begins to argue with God. Have the campers spend some time with some of these questions:

1. Why does God tell Abraham what is about to take place? (*God is going to make a great new beginning with Abraham, and doesn't want to leave him in the dark about what is taking place.*)
2. What does God hope will happen for Abraham and his family if he knows what is going to take place in these cities and why? (*It will deepen the sense of partnership between God and Abraham. It will help Abraham to understand how important faithfulness is to God. At the very least, it will convince Abraham and his family to stay away from these cities while God destroys them.*)
3. Why is God so angry with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah? (*Their sin is not specified at any time in the Bible, but their sin has deeply offended God.*)
4. Have we read other stories about God becoming this angry? (*Noah, Tower of Babel*)
5. How serious do they think God was about destroying these cities? (*Quite serious!*)
6. Why was Abraham so concerned with the people who lived there? (*Primarily because his nephew, Lot, lived there with his family.*)
7. Why was Abraham unafraid (although cautiously polite) to argue with God? (*Perhaps because they had built up a relationship over nearly 100 years that caused Abraham both to trust God, and to know what was important to God. Abraham might have been worried that God was about to do something that would be inconsistent with what God has stood for in the past.*)
8. Does it seem that Abraham believes that it is possible to change God's mind? (*Yes: he seems determined to do so. He persists, until he prevails.*)

Some think of this exchange as a prayer. Others think of it as a face-to-face conversation between Abraham and God. What it reveals, is that through the relationship which had developed between Abraham and God, Abraham found himself in a position to change God's mind about destroying every person in Sodom and Gomorra. He was determined, and persistent, and he succeeded in doing so.

#### **Note to Bible Study Leaders**

*It has been assumed by many that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah angered God by committing sexual sin. The text does not necessarily support this notion (nor does it negate it). God has already decided to destroy the city before the three men end up in Lot's home. We never learn why. After they arrive, the people of the town want them brought out of Lot's home so they can "know them" (v. 19:4 – a Biblical euphemism for sexual activity). The intent of Lot (19:8) seems equally offensive to us: he is willing to give the crowd his two virgin daughters, so the crowd can do as they please to them instead, if they will agree to leave his guests alone. God saves Lot, so perhaps this story isn't about sexual immorality. Nevertheless, don't let the conversation about this text focus on Sodom and Gomorrah or the nature of their sin. The point is to observe the conversation between Abraham and God.*

#### **Prayer that Changes Our Mind**

That was a story about a time when someone's petitions changed God's mind. Let's take a look at a story where the exact opposite happened. This one takes place during the last week of Jesus' life.

<sup>26:36</sup> Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."<sup>37</sup> He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated.<sup>38</sup> Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me."<sup>39</sup> And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."<sup>40</sup> Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?"<sup>41</sup> Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."<sup>42</sup> Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."<sup>43</sup> Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.<sup>44</sup> So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.<sup>45</sup> Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."<sup>46</sup> Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand." [St. Matthew 26:36-46]

In some ways, this is a surprising story. Jesus, who seems to have known God's will from the beginning, prays that God might release him from his destiny on the cross.

1. Take a close look at the passage in your Bibles. What are the three prayers that Jesus offers to God? (*1. That he be allowed to pass on the cross, but only if it is God's will. 2. That if it is necessary, God's will might be done. 3. "saying the same words"*)

2. What does this prayer tell us about what Jesus is thinking and feeling? (*Jesus doesn't want to go to the cross. But even more so, Jesus is more interested in what God wants, and is willing to do whatever God's will might be.*)
3. Does this prayer change God's mind or God's plan? (*No. Jesus still dies on the cross. The Bible describes this event as being exactly what had to happen, if the entire world was going to receive redemption. Jesus leaves the garden, and goes to his fate. It seems as though he came to understand that this is what God needed him to do.*)
4. How can we know God's will, so that our prayers will be more effective? (*Ultimately, we can't – even Jesus can't, and he is God. We are called to spend a lifetime exploring God's word, and the better we know God's word, the more likely we are to glimpse God's will. This is more than enough reason to spend time every day reading the Bible, and reflecting on what we know about God. But God's will is always shrouded in mystery. When we pray, we pray with a certain humility, never imagining that we know God's will, but only hoping that our will begins to more and more line up with what we know about God.*)

### **Summary**

The combination of these two texts suggests that there are times when we can change God's mind, and there are times when it is necessary for us to be willing to line up with God's will. Have the campers consider some of these questions:

1. How do we understand whether our prayer(s) changes God or changes us?
2. Is it even possible for us to understand which it is?
3. Is there so much mystery in our relationship with God that we simply offer God our hopes and concerns, and open our hearts for God's response?

### **The Counsel of Jesus (a Final Text)**

An interesting text, as we are considering when we can influence God and when we need to be changed by God's will, is found in Matthew 18. Jesus is giving counsel to his followers about what to do when one church member sins against another. He outlines a process whereby believers can confront sin, and work towards reconciliation. Then he refers to what happens when we ask God for anything. Have someone read verses 15-20.

<sup>18:15</sup> “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. <sup>16</sup> But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. <sup>18</sup> Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. <sup>19</sup> Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” [St. Matthew 18:15-20]

Jesus doesn't define a program that will determine which prayers change God and which prayers change us. But he leads us in the direction of an answer. Have the campers consider some of these questions:

1. Does Jesus say that anything we ask for will be granted? (*No: it takes more than one person to give birth to a prayer that will be answered: one person's needs or one person's wants are not always enough to sway God.*)
2. Who must participate in the asking? (*Campers will probably answer, “Two or three believers.” Have them read verses 19-20. Tell them that the answer is not found just in verse 19. What Jesus seems to be saying here is that when two or three are “gathered in his name” their prayers will be granted. His presence shapes the prayers we offer to God. Perhaps prayers that aren't answered are prayers that Jesus doesn't participate with us in praying.*)
3. What does it mean to pray, gathered in Jesus name? (*It means to know that he is with us. It means to study his life and his teachings, and try to understand what is most important to him – and then pray with that in mind. It means to search the whole Bible for what it says about God's nature and God's actions, and pray in ways that are consistent with what we learn about God. It means to wonder what Jesus would pray about, and keep that at the center of our own prayers.*)

### **Prayer Yell**

As an exercise, have the campers consider these requests. Have them yell “yes” if they think it is something that two or three believers *and* Jesus would ask. Have them yell “no” if they think it is something that two or three believers *and* Jesus would not ask.

God, please let there be peace in the world.

God, please bless medical workers who battle disease around the world.

God, please let me win the lottery.  
God, please help my pastor be a strong, faithful preacher.  
God, please help our team win the big game.  
God, please let that cute boy/girl notice me.  
God, please let people's hearts be transformed in this camp.  
God, please help me to know your will for me.  
God, please let me pass this test (even though I didn't study very much).  
[Add as many as you want.]  
[an additional option would be to allow campers to try out their own prayers out-loud]

### **Another Summary**

Some prayers clearly are not prayers we could imagine Jesus joining us in praying. Others are. Yet there are many that lie somewhere in between. Is it God's will that an aging loved one reaches the end of life's journey, or is that a situation where our prayers can change God's mind? Is it God's will that the dream job I have in mind is not the best fit for me, or is that a situation where my prayers can change God's mind? Praying with Jesus in mind shapes our prayers, and if we imagine that he is sitting right next to us, praying with us, it will change how we pray. But as much fun as it might be to yell out "yes" or "no" to obvious petitions, there are some times when we just have to pray as Jesus did: "This is what I want, but your will be done."

### **Closing Prayer**

If your campers wrote ACTS prayers at the beginning of the study, have the campers pray these prayers out loud now, as your time together comes to a close. Otherwise, go around the circle, and have each person offer something that they imagine Jesus would want to pray along with them.

## **E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS**

**Quotable Quotes:** what do these quotes say about prayer? Yesterday we discussed what it means that God wants to be in relationship with us. Read some of the quotes, and invite campers to first share what these quotes say to us about friendships. Then, have them discuss how these quotes might apply to an understanding of prayer, and our relationship with God. If there are other dynamics of prayer you want your campers to discuss, you might create your own quotable quotes.

### **In prayer, God offers to be in a "two-way relationship" with us.**

"My friend is always willing to spend time with me, whether I am happy or sad."  
"I don't ever have to be fake with my friend – I can always be myself – just who I am."  
"We don't always agree perfectly, but we are definitely friends for life, no matter what comes."

### **In prayer, God wants to hear about what is most important to us.**

"My friend really pays attention. She'll remember, like a week later, something I said to her."  
"I have a friend who will drop everything and come, if I ever need to talk."

### **In prayer, God helps us sort out our own priorities.**

"A lot of times I know what I want to do, I just need a friend to help me discover what it is."

### **In prayer, God enters into our life's journey, and stays close to us.**

"I remember one night when I was scared, and my friend sat with me for hours."  
"We've been going to the same school for the whole time we've been in school."  
"I was so close to giving up, and my friend said he'd stick with it too, if I would."  
"We've been through so much together. It's like we're the same person."

## **F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY**

### **Tug-of-War**

Have cabin groups participate in a tug-of-war with other cabins. After the competition, have the two cabins sit in a circle and talk about whether or not prayer seems like a tug of war between God's will and ours. What happens in a tug-of-war

when one party is much stronger than the other? Does God pull us sometimes? Do we pull God sometimes? Does God let us pull some times? Does God let us win some times?

### **Service of Prayer**

Hold a service of prayer. Invite campers to write a variety of prayers (remember ACTS), and intersperse these prayers with songs and periods of silence. Teach campers that there don't always have to be lessons and messages and Eucharist for it to be a genuine Christian worship service. After the service, have campers discuss with one another what the experience was like.

1. What was it like to have a service that wasn't guided step-by-step by worship leaders?
2. Were we able to stay focused on the prayers we wanted to bring to God?
3. Did our minds wander more than usual?
4. How might we learn to stay more focused in prayer?

## **G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES, THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Songs from the Camp Song Sheet**

Borning Cry	In The Secret
Friends	Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying
Here I Am, Lord	Seek Ye First

### **Other New Songs (list titles and source)**

O Lord Hear My Prayer	What a Friend We Have in Jesus
Down to the River to Pray	

### **Additional Scriptures**

Exodus 32:7-14 - *Moses convinces the Lord not to destroy Israel*  
St. Matthew 6:5-13 - *Do not heap up empty phrases, but bray in this way (the Lord's Prayer)*  
St. Matthew 7:7-11 - *Ask and it will be given; search and you will find; knock and it will be opened*  
St. Matthew 21:18-22 - *If you have faith and do not doubt, your prayers can move mountains*

## **H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS**

### **Our Parents' Will**

Talk with the campers about a time when they disagreed with what their parents wanted (*staying overnight at someone's house, owning a cell phone, staying up later than curfew, purchasing games or movies that are rated for older ages, riding a skateboard without a helmet...*).

1. Were there times when we helped our parents understand something they were missing?
2. Were there times when our parents knew more than we did?
3. When we disagreed, were our parents just being mean? Or were they doing what they thought was best for us?
4. Are there some similarities between making requests of our parents, and offering prayers to God?

### **Role Play**

Have three campers play (together) the role of God, and have the others play (together) the role of someone praying. The ones praying can huddle and come up with a list of prayers they'd like to offer to God. They can then pray the prayers out loud, one at a time, and the three campers playing God can put their heads together and decide how God might answer the prayers. (*The intent is for the campers to determine the content of the prayers, so that the conversation can be around the kinds of prayers that they, themselves, might actually pray.*)

## **I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGH**

### **Answer or Coincidence**

There is a certain degree of comfort that comes from believing that God has a hand in everything that happens – and that specific experiences of life are the answer to prayer. At the same time, there is no reliable method of measuring whether good fortune is coincidence or answer to prayer. Have these older campers consider some of these questions:

1. What are the dangers in believing that every good thing is an answer to prayer?
2. What are the dangers in doubting that any good thing is an answer to prayer?

3. How can we have the faith to believe that God answers our prayers, yet the humility to realize that we often don't know exactly what God's will is?
4. Are there other people who can help us better understand whether our prayers are faithful, or whether experiences we have are God's answer?

### **Prayer Journal**

It is easy to lose track of the prayers we've shared with God, and how the situation that concerned us turned out. Talk as a group about the value of creating a prayer journal. Using a notebook, or a computer, or a personal digital assistant, write down every specific prayer that you offer to God. When you think you may have received an answer, write that down adjacent to your prayer. Review your journal every month, to remind yourself of those issues you've shared with God, and how God has been a part of what happened.

## **J. STAFF STUDY**

### **A Difficult Example**

While working on this study, the author received word that a dear friend's elderly mother had been diagnosed with lung cancer. This exchange ensued.

□

February 1, 2011

Hay, Bro D -

"We are called to make a difference. The grace of God frees us from worrying about our salvation, in order to free us up to make a difference"

Nice work. Has to be right. You agree with me.

May you and your beloved ones (of whom there are wads, I know) be well and happy. If it occurs to you, please remember my old mom in your prayers. She has lung cancer, a nodule discovered accidentally when she was in the hospital being diagnosed with colitis a few months back. It has doubled in size in four months, and a biopsy showed it malignant. We've now had her in for a PET scan and a breathing test, the latter to see if she has the breathing capacity to stand the removal of a lobe, if that's indicated. She's 89, a person of faith, courageous and not in pain. She'd like to get this out if it can be done. We'll learn more tomorrow.

We pray that God's will be done, that we're bright enough to recognize it and tough enough to do our part. And if it coincides with my specific desires, so much the better. "Father, if you be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless...". Eek. Big nevertheless.

Stay of good cheer,

Ken

□

February 2, 2011

Thanks for your kind words about my message. In ministry, you never have an absolute sense for what you're accomplishing, or whether or not a point-of-view you adopt is correct. Now I have the answer: if Ken agrees, I'm right. You can't even begin to imagine how much uncertainty that takes away from my life. I feel like a completely different person. Thanks for that.

I'm sure sorry to hear about your mom. (Surprised, of course, that a guy as ancient as you still has a mom to care about, but pleased at the possibility that you've inherited the long-life gene, and that we'll have to put up with you for a good number of decades to come...) I'll sure be remembering her in my prayers. If you'd be kind enough to offer us her first name, we'd be happy to invite the whole congregation to join you. It's amazing what God can do with people who have both faith and courage. We'll pray that there is an opening there.

I liked your last paragraph a lot. I'm in the middle of writing (with four other Pastors) a Bible study that will be used by 3,000 summer camp students this year. The theme assigned to me is, "Does Prayer Change God? Or Does Prayer Change Us?" The answers, of course, are yes and yes. But I'm using Genesis 18:20-33 (where Abraham changes God's mind) and Matthew 26:36-46 (which you've so aptly excerpted) to suggest that the Bible doesn't present a way to turn God into a cosmic vending machine. When we pray about something that concerns us, we enter into a journey of searching our own hearts, and wrestling with what we know about God, and acknowledging that there are neither any easy answers about what God will or won't do, nor any sure way to be absolutely certain that what results is answer or coincidence. I'm starting to see a way to invite our High School participants into that conversation, but still completely at a loss with how to approach it with second graders. You might think to remember me in your prayers too. <g>

At any rate, all that philosophical dribble aside, what you're faced with is an ailing mother you love dearly, and a loving God who invites you to entrust your mom to a sacred grace and mercy. I'll pray that God might help you to do that. And then when I'm done, I'll pray that your mother is healed of this damned cancer. We'll leave it to God to determine whether or not that final prayer is faithful or wise.

Always good to be in touch. Let me know how your mom is doing, when you get the chance. We'll hope for the best.

Peace,

Dave

actual e-mail messages; shared with the authors' permissions

The author of the original e-mail message makes two astute comments:

1. "We pray that God's will be done, that we're bright enough to recognize it and tough enough to do our part."
2. "And if it coincides with my specific desires, so much the better."

Some questions to consider as we reflect on this note:

1. What do these two comments teach us about his understanding of prayer?
2. How does the writer understand the role believers play when they ask God for help?
3. Does he sound more like Abraham in Genesis 18, or like Jesus in Matthew 26?
4. What difference do you think the writer's prayers made (for him, or for God)?

The author of the response offers two distinct comments:

1. "... a loving God who invites you to entrust your mom to a sacred grace and mercy. I'll pray that God might help you to do that"
2. "And then when I'm done, I'll pray that your mother is healed of this damned cancer. We'll leave it to God to determine whether or not that final prayer is faithful or wise."

Some questions to consider as we reflect on this note:

1. Do you think these two responses are inconsistent with one another?
2. Is it harder to trust God than to make a specific recommendation as to what God should do?
3. Is it appropriate to pray for the solution we prefer?
4. Do you think the response was helpful to the writer of the original note?
5. The final petition includes a profane phrase; do you think this offends God, or helps to clearly communicate the distress this person wants God to touch?

## **K. PARENT DEVOTIONAL**

### **Text for the Day**

St. Matthew 26:36-46

### **Reflection**

Today we consider the specific prayers we offer to God. What does prayer accomplish? Do our prayers change the will and mind of God? Are we bold enough to imagine that God wants our help in figuring out what to do? Conversely, does God have a master plan for our lives? Are the events and circumstances of our experiences already mapped out in such a way that our prayers can't make a difference? Or is God's will so profound, that nothing we contribute could ever shift it? These are questions that people of all ages have asked. There is scriptural support for the claim that our prayers can change God's mind. There is scriptural support for the claim that God's plan is in place, and that our praying has more of an impact on us than on God. Today we study two texts that inform our understanding of prayer: In Genesis 18, Father Abraham convinces God to spare the city of Sodom if ten righteous people can be found there. In Matthew 26, Jesus asks God to spare him from the cross, but is willing to stay the course if God's will requires it. So which is it? Do our fervent prayers have the capacity to change God's mind? Or is God's will solidly in place, and our praying is one way to line up our wills with God's will?

It may be that the beginning of an answer can be found in St. Matthew 18:19-20. Here Jesus promises that if two believers agree on a prayer, God will grant their request. He also teaches that wherever two or three are gathered in his name, he is there among them. That is significant: his presence affects their prayers, making it more likely that they become requests that God desires to grant.

### **Activity**

Have the family create its own on-going prayer list. They might include prayers they have lifted up as a family in the past (and whether or not they perceived an answer from God), prayers that are currently on their minds, and make plans to add to their family prayer list as future needs become known. Periodically review the prayer list, to be reminded of their desire to entrust all of life to God.

### **Closing Prayer**

Dear God, we thank you that you love us with such a profound love, and that you promise to hear every prayer that we offer to you. Help us to be faithful and wise in the ways that we pray. Help us to be insightful and open-hearted as we wait expectantly for you to answer. Help us to be trusting and humble in those situations where your will might lead us in a new direction. Most of all, grant us the grace to entrust all of our lives to your loving care. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

# The Situation Is Impossible, So Why Should I Even Pray? Or KEEP...KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCKIN' ON HEAVEN'S DOOR "Persistence in Prayer"

## A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

There is so much sadness and suffering in the world. We often pray and get no answers or the answers we get are not the answers we are looking for. A family member is suffering from cancer and we want them healed. A friend has found out that their parents are getting divorced and that means your best friend is moving away. Your grandma is suffering from Alzheimer's and doesn't even know who you are anymore. You pray and pray for God to rectify all these situations, but God does not.

What's the point of continued prayer if God doesn't answer your prayers? There are plenty of biblical characters that suffered, continued to ask for relief from suffering but didn't receive it. What kept them in their relationship with God? Moses suffered and after a long, long walk with his friends in the Wilderness wasn't even allowed to enter the Promised Land. He worked hard to keep his people in a relationship with God, pleading with God to forgive them for being silly and for not obeying. Ultimately they entered the land they had been promised by God, but Moses didn't. What's that about?

What about Job and his endless and seemingly senseless suffering? He wailed and railed against God but his suffering didn't stop. That's what I'm talkin' about! I've got to wonder what kept him coming back for more...kept him in conversation with God? I think that the alternative seemed dark to him...walking away rather than staying in the relationship wasn't a viable alternative. It's like choosing to leave the only home you know...it's not a great home sometimes...but it's all you know and in that home you stay warm and dry...but you choose to leave anyway because it isn't exactly what you think it should be.

Staying in relationship with God is better than any alternative the world offers. And praying, even if you don't get all the answers you want the way you want them, is dramatically better than walking away. God's love for you is deep and unconditional. Living into that love even if it doesn't bless you as you think it should, is vastly better than the ways of the world.

Job was persistent. Moses was persistent. Jesus was persistent even though he succumbed to the cross. An interesting New Testament word stands behind the concept. *proskartereo* may be translated "to persist," or sometimes "to be devoted to" or "to focus on." We find the word here and there throughout the New Testament, often associated with prayer. A good example is found in Colossians 4:2 where Paul exhorts the sisters and brothers to "Be persistent in prayer."

Jesus, too, taught his disciples to pray with persistence. He illustrates the idea with the story of a neighbor who rises at midnight to ask his friend for a loaf of bread. "I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs" (Luke 11:8; see a similar story in chapter 18). Here Jesus illustrates persistence in prayer. In the very next verse, he commands the disciples: "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you" (Luke 11:9). They are to ask with persistent demand. They are to seek with insistent focus. They are to arise in the middle of the night and knock with bold persistence until they get an answer.

The disciples must have taken the lesson to heart. We later find the New Testament church "constantly devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14, cf. 2:42). "We, for our part," reported the disciples, "will devote ourselves to prayer" (Acts 6:4). And Paul exhorts the emerging church, "Persevere in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

In the New Testament Dictionary by Gerhard Kittel we read these comments: "In *proskartereo* [we find an] important aspect of the vitality and power of the New Testament church...that is, prayer. Prayer, which has its roots deep in the life and power of God, knits the church together with a firm bond. It is not just a pious discipline but serious work which demands perseverance" (Kittel, ed. Bromiley, p.417f.). (Taken from the World Mission Prayer League website written by Lindquist)

## B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

1. To teach/lead campers to understand that even if prayers are not answered the way they think they should be, a relationship with God means continuing to trust and remain faithful.
2. Encourage campers to comprehend that a relationship with God is better than any possible alternative in the world.
3. Help campers learn that persistence in prayer keeps us close to God.
4. Encourage campers to see the bigger picture; that unanswered prayer and personal suffering doesn't always lead to darkness but instead leads to a more mature Christian faith and a deeper friendship with God.
5. Give campers insight into the life of a Biblical Character named Job who struggled with personal suffering and unanswered prayer and yet remained faithful to and in relationship with God.
6. Introduce campers to a true story of suffering and hope.

## C. MORNING WATCH

Morning Watch will focus on five different prayer disciplines. Each morning camper representatives from each village will meet to decide which discipline their village wants to focus on that morning. The disciplines to choose from are:

1. Prayer Labyrinth
2. Prayer Journaling
3. Breath In, Breath Out, Say Thank You Centering Prayer
4. Prayer Bracelets/Prayers Cords/Prayer Knots/ Prayer Flags
5. Stretching Prayer
6. Prayer Stations
7. Prayer Partners

## D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

### **Job's suffering...God's response...Not exactly an easy row to hoe!**

It is difficult to choose just one section of the book of Job for this study. Frankly, all 42 chapters tell the story of an upright man and a lover of God who encounters difficulty and suffers. It will be important for you to understand the book of Job and be familiar with the whole story rather than just specific verses.

Job debates with God and his friends for 34 chapters of the 42 chapters of Job. Although Job's "comforters" reach wrong conclusions, they are his friends: of all who know Job, they are the only ones who come; they mourn with him in seven days of silent sympathy; they confront Job without talking behind his back. However, after Job breaks the silence, a three-round debate follows in which his friends say Job must be suffering because of his sin. Job's responses to their simplistic assumptions make the debate cycles increase in emotional fervor. He first accuses his friends of judging him, and later appeals to the Lord as his judge and refuge.

Job makes three basic complaints: (1) God does not hear me (13:3, 24; 19:7; 23:3-5; 30:20); (2) God is punishing me (6:4; 7:20; 9:17); and (3) God allows the wicked to prosper (21:7). His defenses are much longer than his friends' accusations; in the process of defending his innocence, he becomes guilty of self-righteousness.

After Job's five-chapter closing monologue (27—31), Elihu freshens the air with a more perceptive and accurate view than those offered by Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar (32—37). He tells Job that he needs to humble himself before God and submit to God's process of purifying his life through trials.

**Below is a summary of the book. Read it and commit the story's premise to memory. Then re-tell the story to your campers.**

Job is a wealthy man living in a land called Uz with his large family and extensive flocks. He is "blameless" and "upright," always careful to avoid doing evil (1:1). One day, Satan ("the Adversary") appears before God in heaven. God boasts to Satan about Job's goodness, but Satan argues that Job is only good because God has blessed

him abundantly. Satan challenges God that, if given permission to punish the man, Job will turn and curse God. God allows Satan to torment Job to test this bold claim, but he forbids Satan to take Job's life in the process.

In the course of one day, Job receives four messages, each bearing separate news that his livestock, servants, and ten children have all died due to marauding invaders or natural catastrophes. Job tears his clothes and shaves his head in mourning, but he still blesses God in his prayers. Satan appears in heaven again, and God grants him another chance to test Job. This time, Job is afflicted with horrible skin sores. His wife encourages him to curse God and to give up and die, but Job refuses, struggling to accept his circumstances.

Three of Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, come to visit him, sitting with Job in silence for seven days out of respect for his mourning. On the seventh day, Job speaks, beginning a conversation in which each of the four men shares his thoughts on Job's afflictions in long, poetic statements.

Job curses the day he was born, comparing life and death to light and darkness. He wishes that his birth had been shrouded in darkness and longs to have never been born, feeling that light, or life, only intensifies his misery. Eliphaz responds that Job, who has comforted other people, now shows that he never really understood their pain. Eliphaz believes that Job's agony must be due to some sin Job has committed, and he urges Job to seek God's favor. Bildad and Zophar agree that Job must have committed evil to offend God's justice and argue that he should strive to exhibit more blameless behavior. Bildad surmises that Job's children brought their deaths upon themselves. Even worse, Zophar implies that whatever wrong Job has done probably deserves greater punishment than what he has received.

Job responds to each of these remarks, growing so irritated that he calls his friends "worthless physicians" who "whitewash [their advice] with lies" (13:4). After making pains to assert his blameless character, Job ponders man's relationship to God. He wonders why God judges people by their actions if God can just as easily alter or forgive their behavior. It is also unclear to Job how a human can appease or court God's justice. God is unseen, and his ways are inscrutable and beyond human understanding. Moreover, humans cannot possibly persuade God with their words. God cannot be deceived, and Job admits that he does not even understand himself well enough to effectively plead his case to God. Job wishes for someone who can mediate between himself and God, or for God to send him to Sheol, the deep place of the dead.

Job's friends are offended that he scorns their wisdom. They think his questions are crafty and lack an appropriate fear of God, and they use many analogies and metaphors to stress their ongoing point that nothing good comes of wickedness. Job sustains his confidence in spite of these criticisms, responding that even if he has done evil, it is his own personal problem. Furthermore, he believes that there is a "witness" or a "Redeemer" in heaven who will vouch for his innocence (16:19, 19:25). After a while, the upbraiding proves too much for Job, and he grows sarcastic, impatient, and afraid. He laments the injustice that God lets wicked people prosper while he and countless other innocent people suffer. Job wants to confront God and complain, but he cannot physically find God to do it. He feels that wisdom is hidden from human minds, but he resolves to persist in pursuing wisdom by fearing God and avoiding evil.

Without provocation, another friend, Elihu, suddenly enters the conversation. The young Elihu believes that Job has spent too much energy vindicating himself rather than God. Elihu explains to Job that God communicates with humans by two ways—visions and physical pain. He says that physical suffering provides the sufferer with an opportunity to realize God's love and forgiveness when he is well again, understanding that God has "ransomed" him from an impending death (33:24). Elihu also assumes that Job must be wicked to be suffering as he is, and he thinks that Job's excessive talking is an act of rebellion against God.

God finally interrupts, calling from a whirlwind and demanding Job to be brave and respond to his questions. God's questions are rhetorical, intending to show how little Job knows about creation and how much power God alone has. God describes many detailed aspects of his creation, praising especially his creation of two large beasts, the Behemoth and Leviathan. Overwhelmed by the encounter, Job acknowledges God's unlimited power and admits the limitations of his human knowledge. This response pleases God, but he is upset with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar for spouting poor and theologically unsound advice. Job intercedes on their behalf, and God forgives them. God returns Job's health, providing him with twice as much property as before, new children, and an extremely long life.

The interaction between Job and his friends illustrates the painful irony of his situation. Our knowledge that Job's punishment is the result of a contest between God and Satan contrasts with Job's confusion and his friends' lecturing, as they try to understand why Job is being punished. The premise of the friends' argument is that misfortune only follows from evil deeds. The three friends and Job have a serious theological conversation about a situation that actually is simply a game between God and Satan. The fault of Job and his friends lies in trying to explain the nature of God with only the limited information available to human knowledge, as God himself notes when he roars from the whirlwind, "Who is this that darkness counsel / by words without / knowledge?" (38:2).

The dominant theme of Job is the difficulty of understanding why an all-powerful God allows good people to suffer. Job wants to find a way to justify God's actions, but he cannot understand why there are evil people who "harm the childless woman, / and do no good to the widow," only to be rewarded with long, successful lives (24:21). God suggests that people should not discuss divine justice since God's power is so great that humans cannot possibly justify his ways.

For our study it is important not to get hung up on the theological discussion about suffering but instead highlight Job's faithfulness even in the midst of suffering, Job's "sticktuitive-ness" and persistence in the relationship between he and God manifested in the ongoing conversations the two have, and God's faithfulness to God's relationship to Job.

Prayer draws us deeper into a relationship with our Creator. Even though our prayers are not always answered as we expect or hope they would be, praying connects us and keeps us close even if God sometimes seems far away. It is no different than continuing conversation with a friend. Stop talking and the relationship becomes distant. Keep talking and the relationship stays strong and powerful.

**Let's begin our study with prayer and then break the ice with some questions about the camper's lives.**

### **Opening Prayer**

You are our Mighty God who has created us and all things. Sometimes though, you seem far away and not interested in what we have to say. Help us this day to understand that persistence and even nagging prayer keeps us close to you even if you answer our prayers differently than we hope and expect. Be with us in this study, guide my thoughts and give me wisdom as a counselor to bless these campers. Open their hearts to your Word. Amen.

### **Ice Breakers**

1. Remember a time in your life when you felt you needed something really badly from your Mom and Dad and so you begged and begged and begged for it. What was it? Did you finally get what you felt you needed? What's the difference between wanting something and needing something? How do you react to your Mom or Dad saying to you that what you think you need is not always what you, in reality, really need? Instead...it's what you want.
2. If you did get what you begged for, how did you feel about receiving it? You must have felt as though you were successful in your demands. If you didn't get what you wanted, how did that make you feel?
3. Unpack the following phrase with your campers..."If you love me, you'll give me what I want." Where have you heard that before? Has anyone ever said that to you? At one time in your life have you said that to someone or to God?

## **WITH YOUR CAMPERS, DISCOVER FIRST OF ALL THE KIND OF GUY JOB WAS**

### **Read Job 1:1-5**

What do these verses say about Job?

(he was blameless, faithful, rich, generous, and a deeply spiritual a man of complete integrity)

Then say: We can assume then that Job was someone in whom God was delighted. According to the first chapter of the Book of Job, Satan is patrolling the earth and comes upon this upright guy named Job. Consequently, Satan and God have a conversation about Job and Satan suggests that Job's life has been a piece of cake; never any calamity or suffering but prosperity and success. Satan claims that if he puts Job to the test with some serious suffering, he'll fall away from God. So...God says, go ahead, but don't hurt Job physically. So the tempting begins.

The Mosaic Bible commentary says Job eventually loses his children, his possessions, and even his health all within a very short period of time. Only Job and his wife survived the ruin Satan inflicted upon him.

## **AND WHAT ABOUT JOB'S FRIENDS? WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT DID JOB HAVE? WHAT WERE HIS FRIENDS LIKE?**

### **Read Job 2:11-13**

What do these verses say about Job's friends? How did they respond to Job's suffering?

Job's three friends came to comfort him and reflect on the purpose of his suffering. They each considered the basic question, "Why must we endure suffering when God is powerful enough to do something about it?" For a while, they helped Job remain faithful.

Later, but not much later in the book of Job, Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar each deliver speeches accounting for Job's misery. A fourth young man, Elihu tried to summarize the situation with yet another explanation. But all of them failed to provide Job with a satisfactory answer to the question of suffering.

What would your friends do if you encountered some serious struggles and suffering? How would they minister to you or how have you ministered to a friend in need?

## **SO, WHAT ABOUT JOB'S WIFE...HOW DID SHE RESPOND TO THE SUFFERING INFLICTED UPON JOB?**

### **Read Job 2:3-10**

What do these verses say about what happened to Job?  
How did his wife respond? What did she say Job should do?  
How did Job respond to his wife's urging?

Throughout the book of Job there is an ongoing conversation between God and Job. Name is prayer or just ancient dialogue between God and someone God loved. Whatever we call it, it can teach us something about persistence, courage and forthright honesty. Read the next set of verses and then let's discuss persistence and honesty in prayer.

## **SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR BEING HONEST AND PERSISTENT IN PRAYER**

### ***Job 13:15-22***

"God may kill me, but still I will trust him and offer my defense. <sup>16</sup>This may be what saves me, because no guilty person would come to his court. <sup>17</sup>Listen carefully to my words! <sup>18</sup>I have prepared my case well, and I am certain to win. <sup>19</sup>If you can prove me guilty, I will give up and die. <sup>20</sup>I ask only two things of you, my God, and I will no longer hide from you-- <sup>21</sup>stop punishing and terrifying me! <sup>22</sup>Then speak, and I will reply; or else let me speak, and you reply."

Job was preparing his defense. He evidently expected God to kill him for what he was about to say, but he wanted answers more than life. Job had prepared his defense as a good lawyer, and he believed he would win his case even though God would kill him. Still his hope was in God.

When you are in trouble; when you are suffering or struggling with friendships, your parents, school work, or love relationships, what do you do? To whom do you turn?

Tell of a time you were in deep need and turned to God in prayer. God can handle our honesty and persistence. I think God appreciates that from us more than hemming and hawing with what we think we need. What caused you to pray a very courageous prayer telling God exactly what was on your heart? When have you been able to express your frustration to God, even your anger at God? How did you feel after you expressed yourself in that way?

Consider a time in your life when you needed something from God. Did you ask once or again and again and again? Does it bug you when God doesn't respond to your persistent prayers? How difficult is it to trust God and remain faithful to God when God doesn't answer your prayers the way you think God should?

***Tell the campers that for 34 chapters Job and God dialogue. Back and forth they gently argue...perhaps better said, they discuss Job's plight and God's presence.*** Job speaks of his anguish and eventually God hears his protestations. But God continues to challenge Job until almost the very end of the book. Finally in chapter 42, Job rests his case and declares himself accountable and then offers repentance for his doubt.

**Here's What Job Says To God: Read Job 42:1-6**

**And Then Read God's Response: Read Job 42:7-16**

## **Why Keep Praying When You Think God Doesn't Answer?**

Maybe God does know best?! We believe that God knows what God is doing. But if God does, then why *do* bad things happen to good people? Why do godly people suffer and even die before they have a chance to grow old?

### **A story worth sharing and processing with your campers – someone who died too soon and how the family understood and lived through the suffering and grief...**

He helped all of us feel comfortable with his military career and service. Rarely did the family feel as though he was in grave danger. He was a highly trained and specialized operation's soldier. He served his country well and vigorously. 7 times he traveled to Iraq to fight a war that seemingly had no end to it. 2 times he traveled to Afghanistan. Even the last time he was there, none of us thought he would be hurt much less, lose his life.

On the morning of September 18, his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, the startling call came and it shook us to our core. It was surreal; like a nightmare that would end if I finally woke up from sleep. But it wasn't a nightmare. It was real and the pain of our loss began to sink in deeply, penetratingly and painfully. Our good boy was killed by enemy machine gunfire. This side of heaven we would not hug our boy again. This side of heaven we would walk the long journey through life without him; his laughter, humor and good soul.

You've got to wonder how a family survives such a loss. Perhaps you, too, have been broken open by the loss of someone you've loved. Our good boy's death is unfair. I know God could have saved him. I also know that God should have; at least that's what my broken heart tells me day after day.

I think the most anguishing question a Christian can ask is, "Why didn't God answer my prayer?" I cannot count the number of times I have stood beside the bed of someone who is dying; the family holding on to each other, praying that healing will come and the next hour, the next day, their loved one dies.

I have been asked, not only by children but adults as well, does prayer really work? This question is always heavy with emotion and the answer is anything but simple. I prayed that God would watch over, protect, give courage to and strengthen the men and women who are serving overseas. If God had answered my prayers and the prayers of my family, my life would certainly be different today.

My knees have the calluses to prove my own persistence in prayer. Maybe your knees have them, too. I think every church's pews are full of people who are weary and ready to give up on praying...people who are tired of waiting with expectant hearts for answers that do not come. Why doesn't God fix things for all who ask persistently in prayer including me?

The Old Testament story of Jacob is a story of persistence, too. It gives us a perspective on the nature of the conflict especially between what we want and what God wants for us. The Bible ultimately reassures us...and Jacob's story reassures us that we can trust God to know what is best. My family has learned that the life of faith is not about telling God what is on our wish list but instead, a life of faith is constantly lifting up every joy and sorrow, every fear and doubt, every need and want, every lament and heartbreaking plea to the One who hears and answers.

Nope. The answers don't always come how and when we think they should. God's words through the prophet Isaiah remind us that "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways."

Our good boy rests in the arms of Jesus in heaven. We think about him every day. When I visit his grave, the question "How can this be?" comes flooding back to me again and again. But my prayers haven't stopped because I need to keep the conversation going. I need God to keep listening to me even if I don't always get what I want. God's heart is the best place for me to lay my joys and sorrows. Persistence is the name of the game. Persistence in prayer. Persistence and prayer. And so...I keep knockin' on heaven's door.

## **E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS:**

### **Establish A Prayer Place**

Right after breakfast or at some point during the day, maybe during your Bible study time, ask the kids to establish a place of prayer that they can go back to if they'd like. Name it "Peniel", the name Jacob gave to the place where he wrestled with the angel in the middle of the night. Genesis 32:30 says: <sup>30</sup>So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." Take time to pray with them there. Ask them to share their most painful life's experience and offer it to God there. Claim the space as sacred; let them claim it as their own.

### **Prayer Partners**

At the beginning of the week put all your kid's names in a hat. Each camper draws a name from the hat. That person is their prayer partner and they are asked to keep that person close to their heart all week. Maybe on the first night before you go to bed when you are processing the day with each other, ask each camper what they wish someone would pray for them. That becomes the basis for the prayer partner's daily prayer all week long.

### **Prayers In The Dark Of Night**

In your cabin at night before you go to bed...quiet your campers...light only a flashlight or two...then pray for each other. Maybe you pray for the person on your right or left...or for someone you are aware is struggling.

### **Act Out The Story Of The Friend In Need**

This is a great Bible Story about being persistent. Ask the kids to re-write and modernize the story. Or, divide your cabin into two groups. Ask the kids to come up with a dramatic presentation and share those with each other.

### **The Parable of the Friend in Need...Keep Knockin': Luke 11:5-13**

<sup>5</sup>He said to them, "Which of you, if you go to a friend at midnight, and tell him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him,' and he from within will answer and say, 'Don't bother me. The door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give it to you?' I tell you, although he will not rise and give it to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence, he will get up and give him as many as he needs. "I tell you, keep asking, and it will be given you. Keep seeking, and you will find. Keep knocking, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives. He who seeks finds. To him who knocks it will be opened. "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he won't give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he asks for an egg, he won't give him a scorpion, will he? <sup>13</sup>If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

## **F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY**

1. Stop in your tracks with the kids and pray often throughout the day
2. Pray the Lord's prayer before or after a meal.
3. Talk about how persistence in prayer...that it is a lot like working out or being a consistently good friend or eating the right foods. All those things bless one's life and persistence in prayer makes one strong and keeps one close to God.
4. Check out the news on your laptop with the kids...or bring some news to them about something happening in the world. Then pray about it.
5. Stand in a circle with one person in the middle. Every kid lays a hand on the one in the middle of the circle
6. Ask your campers to pray prayers of strength and encouragement. Everyone gets a turn in the middle to be blessed and prayed for.

## G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES, THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

### Songs From the Camp Song Sheet

Seek Ye First	Lord, Listen to your Children Praying
Be Bold	Taize – O, Lord Hear My Prayer from WOV
Light the Fire	GO
Step By Step	We Are Walking (Praying) In The Light of God
Dance With Me	Kum-Ba-Yah
Psalm 121	I Could Sing Your Love Forever

### OR, HOW ABOUT...

**The Lord's Prayer In Motion...** Use Actions below to pray the Lord's prayer...teach it to the whole camp.

**Our** (*point both hands to the chest*)

**Father** (*hug own body*)

**Who art in heaven** (*raise both hands upwards*)

**Hallowed be thy name** (*place hands together in prayer*)

**Thy kingdom come** (*'pull' heaven down out of the sky to your chest with both hands*)

**Thy will be done** (*with elbows into your side touch your shoulders with both hands at the same time – left hand to left shoulder, right to right – then lower both hands down, as if offering them, stopping when your hands at a 90 degree angle out in front of the body*)

**On earth** (*spread hands down towards ground and around, indicating the earth*)

**As it is in heaven** (*spread hands up and around to indicate heaven*)

**Give us this day** (*start with hands out in a receiving position, then draw them inwards and close the fists at the same time*)

**Our daily bread** (*using left hand as a piece of bread, use right index and middle fingers together to perform the action of spreading butter back and forth across the left hand*)

**And forgive us our trespasses** (*use both hands in a motion of flinging something away*)

**As we** (*point to self with both hands*)

**Forgive those** (*repeat forgiving action above*)

**Who trespass against us** (*clench both fists, and bang the right one down on top of the left one, as if hammering it once*)

**And lead us not into temptation** (*Keeping fists closed, cross wrists as if they are tied together*)

**But deliver us from evil** (*pull wrists apart as if being suddenly freed*)

**For Thine is the Kingdom** (*use both hands, with fingers pointing upwards, to make a crown for your head*)

**The Power** (*use both hands to show biceps in a power action*)

**And the Glory** (*lift arms together over head, and bring them down and out to each side to form a glorious circle*)

**Forever and ever** (*arms move in two steps out to each side, simultaneously, as if drawing a rounded sort of M-shape*)

**Amen** (*hands come together in prayer*)

### **The Lord's Prayer According to Fric and Frac**

A reader's theater script by Neil MacQueen + Characters: Fric the Proper Teacher and Frac the Sassy Kid

Fric is a very proper teacher who keeps being interrupted by Frac, a sassy little kid. The kid is played by a teen, preferably a

girl who can act rather daffy. Think Elmo on Sesame Street and you've got the tone and attitude. The purpose of the reader's theater script is to introduce a lesson on Lord's Prayer to a group gathered around

Fric. Frac takes up her place among the other kids but near Fric making quite a scene so the younger children are clued in that this is a put-on. Fric grows increasingly impatient with Frac. After the script might be a good time to help define some words in the Lord's Prayer.

**Fric:** Hello everybody, I'd like to read to you the world's most famous prayer, the Lord's Prayer and talk about it with you. Does anybody know how it begins?. Yes, that's right, we start by praying the words: Our Father who art in heaven

**Frac:** Excuse, me, excuse me

**Fric:** Yes,

**Frac:** Who is Art? Is God's name Art? I never heard God called Art before.

**Fric:** What in the world are you talking about?

**Frac:** Our Father Art in heaven?

**Fric:** No, no, I'm afraid you've misunderstood, Art is a fancy way of saying "who is in heaven"

**Frac:** I don't know

**Fric:** You don't know what?

**Frac:** I don't know who is in heaven. Probably a lot of angels and dead people and stuff, but I've never been there so can't say for sure.

**Fric:** No, no, no....it's our Father Art, I mean, Our Father who are- is- was and will always be in heaven.

**Frac:** No he isn't.

**Fric:** He isn't what?

**Frac:** He's right here too (pointing to heart).

**Fric:** Moving right along.... Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

**Frac:** O, so now you say God's name is "hallowed".... so which one is it? Hallowed or Art? Is anybody else confused?

**Fric:** It's neither.

**Frac:** Then why do you keep saying it is. Look, why not just say Our Father in heaven.

**Fric:** Because that's not the way Jesus said it.

**Frac:** Oh, Jesus said it that way?

**Fric:** Uh huh.

**Frac:** Well....I guess he would know. Continue on...

**Fric:** Our Father who "is" in heaven, hallowed by thy name

**Frac:** (tapping on shoulder)

**Fric:** Yes, what?

**Frac:** What does Hallowed mean?

**Fric:** It's an old word that means special, great, awesome.

**Frac:** Then why didn't you just say so?

**Fric:** I just did —Our father who art in heaven "hallowed"

**Frac:** special, great and awesome!

**Fric:** BE thy name.

**Frac:** Thy? What kind of word is thy?

**Fric:** (dirty look)

**Frac:** Never mind.

**Fric:** Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

**Frac:** Thy thy thy....Marcia, Marcia, Marcia, why do you keep saying thy?

**Fric:** Because....

**Frac:** I know, I know....because "Jesus" said it that way

**Fric:** Well no, actually he didn't.

**Frac:** Oh, then why do you?

**Fric:** Because that's the way it's printed in the version of the Bible we use.

**Frac:** Oh.

**Fric:** Yeah, "Oh." Can I continue?

**Frac:** If you must.

**Fric:** Oh I must, believe me, I might even.....

**Frac:** Now now now.....it's prayer time.

**Fric:** Yes, "prayer time" now where was I, oh yes, Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

**Frac:** They rhyme ya know.

**Fric:** What rhymes?

**Frac:** Thy kingdom COME thy will be DONE. It rhymes.

**Fric:** (Dirty look and sigh) On earth as it is in heaven. (Stares at other)

**Frac:** What?

**Fric:** Well aren't you going to stay something about that too?

**Frac:** No.

**Fric:** Don't you wonder what "on earth as it is in heaven means" ??

**Frac:** Not if you don't.

**Fric:** Arrrggg. Give us this day our daily bread.

**Frac:** (Raise hand)

**Fric:** Yes. What is it now?

**Frac:** Give us our day our "daily" bread. What does that mean?

**Fric:** It means give us what we need to live today Lord.

**Frac:** Then why didn't you just say so?

**Fric:** Because it's a poem and poems often say things in flowery ways.

**Frac:** I thought you said it was a prayer. Now you're saying it's a flower?

**Fric:** No, I mean yes, I mean -poems and prayers are often alike.

**Frac:** Oh, you mean like, "roses are red, violets are blue, if you don't get going, you won't get through?"

**Fric:** Exactly.... Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. (looks and waits for other to respond)

**Frac:** Well I know what that means. What do you think I am, stupid?

**Fric:** And lead us not into temptation...

**Frac:** What's THAT ?

**Fric:** It's what you're doing right now?

**Frac:** What?

**Fric:** Leading me into temptation

**Frac:** Ohhhh, never mind.

**Fric:** But deliver us from evil

**Frac:** (pointing to self and shaking head "no" as in "I'm not evil" and acting contrite)

**Fric:** For thine

**Frac:** Wha—

**Fric:** It means "yours," thine means "yours."

**Frac:** Continue.

**Fric:**...is the kingdom

**Frac:** is what?

**Fric:** for THINE is the kingdom, and the power and glory forever. Ah—

**Frac:** -MEN.....see there, now that wasn't so hard, was it?

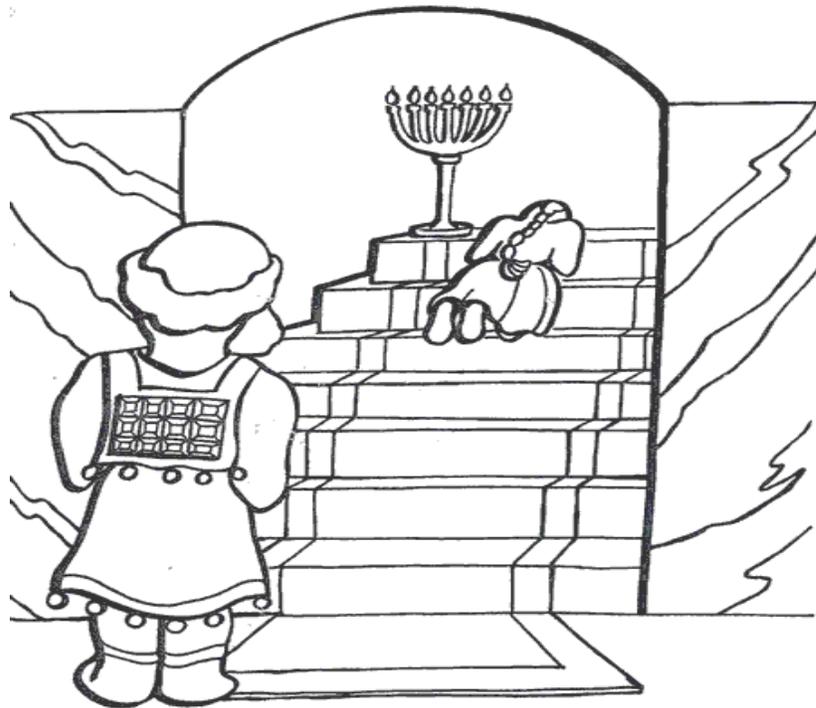
**Fric:** (shaking head)

## H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

Read the story of Hannah from I Samuel. Talk about Hannah's prayers and the fact that she never lost hope or gave up. Her persistent prayers were answered by God.

Hannah was a good woman who loved God. But she was sad, for she had no children. Each year, her husband took her to a place called Shiloh, where they worshiped God. And each year, Hannah prayed a special prayer that God would give her a child. One year, she prayed, "Dear God, if You will only give me a son, I will give him back to You, to serve You all his days." She prayed so hard her mouth moved, but no words came out. A priest asked if she was drunk. "No," she said. "I'm pouring my heart out to God." "May you find favor in God's eyes," said the

priest. The following year, Hannah couldn't make the trip to Shiloh with her husband because God had answered her prayers. She had a new baby boy named Samuel! She happily cared for Samuel until he was old enough to leave her. Then she kept her promise to God and took Samuel to live with the priests in Shiloh. It wasn't easy for her to say good-bye, but each year she made him a special robe to wear as he served God. God gave Hannah many more children. And Hannah was pleased to know that Samuel was growing up in Shiloh where he would love and serve God always.



One day, she went to the temple to ask God to give her a baby.  
She promised to dedicate the baby to God.

Discuss with the campers...Hannah prayed over and over again that God would bless her with a baby. Finally her prayers were answered. She never gave up. How do you think Hannah would have responded if her prayers hadn't been answered? Would she have given up? Would she have been mad at God?

When your prayers aren't answered the way you think they should be, how do you react?

## I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

### A story about an amazing woman of prayer... Mother Teresa

When your prayers aren't answered the way you think they should be, how do you react?

The following is an excerpt from "*A Retreat With Mother Teresa and Damien of Molokai: Caring for Those Who Suffer*" by Joan Guntzman.

Mother Teresa was always her own person, startlingly independent, obedient, yet challenging some preconceived notions and expectations. Her own life story includes many illustrations of her willingness to listen to and follow her own conscience, even when it seemed to contradict what was expected.

This strong and independent woman was born in Yugoslavia, on August 27, 1910. Five children were born to Nikola and Drona Bojaxhiu, yet only three survived. Though so much of her young life was centered in the Church, Mother Teresa later revealed that until she reached 18, she had never thought of being a nun. During her

early years, however, she was fascinated with stories of missionary life and service. She could locate any number of missions on the map, and tell others of the service being given in each place.

She began her religious career teaching history and geography, which she reportedly did with dedication and enjoyment for the next 15 years. It was in the protected environment of this school for the daughters of the wealthy that Teresa's new "vocation" developed and grew. This was the clear message, the invitation to her "second calling," that Teresa heard on that fateful day in 1946 when she traveled to Darjeeling for retreat.

## **The Streets of Calcutta**

During the next two years, Teresa pursued every avenue to follow what she "never doubted" was the direction God was pointing her. She was "to give up even Loreto where I was very happy and to go out in the streets. I heard the call to give up all and follow Christ into the slums to serve him among the poorest of the poor."

Technicalities and practicalities abounded. She had to be released formally, not from her perpetual vows, but from living within the convents of the Sisters of Loreto. She had to confront the Church's resistance to forming new religious communities, and receive permission from the Archbishop of Calcutta to serve the poor openly on the streets. She had to figure out how to live and work on the streets, without the safety and comfort of the convent. As for clothing, Teresa decided she would set aside the habit she had worn during her years as a Loreto sister and wear the ordinary dress of an Indian woman: a plain white sari and sandals.

Teresa first went to Patna for a few months to prepare for her future work by taking a nursing course. In 1948 she received permission from Pius XII to leave her community and live as an independent nun. So back to Calcutta she went and found a small hovel to rent to begin her new undertaking.

Wisely, she thought to start by teaching the children of the slums, an endeavor she knew well. Though she had no proper equipment, she made use of what was available—writing in the dirt. She strove to make the children of the poor literate, to teach them basic hygiene. As they grew to know her, she gradually began visiting the poor and ill in their families and others all crowded together in the surrounding squalid shacks, inquiring about their needs.

Teresa found a never-ending stream of human needs in the poor she met, and frequently was exhausted. Despite the weariness of her days she never omitted her prayer, finding it the source of support, strength and blessing for all her ministry.

## **A Movement Begins**

Teresa was not alone for long. Within a year, she found more help than she anticipated. Many seemed to have been waiting for her example to open their own floodgates of charity and compassion. Young women came to volunteer their services and later became the core of her Missionaries of Charity. Others offered food, clothing, the use of buildings, medical supplies and money. As support and assistance mushroomed, more and more services became possible to huge numbers of suffering people.

From their birth in Calcutta, nourished by the faith, compassion and commitment of Mother Teresa, the Missionaries of Charity have grown like the mustard seed of the Scriptures. New vocations continue to come from all parts of the world, serving those in great need wherever they are found. Homes for the dying, refuges for the care and teaching of orphans and abandoned children, treatment centers and hospitals for those suffering from leprosy, centers and refuges for alcoholics, the aged and street people—the list is endless.

Until her death in 1997, Mother Teresa continued her work among the poorest of the poor, depending on God for all of her needs. Honors too numerous to mention had come her way throughout the years, as the world stood astounded by her care for those usually deemed of little value. In her own eyes she was "God's pencil—a tiny bit of pencil with which he writes what he likes."

Despite years of strenuous physical, emotional and spiritual work, Mother Teresa seemed unstoppable. Though frail and bent, with numerous ailments, she always returned to her work, to those who received her compassionate care for more than 50 years. Only months before her death, when she became too weak to manage the

administrative work, she relinquished the position of head of her Missionaries of Charity. She knew the work would go on.

Finally, on September 5, 1997, after finishing her dinner and prayers, her weakened heart gave her back to the God who was the very center of her life.

This following story is a small example of her faith in the power of prayer. It was told by Fr. Langford, the cofounder of the Missionary of Charity priests in a radio interview I was doing with him for my program, “Faith, Hope and Action.” I was so moved by his story that I asked him for permission to include it in this book and he graciously agreed. This story is the transcription from that interview:

“One day in the mother house in Calcutta there were about three hundred novices and they were all out for the morning. One of the novices working in the kitchen came up to Mother Teresa and said, “We’ve planned poorly; we have no flour to back these chipaties for lunch.” Chipaties are little flour and water pancakes. The situation looked bleak—three hundred plus mouths are coming to be fed in about an hour and a half and there’s nothing to cook with. There’s no food.

“What I would expect Mother Teresa to do,” Fr. Langford explained to me, “was that Mother would pick up the telephone and call some of her benefactors and mobilize them to find some way to feed her daughters. Instead, her reaction—her spontaneous reaction—was to say to this little one, ‘Sister, you’re in charge of the kitchen this week? Well then, go into the chapel and tell Jesus we have no food. That’s settled. Now let’s move on. What’s next?’”

Lo and behold, ten minutes later there was a ring at the door and Mother Teresa was called downstairs. A man she had never seen before was standing there with a clipboard. He addressed her saying “Mother Teresa, we were just informed that the teachers at the city schools are going on strike. Classes have been dismissed and we have 7,000 lunches we don’t know what to do with. Can you help us use them?”

God provided for the needs of God’s children. Mother Teresa’s sanctity was built on a very simple foundation of deep faith and trust in God. Mother Teresa turned to Him in prayer, not only in need, but also to rest in the arms of the Father—body and spirit. That is how Mother Teresa lived each day of her life.”

**Define prayer. What power is there in offering your needs to God in heaven? What if God doesn’t answer your prayers the way you think God should? How do people like Mother Teresa survive and thrive...by whose power?**

#### **J. STAFF STUDY**

#### **K. PARENT DEVOTIONAL**

Your children studied the story of Job and talked about persistence in prayer. Job lived through the most horrendous losses anyone can imagine. Satan tempted him to rebuke God and turn away. His friends at first comforted him and then chastised him because they thought the atrocities in his life were due to his bad behavior; his sin. Even his wife encouraged him to wail against God. *Job resisted* the temptation to blame God for his pain. *Job persisted* in his relationship with God and never lost faith. When you are all together in your home again, remember to encourage each other to develop a deep and honest prayer life with God. God longs to hear our prayers and be in an open and loving relationship with us.

The verses from Matthew that you are about to read remind us that persistence...asking, searching and knocking are profound ways we stay in close communication and proximity to the God who loves us more than any other creature walking this earth. We matter to God. What we need matters to God. And so we must persist in asking and trusting that God has our best interest at heart.

#### **Matthew 7:7-11 (Contemporary English Version)**

<sup>7</sup>Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>8</sup>Everyone who asks will receive. Everyone who searches will find. And the door will be opened for everyone who knocks.

<sup>9</sup>Would any of you give your hungry child a stone, if the child asked for some bread? <sup>10</sup>Would you give your child a snake if the child asked for a fish? <sup>11</sup>As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give good things to people who ask.

**Thoughts About The Lesson**

Remember a time when you needed God to answer one of your prayers. You prayed and prayed and prayed but nothing happened. Did you give up?

Did you eventually turn away from God because you didn't get what you want?

What's the difference between God giving us what we need or what we want?

Do you trust that God has your best interest at heart? Talk about that.

**Prayer:**

Generous and loving God, teach us to trust you with the deepest thoughts of our hearts. Make us patient as we wait for you to answer our prayers and then help us to believe that you give us what we need in love when we need it. Amen.

## 2011 RTLC SUMMER BIBLE STUDY DAY 4

# WHAT IF I'M TOO ANGRY TO PRAY?

### A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Life can be tough. Life can be even tougher than tough. Life is sometimes full of pain and suffering, disappointment and loss. Just because we are Christian and we hold to our salvation in Jesus Christ, it does not mean that life will be a bed of roses. There will be things that happen in our lives that make us angry at God and even make us want to turn away. But God remains constant and continues to hold us tightly until we are ready to return to His embrace.

### B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

1. To understand that a relationship with God is based on honesty, even if that honesty comes with strong emotions like anger, frustration, and despair.
2. To reveal how the Holy Spirit carries us in prayer when we feel too overwhelmed to pray on our own.
3. Understand how in a community, others can pray for us when we can't pray for ourselves.
4. To understand that no matter what we have to say, God wants to hear from us and will listen and remain close even in the tough times.
5. To help campers understand that they need not feel guilty about not being able to pray or repress their feelings toward God. These emotions are real and appropriate.

### C. MORNING WATCH

Morning Watch will focus on five different prayer disciplines. Each morning camper representatives from each village will meet to decide which discipline their village wants to focus on that morning. The disciplines to choose from are:

1. Prayer Labyrinth
2. Prayer Journaling
3. Breath In, Breath Out, Say Thank You Centering Prayer
4. Prayer Bracelets/Prayers Cords/Prayer Knots/ Prayer Flags
5. Stretching Prayer
6. Prayer Stations
7. Prayer Partners

### D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

**Pray together.** Gather your group for your study and begin with prayer. For your opening prayer, ask if anyone has any specific people or situations they would like to pray for as you open your study. Write them down so you don't forget them. Then pray for each of those petitions. Or better yet, see if each person that had a petition would be willing to pray that petition as part of the prayer. You start and then close the prayer after all petitions have been shared.

**How many of you know the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm?** If anybody does, start reciting a little of it.

It can be argued that the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm contains the best known, most often quoted, most admired verses of the most published, most read book in human history. Whether or not that could ever be proven, the simple line "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" has brought comfort and peace to millions of people over thousands of years.

Now ask, **Did you know that there is a Psalm 22?** (I will bet no one has ever even read it!)

#### **Scripture Reading**

Let's look up Psalm 22:1-21. Would there be anyone willing to read it out loud to the group?

#### **Psalm 22:1-21**

<sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from my cries of anguish?  
<sup>2</sup> My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,  
by night, but I find no rest.<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;  
you are the one Israel praises.<sup>[c]</sup>  
<sup>4</sup> In you our ancestors put their trust;  
they trusted and you delivered them.  
<sup>5</sup> To you they cried out and were saved;  
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

<sup>6</sup> But I am a worm and not a man,  
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.  
<sup>7</sup> All who see me mock me;  
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.  
<sup>8</sup> "He trusts in the LORD," they say,  
"let the LORD rescue him.  
Let him deliver him,  
since he delights in him."

<sup>9</sup> Yet you brought me out of the womb;  
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.  
<sup>10</sup> From birth I was cast on you;  
from my mother's womb you have been my God.

<sup>11</sup> Do not be far from me,  
for trouble is near  
and there is no one to help.

<sup>12</sup> Many bulls surround me;  
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.  
<sup>13</sup> Roaring lions that tear their prey  
open their mouths wide against me.  
<sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water,  
and all my bones are out of joint.  
My heart has turned to wax;  
it has melted within me.  
<sup>15</sup> My mouth<sup>[d]</sup> is dried up like a potsherd,  
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;  
you lay me in the dust of death.

<sup>16</sup> Dogs surround me,  
a pack of villains encircles me;  
they pierce<sup>[e]</sup> my hands and my feet.  
<sup>17</sup> All my bones are on display;  
people stare and gloat over me.  
<sup>18</sup> They divide my clothes among them  
and cast lots for my garment.

<sup>19</sup> But you, LORD, do not be far from me.  
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.  
<sup>20</sup> Deliver me from the sword,  
my precious life from the power of the dogs.  
<sup>21</sup> Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;  
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

Right there in the same Bible, beside the 23rd Psalm and throughout the “The Book of Psalms” are some of the least read, least understood, least quoted, most troubled and troubling passages in the Bible. These darker, sometimes disturbing prayers--poems of pain, anger and fear--are categorized by scholars as “Psalms of Lament”.

### **QUESTIONS**

**The author of Psalm 22 is angry with God. Why do you think he is so upset?**

**Do you think it is OK to be angry with God? What makes you think so or think not?**

There are many that believe that we should never be angry with God. For them, the mark of true faith of a true believer is the blind acceptance of whatever God doles out and an “attitude of gratitude” no matter how awful the situation is.

**What do you think about that?**

**What are some instances in your life that have made you angry with God? Why did you become angry? (We are disappointed, hurt, resentful, etc.)**

**Did you feel hurt by God? Betrayed? Mised?**

**How did you handle it? Did the anger ever go away? If so, how did you feel?**

Frustration and anger are very real parts of our lives. Sometimes we are right in our anger, especially when it involves mistreatment of others or ourselves. Other times our anger is not so justified.

**Either way, why might it be good to talk to God and express our anger or frustrations to Him?**

**How do you think God would respond to you?**

The psalms of lament are the pure truth of the human experience. Unapologetically, these prayers of anger, prayers of truth seek reconciliation through honesty. Where there is truth, there is growth.

It is crazy to think that we have the power to hide anything from God. If we take God at God’s word, God already knows about our sufferings. Why would we ever talk to a friend about something we’re going through but put on a happy face for God? Therefore, we should pray it, no matter how scary those emotions might seem. People of faith must pray truthfully, even if they are angry at God.

### **How the Holy Spirit carries us in prayer**

Let’s open our Bibles again and read Romans 8:26.

“<sup>26</sup>In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

There are times that we do not have the words to pray. No matter how hard we try, nothing comes. But prayer is that direct channel to God and God is not willing to let go.

Prayer gets us through. Whatever injustice we face, prayer gets you through. We don’t even need to know how or what to pray. God’s Spirit prays with us and for us. Prayer is nothing more than speaking intentionally with God. But prayer is nothing less than God communicating with us.

### **QUESTIONS**

**How do you think the spirit prays for us?**

**What does this mean for your relationship with God?**

**Does this change anything for you in your understanding of God’s love for you?**

### **Story of Richard Wurmbrand**

“Pastor Richard Wurmbrand endured 14 years of torture by the former Soviet Communist regime, three of which were in confinement in a cell thirty feet below ground. He writes, "In solitary confinement, we could not pray as before. We were unimaginably hungry; we had been drugged until we acted like idiots. We were as weak as skeletons. The Lord's Prayer was much too long for us -- we could not concentrate enough to say it. My only prayer repeated again and again was, 'Jesus, I love You.' " (Tortured for Christ, 1998.)

Years ago I heard Wurmbrand speak to an assembly where he described even greater depths of inability. Wurmbrand explained how he no longer could worship in prayer, being beyond words. He said he thought to himself something like, "If I could just stand up, Lord, would that be acceptable worship?" But Wurmbrand couldn't stand. What followed was, "If I could then just raise my arm in your name, would that be enough?" With the little strength he had left, he struggled to raise his open hand into the darkness of his cell. He couldn't quite get it above his head. But he knew it was acceptable. That was his prayer, more profound and articulate than any I have ever offered.”

### **How a community can pray when life is tough**

**Let's open our Bibles again. Would someone like to read Acts 12:1-12?** – Herod is persecuting Jews and people are gathered at Peter went Mary's house to pray.

Questions:

- Why do you think these people were gathered together to pray?
- What do you think that they were praying about?
- Can you think of recent times in our world where people gathered together to pray?
- When was a time that you gathered with others to pray?
- What was it for?
- How did it change God? How did it change you? How did it change the world?

### **How a community can pray for us when we can't.**

Our burdens can make us too angry to pray. When this happens we need to pray all the more. Last March a man killed an Illinois pastor while he led worship. His widow told ABC news that her anger kept her from praying for the first time she could remember. But her friends and her church prayed for her and she reached the point where her prayers took away her anger and led her to reach out to the gunman's parents. The things we dread can choke off our prayers. When this happens we need to pray all the more. Dwight Eisenhower, in the terrible days before he sent nineteen year-old soldiers to invade Europe on D-Day, disappeared each morning for a few minutes. His staff did not know what he was doing. By accident an aide discovered him on his knees in the officer's toilet, praying. Our busy lives can crowd out prayer. When this happens we need to pray all the more. Martin Luther famously said that when the world pressed in on him with extra demands he prayed twice as long.

We are urged to pray together and for one another. There is great power in "the communion of the saints" and when "two or three gather in My Name.”

There are people who are too sick, distressed or emotionally oppressed to even think, let alone pray. We certainly must stand "in the gap" for them, and also call upon the Holy Spirit to "groan" in that unutterable language on their behalf.

### **QUESTIONS**

**Has anyone ever prayed for you? How did that feel? What difference did it make for you?**

**Have you ever prayed for someone that really needed you to pray for them?**

**Are there people in your life who really need you to pray for them and on their behalf?**

**Would you be daring enough to ask someone if you could pray for them? What would that mean to those people? To you?**

## **God will remain faithful**

In all that life throws at us, God promises to never let go of us.

Have your campers pair up and have them grab each other's right forearm. Designate one person in each group to be God and one person to be us. **This arm lock demonstrates God's grip on us and our grip on God. This is that solid relationship that we have with God.** Now have the person representing us let go of "God's" forearms while "God" is still firmly holding on to the other forearm. **This demonstrates that even when things get so rough that we turn away and let go of God, God is still hanging on to us tightly and will never let go!**

## **A Quote from Elie Wiesel**

"I have not lost faith in God. I have moments of anger and protest. Sometimes I've been closer to him for that reason."

You read John 16:33 to your group. This is Jesus talking to us!

**"I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!"**

## **Closing prayer**

Give everyone a minute or two to think of someone they want to pray for that really needs their prayers. Have everyone give you a thumbs up when they have their person and their needs identified. When everyone is ready, begin your prayer and go until everyone has had a chance to speak and then close the prayer.

## **E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS**

### **How To Pray When You Feel Like You Can't \***

I know, I've been there. There have been times in my life that I felt like I just couldn't pray -- like my prayers weren't making it past the ceiling of my room, or like I just couldn't get the words out of my mouth. So what can we do? We know that prayer is incredibly important to a deep and intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father, so how do we break through the barrier? Here are ten ways that we can press on through a difficult prayer time into a rich, life-changing conversation with God.

1. **Keep trying.** Don't give up! Pray, even if you don't feel like it. God hears you even when you feel like He can't. (Philippians 3:14)
2. **Worship.** Put in your favorite worship CD and sing along. Listen to the words. Sing them to God. Praise Him for the things around you -- your house, your family, your friends. Praise Him for silly things like a good hair day or bubble gum. God's Word says that *every* good and perfect gift comes from Him, and that includes chocolate ice cream and big shady trees. (Psalm 9:1-2)
3. **Go to the Bible.** God's Word is full of promises for your life. Worried about your future? God has promised that His future for you is full of hope (Jeremiah 29:11). Unsure of your salvation? God promises that everyone who says that Jesus is Lord and believes He was raised from death is saved (Romans 10:9)! You can find God's assurance for every situation when you read His Word.
4. **Write it down.** If you're stressed out, sometimes your thoughts can be so jumbled that you can't focus on a train of thought long enough to pray. Writing or typing out your prayer can help you express to God how you're feeling, and can really give God a chance to speak to you to help you know what to say. David the Psalmist wrote down his prayers in song form -- and if it's good enough for someone God's Word calls "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14), it's good enough for us!
5. **Look up.** When was the last time you took a minute to look at the sky? God's word tells us that the sky shows us God's glory and creativity (Psalm 19:1) -- this can help us gain a little

perspective. I sometimes forget that the things that are problems to me are not problems for God. He made the whole Earth and everything in it!

6. **Get outside the situation.** When I'm angry, I have a pretty tough time praying for the person or situation I'm angry about, but God tells us to pray for people who have hurt us (Luke 6:28). Remember that God's love isn't just for you, it's for everyone! Remember that the purpose of your life is to glorify God in every situation, and to show Jesus to the people around you. Keeping this kind of perspective can help you to pray -- pray for your own reaction, or for the other people involved.

7. **Fast.** No kidding. You all know what this means, right? It means giving up something you want, in order to spend time with God. Think outside the box with this one. It's not smart for growing kids to skip meals, but what about the TV, internet, or Playstation? Do you come straight home and turn on the TV? Consider a week-long TV fast where you come home and open your Bible instead. Do you stop by the coffee shop on your way to school or work every day? Try giving up that time and money to God for a week or two. When you show that you're willing to give up things you enjoy because you realize that God is more important than those things, God will be there with you!

8. **Let it all out.** Sometimes you can't pray because you're so overwhelmed with emotion that you can't even get the words out. It's OK! Paul tells us that, when this happens, the Holy Spirit prays on our behalf (Romans 8:26). Some human emotions are too deep to express, and God hears our hearts even when we can't tell Him how we feel or what we want.

9. **Say thanks.** God's word tells us to give thanks in every situation, whether good or bad (1 Thessalonians 5:13). Even when you don't feel like it, you need to do what God says and thank Him. He can change your attitude and your heart when you begin to thank Him.

10. **Spread it around.** There will be times when you'll feel so overwhelmed that you can't pray at all -- these are the times when you need a close friend around to support you and pray for you. Ask your friends to pray with you and for you, and give them permission to call and ask for your prayer help too. God doesn't intend for us to live out our Christian walk alone -- in fact, Jesus promised to be with us in a unique way when we gather in His name (Matthew 18:20).

\*Adapted from "Ways to Pray When We Cannot Pray" by Cindy Hyle Bezek

#### F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Set out pray boxes where campers and staff can drop in prayer requests anonymously and then the village of the day will use those prayers as part of our evening worship.

#### G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES, THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

##### Songs From the Camp Song Sheet

The Spirit Intercedes

Lord, Listen to your Children Praying

Taize – O, Lord Hear My Prayer from WOV

##### Video - Youtube

I Can't Pray – Ben Dukes

##### Prayer When I Can't Pray

I try to pray; words don't come.  
I toss and turn and feel nothing.  
My mind is dry, my heart is dull,  
my soul longs for life.  
Hear my silent cry, my God, hear me.  
Let me not be a shriveled reed  
or an empty shell.  
Breathe on me and make me whole.  
Give me passion that I may love.  
Then shall my tongue praise  
your holy name  
with words I do not yet know.  
So be it.

Vienna Cobb Anderson

OR

**"Bring The Rain" by Mercy Me**

I can count a million times  
People asking me how I  
Can praise You with all that I've gone through  
The question just amazes me  
Can circumstances possibly  
Change who I forever am in You  
Maybe since my life was changed  
Long before these rainy days  
It's never really ever crossed my mind  
To turn my back on you, oh Lord  
My only shelter from the storm  
But instead I draw closer through these times  
So I pray

Bring me joy, bring me peace  
Bring the chance to be free  
Bring me anything that brings You glory  
And I know there'll be days  
When this life brings me pain  
But if that's what it takes to praise You  
Jesus, bring the rain

I am Yours regardless of  
The dark clouds that may loom above  
Because You are much greater than my pain  
You who made a way for me  
By suffering Your destiny  
So tell me what's a little rain  
So I pray

Holy, holy, holy  
Is the Lord God Almighty

## **H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS**

## **I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS**

## **J. STAFF STUDY**

## **K. PARENT DEVOTIONAL**

### **Text for the Day**

Psalm 22:1-21

### **Reflection**

Today we talked about when we are too angry to pray on our own. Life can throw many curves at us and at times, we are so angry with God about some of the tragic things we experience. But even in lapse of trust, God remains faithful to us will never let go. In our humanness, there are times we are so angry or distraught or overwhelmed, we can't pray. When this happens, the Holy Spirit prays on our behalf and invites others to pray for us. This is a key piece of being part of a faith community.

### **Activity**

Have your family pair up and have them grab each other's right forearm. Designate one person in each group to be God and one person to be us. This arm lock demonstrates God's grip on us and our grip on God. This is that solid relationship that we have with God. Now have the person representing us let go of the other forearm(God's) while God is still firmly holding on to the other forearm. This demonstrates that even when things get so rough that we turn away and let go of God, God is still hanging on to us tightly and will never let go! Now, have your family think of people in your lives that are experiencing some rough times and are in need your prayers. Write them down, and then pray for them as a family. Hang the list on your refrigerator as a reminder of those people in your life.

### **Closing Prayer**

Dear God, thank you for sticking with us, even when we get angry with you and can't find the words to talk with you. Thank you for putting people in our lives that love us and care for us and who will pray for us. Help us to be those loving and caring people in the lives of others as well. AMEN

## 2011 RTLC SUMMER BIBLE STUDY DAY 5

# Living A Life Of Prayer

### A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

The story of David is the longest and most complete accounting of one individual's life in the Bible. 1 Samuel 16 through 1 Kings 2. It's a great idea to read the whole story before you teach your first Bible study if you can. His story is bigger, richer and more complex than most Sunday school and confirmation lessons can cover.

David was most likely the son of a nobleman and the youngest of 8 sons. It appears his family had some money because they had land and he played the Lyre, an instrument of the wealthy. As a boy David's chores included tending to the sheep. He only happened upon the encounter with Goliath because he was running an errand for his father. David wanted to defend the Lord when he faced Goliath but he also knew there was a promised reward from the king; great wealth, the king's daughter's hand in marriage and exemption from taxes for his father's family. David was a well loved and talented man. He was a respected warrior and a gifted musician. He began as a shepherd and grew into a king. He was self made. He was brilliant. He was flawed. He was a murderer and an adulterer and an outlaw.

While many of his stories portray him as a hero, the whole story of David reveals him to be a fallible man who loved God and tried to do His will but often failed due to his own greed, lust or stubbornness. Keep in mind that the story of David presented in scripture is said by some scholars to be written by "spin doctors" especially Chronicles. There are some historical events that could not be denied because they were so well known but those who wrote the history of David worked hard to provide acceptable reason and explanation for David's questionable behavior.

David's life has the potential to engage young people because he is the ultimate example of *Simul justus et peccator* which means "simultaneously saint and sinner." Young people may not know the Latin phrase or the concept that Luther wrote about but they live the reality of this paradox every day. Listen carefully to young people struggling in their faith you will find many of them wonder how can anyone be loved by God when they are full of sin? What a wonderful opportunity for conversation about GRACE! God loves us while we are still sinners. He loves us even though we are sinners. He doesn't wait for us to be good or get it right, He loves us right now as we are... icky, sticky, sinful, dirty, unworthy people! God loved David and continued to love David through all of his sin and brokenness.

Living a life of prayer means being in constant communication with God. There is no need to say a "dear god" or an "amen" to begin or end your prayer. We can live out every moment of every day knowing that God is with us and the words in our hearts, the thoughts in our heads and even our greatest desires are known to him. He still wants us to talk to Him about what we are thinking and feeling and experiencing. God knows before we tell Him but He wants to hear from us. God does not demand from us formal fancy and perfect prayers. He desires instead honesty and authenticity. God wants us to share our hearts with Him.

Living a Life of Prayer is about a mindset or a way of seeing the world it's a shift from one way of seeing to another...

I am alone	God is always with me
I can't do anything	I can do anything through Christ who strengthens me
I don't have enough	God has given me all I need
I am a loser	I am a precious child of God
I'm nothing special	God has given me gifts and calls me to a special purpose

David is a man who understood this way of being in relationship with God. Just because He lived a life of prayer in constant communication with God does not mean he was a saint or anywhere close to perfect. In fact he made some major mistakes that led him to suffer awful consequences in his life. It is easy for a young person to relate to David in some ways- he wanted to be important, he was tempted, he got angry with God, he felt awful when he sinned and worried about being forgiven, he was bullied by his enemies. If a man like David can open his heart to God and live a life of prayer sharing honestly all of his thoughts and feelings then certainly we can too.

## B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

1. Examine David as an example of someone who loved God and lived a life of prayer.
2. Encourage young people to share their authentic self, to be honest and open in their communication with God.
3. Teach young people that living a life of prayer requires a shift in how we understand the world.

## C. MORNING WATCH

Morning Watch will focus on five different prayer disciplines. Each morning camper representatives from each village will meet to decide which discipline their village wants to focus on that morning. The disciplines to choose from are:

1. Prayer Labyrinth
2. Prayer Journaling
3. Breath In, Breath Out, Say Thank You Centering Prayer
4. Prayer Bracelets/Prayers Cords/Prayer Knots/ Prayer Flags
5. Stretching Prayer
6. Prayer Stations
7. Prayer Partners

## D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

### Opening

Have you ever wished for a deeper relationship with God?

**How would you finish this sentence:** *“If I could change one thing about my relationship with God it would be...”*

**Can you feel God’s presence here at camp? For anyone who has been at camp before, do you find it hard to feel God’s presence in your life after you leave camp? Why or why not?**

**How would your life change if you really invited God to be a part of your WHOLE life?**

*God is always present with us. In scripture He promises to be with us always. Sometimes we don’t always acknowledge Him or welcome Him into our daily lives and activity. That doesn’t mean He isn’t with us it just means we have to shift our way of seeing God at work in our lives and in the world.*

**Can anyone remember today’s theme?**

*The theme is LIVING A LIFE OF PRAYER. Today we are going to talk about how to make a deeper connection with God, one that exists in every moment of every day not just on Sundays or at night when you say bed time prayers.*

### Prayer

Lord we know you are already here with us in our Bible study. Thank you for being always present with us. We want to feel your presence in our lives every day. We want to be close to you and live a life of prayer. Help us to understand how to live a life of prayer so we can be in constant communication with you Lord.

### Activity

Split group into two teams ask each group to come up with three or four prayer scenarios and write each one on a slip of paper then play “Prayer charades” and have the team guess what prayer scenario you are acting out. Some ideas might be: meal time, when you pass a car accident on the highway, before a test, bed time, etc.

**We are taught by parents and teachers and youth leaders and pastors to pray at meal time and bed time and at certain times during a church service. How do you think living a life of prayer would be different than the scenes you just acted out in charades?**

### Scripture Reading

Let’s look up 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Would someone be willing to read it out loud to the group?

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

**How does this passage challenge you in your prayer life?**

**Can you think of someone you know who is always joyful and prays continually and gives thanks to God no matter what is going on? What qualities or characteristics describe that person?**

*David is someone who lived a life of prayer. He was constantly in communication with God.*

**We have a few different passages we are going to read out loud and look at together.**

1 Samuel 18: 12-16	David was successful and God was with Him
2 Samuel 2:1	David asked God for direction... LITERALLY
2 Samuel 5:1-2	David was told by God that he would be the shepherd of Israel, become King
2 Samuel 7:1-3	Nathan helps David understand the Lord's will for him.
2 Samuel 7:8-9	Lord tells David he has been with him
1 Kings 2:1-3	David tells his son Solomon to follow the Lord

**How would you describe the relationship between David and God? Can you imagine having this same kind of relationship with God? Why or why not?**

#### Activity

Give everyone a piece of paper to write out a "text message". **Close your eyes and try to remember the last time you felt really angry or really hurt. Now write out a text message that you would send to a friend to express how you feel. No one will read what you write and you don't have to share it with anyone.**

Now look carefully at that message. What kind of language did you use? Is it formal and fancy or slang and casual? Is it real? Does it reflect exactly what is in your heart?

*God desires that kind of honesty and closeness when you pray. He wants that kind of relationship with you. That is the kind of relationship David had with God. He wasn't a perfect Christian but He did know that God was always with Him through the good and the bad and He knew He could always talk to God and be real with Him.*

**Do you feel like you can be that "real" with God? Why or why not?**

**What keeps you from being honest with God about your thoughts and feelings?**

#### Scripture Reading

Look up the Psalms.

Psalm 69: 1-4	Bullying, scared, crying out for help to be saved from enemies
Psalm 51:1-12	Repentance, Create in me a clean heart
Psalm 40:1-8	Praise and adoration, devotion to God
Psalm 38:1-10	Regret, sorrow for sinning, embarrassment
Psalm 27: 1-5	Confidence in God, trust,
Psalm 23:1-6	Declaration of faith and God as savior and protector
Psalm 22: 1-7	Anger at God, pain and suffering

**What psalm do you connect with the most? Why? Have you ever found yourself thinking or saying similar things to God in your thoughts or in your heart or even out loud in prayer?**

*These Psalms written by David show us that David felt very close to God. He wasn't worried about hurting God's feelings, he didn't try to hide from God, and He shared with God everything he thought and felt the good, the bad and the ugly. This is all part of living a life of prayer.*

#### Activity

Living a Life of Prayer is about a mindset or a way of seeing the world it's a shift from one way of seeing to another. Everyone take a slip of paper. You will see that there is a statement written on one side of the paper. Read that statement now. I will read a short passage to you and then I want you to write on the other side of your paper an OPPOSITE statement that shows the way that you think God would want you to see the world.

**God created the world and everything in it including you.**  
**God loves you completely, totally, unconditionally with all of His heart.**  
**In baptism God claims you as His very own son or daughter.**  
**God gifts you with all you have and all you need including special talents to share with the world.**  
**God calls you to share those gifts with the world in service to others.**

I am alone	God is always with me
I can't do anything	I can do anything through Christ who strengthens me
I don't have enough	God has given me all I need
I am a loser	I am a precious child of God
I'm nothing special	God has given me gifts and calls me to a special purpose

**What strong statements do you believe to be true about the world and life? Would God challenge any of those statements? How do you think He would want you to shift the way you see the world?**

**How would you need to shift the way you see the world in order to live a life of prayer?**

### Closing

What concrete changes would need to happen in your life to make it possible for you to live a life of prayer? Take careful notes of what each person says. Use these notes to pray out loud and individually for each person in your Bible study at the very end.

**What do you think would be the benefit of living a life of prayer?**

**What obstacles might you face as you try to live a life of prayer?**

**As we close, remember these four important points we discussed today:**

1. Living a life of prayer is a way to invite God to be part of everything that happens in your life.
2. David was in a constant conversation /relationship with God
3. David praised Him, cursed Him, questioned Him, thanked Him, asked Him for advice.
4. God desires a deep relationship with you! He wants you to share everything with Him and be real about it all!

### Prayer

Lord we thank you for opening our hearts and minds to your word today. We come before you now to lift up one another in prayer as we seek to live a life of prayer.

(Continue by lifting up each person in your group and praying for them using the notes you took)

## **E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS**

**Scripture Reading - Consider the character of David:**

**Will someone be the recorder for our group? Is anyone willing to read? We have a few different passages we are going to read out loud and look at together.**

1 Samuel 16:10-13	Handsome and chosen for special responsibilities
1 Samuel 17:13-15	Youngest of 8, shepherd not a great warrior
1 Samuel 17:20-37	Brave, child/youth, faithful
2 Samuel 11: 2-5, 26-27	Sinner, Adulterer, Murderer

*At the end of each passage ask someone to give an adjective that describes David's character.*

**When you are done look at the list. What kind of person was David?**

**In what ways do you see that you are like David?**

*David was a king and a warrior but in terms of his character, he is a pretty average person. He loves God but he makes a lot of mistakes. He gets jealous, he is tempted, he wants to be popular and rich and famous and he can get mad and act out in anger.*

*Living a life of prayer doesn't mean you don't sin or don't make mistakes. It doesn't mean you are a perfect Christian or a monk or a nun. Living a life of prayer means you are willing to acknowledge the presence of God and the gift of grace as part of everything you do.*

## **F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY**

- At worship and meals refrain from using “Dear God” and “Amen” to reinforce the idea that we are always online with God.
- Practice living a life of prayer by publicly praying and acknowledging God’s presence with you in everything you do. Maybe pray during KP or showerhouse? Stop and pray during archery or wood carving or all camp.
- Just for fun... Imagine if David had kept a diary and had a great sense of humor. What kind of diary entries would he have written? Find someone in your village with the gift of humor and invite them to write diary entries that relate to some of David’s stories or experiences and read them out loud to the camp at the beginning or end of each meal.
- Place baskets at different key locations around camp with index cards and pencils. Ask everyone to stop and write their current thought or prayer on the card and leave it in the basket. Read the prayers at evening worship.
- At morning worship tell everyone to keep an eye out for God markers. These are reminders that God is always present and never more than a thought or heart beat away. Encourage everyone to stop and share a moment with God in their heart or mind whenever they see a God marker during the day. Village of the day can leave “God” markers for people to discover during the day. Maybe red ribbons tied around trees or the volleyball net or cabin bunk beds.
- Give each village a small journal to keep notes on how they experience God with them at random moments throughout the day. Have them record their thoughts and experiences and share them at all camp or evening worship

## **G. OTHER SONGS, STORIES, THOUGHTS, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS**

Staff witness on this day could share some of the ways they choose to be in constant contact with God. Or they could share a time when they shared honestly their anger, frustration, grief, sorrow or doubt with God.

Try chanting psalms responsively as part of worship. This is a worship practice that can help tie camp and worship back home together.

The Message Bible can be a powerful way to review psalms. Especially when a psalm includes imagery or analogies that are unfamiliar.

Many camp songs are based on the psalms. Have someone read the psalm from the Bible before the song is sung.  
Psalm 121, Psalm 27, Psalm 25

Use black construction paper at worship for writing down things you want to say to God but don’t want anyone else to see or know.

## **H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS**

### **Activity**

Close your eyes for a moment. I want you to imagine that for one year you get to go live with your best friend. You do everything together and you go every where with your friend to school, to parties, to church even to soccer practice. It

could be pretty cool to have your best friend with you everywhere you go right? Now imagine that your best friend only spoke to you or acknowledged you a few times a day. Once before each meal and once before bed time. Now imagine that the only conversation you had was one way... he or she spoke to you but never listened to a word you said. And even then all he or she said to you was thanks for the food and please help keep me safe. You have spent all day with your friend. You love your friend. You watched your friend get picked last at recess for kickball. You were there on Saturday night when your friend got in trouble with dad and was grounded for a week. You watched as the older kids at school teased and taunted your friend and threatened to hurt your friend. All of this stuff happened and you aren't even going to talk about it?

**Is that at all realistic? What kind of conversation would you really have with your best friend in those situations?**

**What would you talk about? When would you talk about it?**

*Most likely you would share your heart. Everything you felt your anger, your hurt, your disappointment*

## **I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS**

**Senior High youth can tackle the story of Bathsheba and Uriah. Temptation, cheating and scandal is a story line they are familiar with but they see it on tv or read it in magazines and never hear the God response. The God response here is severe. David suffers a serious consequence for his action. God is very angry but he continues to love David. There are three important elements to this story, first that Nathan helps David to understand he has done something wrong (friendship), next to understand there are consequences to sin and finally God loves us always even when we sin.**

### **Activity**

Search your own heart and consider carefully what it is you most want to say to God. Are you angry at Him? Do you want to declare your love and devotion? Are you worried about sin or fearful of others? David wrote about all these things. Try writing your own psalm. We have both white paper and black paper available. If you don't want anyone to read what you write then you can write it on the black paper with a black colored pencil. If you want to share what you write you are welcome to share. If you don't want to share you don't have to. The purpose of this exercise is just to give you a chance to write an honest message to God and practice living a life of prayer that is open and authentic.

Give everyone a chance to finish and then ask if anyone wants to share.

## **J. STAFF STUDY**

You will be teaching the story of David all summer so it could be very helpful for you to learn his story and know it by heart. Below is a breakdown of the chapters that tell David's story. Make a goal to read one segment each week, or if you are ambitious, try to read one section each day for a week. Knowing this story and being able to tell it will serve as a great tool for you in your Bible study with your campers.

1. 1 Samuel 16-20
2. 1 Samuel 21-27
3. 1 Samuel 28-2 Samuel 1
4. 2 Samuel 2-5
5. 2 Samuel 6-10
6. 2 Samuel 11-13
7. 2 Samuel 14-1 Kings 2:10

## **K. PARENT DEVOTIONAL**

Four Keys to Faith Formation: Caring Conversation, Devotion, Ritual Tradition and Service

### **Caring Conversation: Highs and Lows**

Take time to share your highs and lows for the day. Make sure everyone has a turn to share and make sure everyone feels like they are heard!

### **Caring Conversation Questions**

How did you see God in the world today?

If you could tell God one thing you want Him to know what would it be?

If you could ask God one question today what would it be?

### **Devotion:**

#### **Scripture Reading**

Look up 1 Thessalonians 5:18 and read it out loud.

#### **Devotion Questions**

What do you think it means to live a life of prayer and to pray continuously?

Name one thing you would like to see our family do to practice living joyfully.

#### **Activity**

Together make a list of those things for which your family can give thanks for in all circumstances. Use post it notes and take turns writing one thing from the list on each post it note. Then the person who wrote that note gets to find a place in the house to post that note. Soon your house will have post it notes of gratitude all over. Encourage everyone to say a prayer of thanks to God in their heart for that thing whenever they come across one of the postit notes. This is one way to begin practicing “living a life of prayer.”

**Rituals and Traditions:** Your camper learned a lot of new table graces this week. Invite him/her to teach the family a new table grace to use before meals and make this a family tradition.

**Service:** Your local congregation will have a list of people they are praying for who are sick or perhaps serving in the armed forces. Contact your pastor to get a copy of that list and as a family make it your service project to pray together for each person on the list daily for one week.