
Rainbow Trail
LUTHERAN CAMP
RTLC SUMMER 2026
HANDS WIDE OPEN
PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Hands Wide Open

We are very grateful to the following individuals for their work in writing the 2026 Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp Bible study.

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2026 HANDS WIDE OPEN

I'll never forget the first time a group of young kids came running up to me in Tanzania, all of them trying to hold my hand. The many times I held hands with my kids as we prayed in church. Holding the hands of dear parishioners from my church as I prayed with them during hospital visits. The list could go on of the many precious hands I've held, or powerful moments of holding hands with someone we care about. As powerful as these moments can be, so often we are quick to pull away or are nervous to trust someone to hold their hand. Remember that first time in Middle School youth group you were asked to hold hands during prayer! So much can be communicated through holding hands: trust, care, fear, love, support and so much more.

My favorite Bible verse has always been Psalm 63:8, "My soul clings to you, your right hand upholds me." It was my screen saver on my very first cell phone. And while I'm thankful that God holds me up, if I'm honest, I don't often approach Him with open hands. I so often tend to pull back or try to do it on my own. Can you relate?

We wanted to create a Bible Study this summer that really challenged all of us to live more open handed with God. So often our closed hands turn to fists of anxiety, fear and anger. Our hope this summer during this sacred time each day is to slow down, be present, get honest about our struggles and anxieties and open our hands to God in moments of Thanksgiving. Prayer and Peace. It is my hope that this Study will be a blessing to all of us as we open up our hands and draw near to God!

1. **BEING PRESENT-**Coming just as we are before God as we become aware of ourselves, our actions, our emotions and the community around us.
2. **ANXIET Y WITH CLOSED FISTS -** Taking a look at the anxiety in our lives and what that looks like in our relationship with God.
3. **THANKSGIVING -** Intentionally taking some time to focus on the things in our lives that we are thankful for and how gratitude can help us deal with the anxiety struggles in our lives.
4. **PRAYER -** Moving from closed hands, to cupped hands, to hands of prayer in our times of anxiety and struggle. Taking time to pray and be with God.
5. **PEACE -** Understanding who we are as beloved children of God as we connect to God and carry that connection home with open hands!

I'm so thankful for this study. I'm hopeful that God will use it in powerful ways to draw us all to Him. I'm trusting that as we open our hands in times of anxiety and strife God will move us towards being present in thanksgiving, prayer and times of peace. I'm hopeful that campers, staff, and adult leaders will be set free as they "in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4). My prayer for each of us is that we can continue to discover more nf who we are as we see more clearly Whose we are! Thank you for the time, love, and support you will pour out through this Study as we partner together in serving the people of the Rocky Mountain Synod and beyond!



Dave Gunnlaugsson,
Executive Director

2026 RAINBOW TRAIL BIBLE STUDY
HANDS WIDE OPEN
DAY 1: BEING PRESENT

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Where are your arms and hands right now? Are your arms crossed or your hands in a fist? Are your arms open and hands open?

Take a moment to clinch your fists and squeeze them. What do you feel? What do you notice about your body, your arms, your legs, your chest, your neck, your breath, your heart, your heart beat? Are you tensing up, are your breaths shallow and are you closing out the things around you or shutting down?

Now release. Did you just sigh as you released or take a deep breath? Now, take a deep breath. Breathe in and relax your body as you breathe out.

Take a moment to now open your hands. What do you feel? What do you notice about your body, your arms, your legs, your chest, your neck, your breath, your heart, your heart beat? Are you more relaxed, are you breathing deeper and are you open to what is around you?

Now release and take a deep breath.

I am a runner, I enjoy running and have been doing it since middle school. I wasn't a natural runner and had to learn good form. I played many sports where running was involved. There was a lot of running in soccer, but the focus was on the ball. There was a little running in baseball, but it was short and quick stents to get to the ball or the base.

I can still remember my cross country coach yelling at me to loosen up and relax. I would run with clinch fists and it took so much more work and effort. I would get tired faster than when I would run with my hands open or relaxed.

Have you ever watched sprinters in the Olympics? What are they doing with their hands? They are wide open and straight so they can relax and use their whole body to run faster.

What activities do you do where you have your fists clinched besides punch or fight? Imagine dribbling a basketball with your fists clinched! No way, you have to have your hand wide open and relaxed to smoothly move it up and down to dribble the ball. When you sing or see professional artists perform, what are they doing with their hands? They have them open and relaxed or they are moving them freely; unless they are singing with a negative emotion.

Think about it, when do you clinch your fists? When you are angry, afraid, frustrated or anxious?

Our Bible study for 2026 is based on the theme "Hands Wide Open." Throughout this Bible study we will be talking about our hands:

- Day two is on anxiety where our hands are clinched and closed.
- Day three is on thanksgiving where our hands are cupped open.
- Day four is on prayer where our hands are open and out.
- Day five is on peace where our hands are open and wide (hands wide open).

Our hands say a lot about our emotions and how we are feeling. As we go throughout life, we have and experience emotions. Some people wear their emotions on our sleeve; meaning you can read them and what they're feeling based on their body language. Where are their arms and hands? What are they doing with them? Are they crossed, closed or open?

Have you ever seen the Disney movie Inside Out? It is based on a girl named Riley and her emotions of Joy, sadness, fear, disgust, and of course anger, which influence her actions. As Riley becomes a teenager, in Inside Out 2, five more emotions appear: anxiety, envy, embarrassment, ennui (boredom), and nostalgia.

We all have emotions, but how to recognize, use and handle our emotions is a learning process. I'll be honest, as a male, I didn't know how to recognize my emotions and what to do with them or about them until I was in my mid 20s.

As a father of a 5th grade son and 3rd grade daughter, I am trying to learn how to help them recognize their emotions, understand them and live into them. Our emotions are part of who we are; they are not bad, we just have to understand them.

Kids have a lot of emotions and how they express their emotions tells a lot about them or the household they live in. I grew up in a family of four boys, my poor mom, so there were not many emotions except anger and happiness. "I love you" was not said, but implied. You can imagine how I struggled with being aware and understanding my emotions as I got older. Especially when my wife, when we were dating, would ask me, what are you feeling? I would respond, "I don't know" and that was an honest answer!

A big part of this day, Monday, is to help the kids to be present and be aware of themselves, their emotions and their feelings. You may even want to use or have an emotions chart available and ready. You don't have to force it with the campers, but asking them how they are doing and what they are feeling will help them to be aware and present.

If your campers are anything like my son, it may start as a struggle, but be so beneficial for them. Boys have emotions and feel them, but move on so quickly, they don't process them or even think about them. Compared to typical girls who have a lot of emotions, feel them, process them and have a hard time letting go of them.

The big question is how does all of this relate to our faith? God does not expect us to set our life and emotions aside to be a person of faith and be in relationship with God. Our life and faith together make up who we are and is how we come to God. God desires for us to come to Him in conversation, in relationship, and in prayer with all of our emotions; when our hands are clinched and when our hands are open in all their forms.

Yes, we can come to God when we are anxious, worried, afraid, sad or upset; when our hands are closed. Come to God in prayer and let God know what is going in your life, what you are upset about, what your friend said about you, what happened that made you close your hand into a fist. Tell God how you are feeling and what you are thinking.

Don't forget to also come to God when you are thankful and at peace. This is the great message of our theme verse from Philippians 4: 6-7 as Paul, encourages us to come to God in prayer in every situation with thanksgiving to make your requests to God. In doing so, we will have peace, the kind of peace that will go beyond all understanding and protect us.

This day sets the foundation for the rest of the week where we will dig deeper into each of these themes: anxiety, thanksgiving, prayer and peace. We will explore how important it is for us to be present and aware of ourselves, our emotions and our feelings to be able to come to God as we are and be in relationship with God.

May God be with you as you walk with these campers to help them be aware of themselves and help them to go from closed hands and clinch fists to hands wide open.

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

- To come together as a group to begin to explore how life and faith come together and how God desires us to come to God in prayer, just as we are, with our emotions.
- To be present and become aware of ourselves and our actions; starting with our hands, emotions and feelings.
- To through the story of Peter walking on water.

C. MORNING WATCH

Common Welcome
Good morning, friends. As we begin this day, I invite you to rest your hands open in your lap, a sign of trust and readiness to receive. Paul reminds us in Philippians that we don't earn God's peace by worrying less—we receive it as we bring everything to God in prayer. Today, let's start with open hands, trusting that the peace of Christ will guard our hearts and minds as we walk through this day together.

Introduction to the Day
Good morning and welcome to morning watch!
Today, I invite you to be present and be aware. Be aware of yourself, what you are doing with your hands, and what you are feeling. When we are thinking about what is next or what is going on somewhere else, we are not present in the moment. When we are present, we get to experience the beauty around us, the people we are with, ourselves, and the presence of God.

Why we chose the Passage and Scripture
Today's scripture is the story of Jesus walking on water. The disciples experience a lot of emotions in this story; especially Peter, who also walks on water towards Jesus. At first Peter is

full of faith and confidence, but then when he notices the wind and the waves, he becomes afraid and begins to lose faith. Peter's hands go from being open to starting to close as he cries out and reaches out his hand crying out to Jesus to save him.

"Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'" (Matthew 14:29-31).

Song: Good Day by Forrest Frank
Okay, okay, okay, okay

I'm 'bout to have a good day (good day)
No matter what they say (what they say)
Sun is shining down on me
Birds are singing praise
I'm 'bout to have a good day (good day)
In every single way
The God who made the universe
Knows me by my name
So it's a good day

Baby, in my arms walking through the neighborhood
Living in the present, not woulda shoulda or coulda
I remember back when I was low as a rug
Now I'm standing up look at what my father does

Turning old things new
Grey skies blue
Hear the church saying, "Won't He do it?"
I know He's got my back
That's why I'm singing that

I'm 'bout to have a good day (good day)
No matter what they say (what they say)
Sun is shining down on me
Birds are singing praise
I'm 'bout to have a good day (good day)
In every single way
The God who made the universe
Knows me by my name
So it's a good day (yeah)

It's a good day, mmm no, it's great
Everything I prayed for didn't come in late
I got all I need and I didn't have to wait
Ask me if you love me, you didn't hesitate

Turning old things new

Grey skies blue
Hear the church saying, "Won't He do it?"
I know He's got my back
That's why I'm singing that
I'm 'bout to have a good day (good day)
No matter what they say (no matter what they say)
Sun is shining down on me
Birds are singing praise

I'm 'bout to have a good day (good day)
In every single way
God who made the universe
Knows me by my name
So it's a good day

It's a good day
(Good day)
It's a good day
It's a good day

Questions for Consideration

- It's a good day! Take a moment to take it all in. You are here! You are at camp in this beautiful place with such wonderful people. Take a moment to take a couple of deep breaths. Look around you and notice the trees, leaves, rocks, dirt, birds or grass. Can you hear the creek or birds chirping? Take a moment to notice yourself, what you are thinking and feeling. What are you looking forward to today? Is there anything you are anxious about or thankful for?
- What emotions did Peter experience when he was walking on water? When did those emotions change? Why do you think they changed? What did he do when he started to sink?
- Are you someone who notices your emotions or feelings? When do you close your hands and clinch your fists? When do you have your hands wide open?
- Are you so busy you don't take time to stop, reflect, think and be present. Take time to be present today to notice yourself, God's beautiful creation around you, and God's presence in the songs, games, conversations, food and people here at camp.

Closing Prayer

Loving God, you promise to be present and with us always. For that we give you thanks. Help us to be present today and to slow down to be aware of the things around us, ourselves and your presence. You have created us as people with emotions and the ability to love. Help us to understand our emotions and come to you when our hands are closed and when our hands are wide open. Thank you for loving me and always listening to me. Amen.

D. <u>SCRIPTURE STUDY</u>

Context:

The story of Jesus walking on water is told in the Gospels of Matthew (14:22-33), Mark (6:45-52) and John (6:16-21), but not in Luke. In both Mark and John, Jesus is the only one who

walks on water, so the story ends when Jesus says, “It is I. Don’t be afraid.” He then gets in the boat. The only gospel where Peter also walks on water is in the Gospel of Matthew.

In all three gospels, the story that proceeds Jesus walking on water is the story where Jesus feeds the 5,000. After this time, Jesus needs time to be alone and to be with his Father, with God. Take time in this study to talk about the fact that Jesus needed to slow down and be, to be aware of himself and God’s presence, to stop and talk to God, to spend time with God in prayer.

God as creator of the heavens and the earth, has power over water. God sent water down to flood the earth, by the power of God, Moses parted the red sea, God provided water from a Rock for the Israelites in the desert, Jesus walks on water and Jesus speaks of living water to the woman at the well, which we will hear about on Wednesday with the theme of Thanksgiving.

Jesus sends the disciples ahead and catches up with them by walking on the water. When he approaches the boat the disciples are in, the disciples see him, are terrified and think he’s a ghost. Jesus tells them, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” This is important because “It is I” is actually a translation from “ego eimi” in Greek, “I am”. Where have you noticed “I AM” at camp? Yes, the great I AM. “I AM” is the phrase God uses to refer to Himself, so for Jesus to say, “I AM,” he is referring to himself as God. There are seven major I AM statements in the Gospel of John. See the “Ideas to adjust study up for Sr Highs section for more on the “I AM.”

Outline:

- Highs & Lows/Hands Open & Closed
- Hand Motion Instructions
- Read Matthew 14:22-33
- Discuss & Reflect
- Importance of Prayer
- Activity: Act out the Walking on Water Story
    - Characters:
        - Jesus
        - Peter
        - Disciples in the boat (what are they doing when Peter walks on water)
- Discuss what Peter experienced walking on the water
    - Anxiety
    - Thanksgiving and Peace
- Closing

Highs and Lows/hands open and hands closed:
Begin with a time to connect as a group. Share a high and a low for their time at camp so far, but in a little different way to help them get the theme of “Hands Wide Open.” Have them share a time when their hands were closed or clinched (a time they were sad, worried, scared, afraid or anxious) (if they are willing) and a time when their hands were opened (when they were happy, thankful, at peace, helpful, etc).

Lesson:
Today, we are going to read the story of when Jesus and Peter walk on water. As I (counselor) read this story, I want you (campers) to use your hands to show the expression of the people in the story.

When someone is anxious, close your hands and clinch them.
When someone is thankful, cup your hands open.
When someone is praying, open your hands up or fold your hands.
When someone is at peace, open your hands out wide.

Read Matthew 14:22-33:

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray ***(Hands open or folded)***. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ***(Hands closed or clinched)***

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ***(Hands closed or clinched)*** "It's a ghost,"they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ***(Hands open and wide)***

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said. ***(Hands open and wide)***

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, ***(Hands closed or clinched)*** cried out, "Lord, save me!" ***(Hands open or folded)***

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. ***(Hand up - Peter reaching for Jesus or down - Jesus reaching for Peter - not one we talked about, but for effect)*** "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." ***(Hands open and wide)***

Discuss & Reflect:
What did you notice about this story?

- Jesus sent the disciples ahead of him.
- Jesus stopped to be with God and pray.
- Jesus was walking on water.
- The disciples were terrified and thought Jesus was a ghost.
- Peter asked to walk on water.
- Peter does walk on water, until he sees the wind and becomes afraid.
- Peter begins to sink and he cries out to Jesus.
- Jesus saves him and asks why he doubts.
- They get into the boat, the wind dies down and the disciples worship Jesus, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Importance of Prayer
How did the story begin? It begins with Jesus making the disciples go ahead of him while he dismissed the crowd, SO THAT, he could go up on a mountainside by himself to PRAY.

Do you think it is important for us to pray to God? What is prayer? Talking with God. We will learn more about this on Thursday.

Prayer is also an important part of Jesus's relationship with God. In this particular situation, Jesus wanted to be alone to be with God, so he could talk to God about all that was going on. We don't know how long he prayed for, it sounds like it was for a while as it says, "Later that night, he was there alone…"

Do you pray? How do you pray? It doesn't have to be hours, just start with a couple of minutes. Talk to God as you would talk to a friend.

Activity:
Read the story once more and have the kids act it out.
Characters: Jesus, Peter and the disciples in the boat
Afterwards, discuss what Peter went through and experienced

Peter Walking on Water
Imagine being in a boat. Have you ever been on a boat? Have you ever been on a boat when it was windy? We read that the water was beating against the boat repeatedly (buffeted) while the disciples were trying to cross the sea. Then you notice something in the distance. It looked like something coming on top of the water, but what could it be except for a ghost? The disciples were terrified and cried out in fear.

Jesus says, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." They knew Jesus was special, but able to walk on water!?! Jesus is God after all!

(More about Jesus being God, "I AM" section of Ideas to adjust study up for Sr Highs)

Peter replies, "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus says, "Come." So, "Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus."

Let's stop and take a moment to observe what is happening here. There is a strong wind causing waves in the water to beat against the boat and Jesus comes walking on the water towards the boat the disciples are in. Jesus is still off in the distance telling them to not be afraid, it is I. Then Peter tells Jesus to tell him to come to him on the water!

Wow, what courage and faith it would take to get out of that boat with the wind and the waves!

Now, I know what you're thinking, but he still began to sink! Yes, he did, but he had the faith to get out of the boat! Would you get out of the boat?

What happens next is what makes this story so real for so many people! Peter has the faith to get out of the boat and walks on water towards Jesus. He is doing it! He's doing it, until he sees the wind. He sees the wind and the waves beating against his legs and he realizes, there is no way I should be able to do this. I can't walk on water!

Peter begins to doubt and lose faith because he takes his eyes off of Jesus. His anxiety increases because he is focused on the wind and the waves rather than on Jesus.

Activity: Emotions Charades/Pictionary
Have the campers act out or draw different emotions or feelings. The other campers have to guess what emotion or feeling they are.

When Life Meets Faith
When we have faith and believe in God, it is part of who we are, it is part of our life. The two are not separate, even though we may make choices that do not align with our faith. Our faith influences the decisions we make, our perspectives, and the things we do and don't do.

Peter believes in God and his faith is part of his life. The problem Peter has when he is walking on the water is that he takes his eyes off of Jesus. Even though faith is part of his life, he is not leaning on it and trusting it, which causes him to fear. If he were to keep his eyes on Jesus, he would know and trust that God was there present with him to protect him and care for him, even though the wind and waves were beating against him.

What happens when you become afraid or anxious? What does it mean for us to take our eyes off of Jesus? What are the things that could distract us from God and being in a relationship with God or going to God in prayer?

- Cell phones, social media or games
- Being busy
- Trying to fit in - when someone makes fun of us for going to church and we stop going
- Being put down by friends or others

(Go deeper with Sr Highs in the section on Ideas to adjust study up for Sr Highs - What it means to take our eyes off of Jesus and focus on earthly things.)

When Peter experiences anxiety, he becomes afraid and begins to sink. He then cries out to Jesus, he prays. Now, yes, it was much easier for Peter, in my opinion, because Jesus was physically right there. However, God is with us always, so God is right here with us as well. So, we too should have faith and not doubt.

Imagine what Peter must have been going through when Jesus caught him as he was sinking and then as they got in the boat together. I am sure he was grateful; I am also sure he was in disbelief of what just happened, but grateful for Jesus saving him.

What are you grateful for in your life? How has God been present and active in your life that you are grateful for?

We will explore more about gratitude and thanksgiving on Wednesday.

Finally, when Jesus and Peter got into the boat, the rest of the disciples in the boat worshiped him saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

What a feeling of peace these disciples experienced.

Wrap-Up and Closing Prayer:
Peter was a normal person like all of us. He had faith, doubted, struggled and called out to God. We can relate to Peter as he goes through the ups and downs of life and faith. He went through many emotions just in this one story. He was confident, filled with joy as he walked on water (presumably), but then anxious and afraid as he took his eyes off Jesus. He went from hands open to hands closed to hands open again.

Let us pray, Lord God, I ask you to be with these campers as we begin this week to journey with them as they go through a variety of emotions and feelings. Help them to be present and give them peace as they look around and may become anxious. May they know we love them, support them and care for them as you love them, support them and care for them to have an amazing week here at camp. Thank you for your presence with us always. Amen.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

Draw Emotions/Expressions: If you have a camper who is struggling with their emotions or being at camp, have them draw their emotion. They can use a face and draw an expression and have them share it with just you.

Breathing: Another option is to have the campers practice breathing to be present. Breath in for three, hold for four and out for five. Do it a couple of times or whatever feels right for your group.

Brainstorming Emotions: Brainstorm a list of emotions and if it feels right to have the kids share a time they had this emotion (for the sake of time, you may just have one story for each emotion.

- Gratitude
- Surprise

- Boredom
- Happiness
- Calmness
- Sadness
- Disappointment
- Worry
- Confidence
- Anger
- Frustration
- Pride
- Jealousy
- Optimism
- Excitement

Name Your Emotion: Have the campers match the emotion with the situation. Use the situations below or make up your own. If this gets too silly, it may not be right for your group.

- Falling over
- Losing your favorite toy
- Arguing with a friend or family member
- Getting an award for working hard
- Playing your favorite game
- Having a birthday party
- Not finishing your homework on time
- Being told off
- Missing your favorite activity or game on TV

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Inside Out day where people dress up in colors of the emotions or be one for the day

  - Joy: Yellow (bright, energetic, sunny)
  - Sadness: Blue (melancholy, calm, deep)
  - Anger: Red (fiery, intense, passionate)
  - Disgust: Green (snooty, but also natural, with a sophisticated look)
  - Fear: Purple (anxious, slightly sickly, nervous)
  - Anxiety: Orange (alert, overwhelming, energetic)
  - Envy: Cyan/Turquoise (jealous, comparing)
  - Embarrassment: Pink (blushing, awkward)
  - Ennui: Grey/Indigo (bored, listless)
  - Nostalgia: taupe/beige/brown (longing for the past)
- Foods of specific colors
- Take time in worship to pause to be present in the space you are in and to be aware of yourself, your feelings and your emotions.
- All camp activity could be a scavenger hunt where you ask one of the support staff members to be one of the Inside Out characters and they hide somewhere throughout camp and the campers are divided into groups and have to find each character and get

them to sign their paper. The person could act as their character to make it even more interesting and fun.

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

Songs

- Be Bold #40
- Isaiah 43 #43
- Dance with Me #45
- Light the Fire #49
- Just Be #51
- Little Room #65
- Here I am to Worship #79
- The Rock (Psalm 18) #7
- Romans 16:19 #16
- Sanctuary #37
- Create in Me A Clean Heart (Psalm 51) #38

Scripture

- Romans 8:5-6
    - "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."
- Isaiah 41:10
    - "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
- 2 Timothy 1:7
    - "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."
- Matthew 6:34
    - "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."
- Psalm 23: The Lord is my Shepherd
- Psalm 46:10a
    - "Be still, and know that I am God."

Suggestions

If a camper is struggling with emotions or having a lot of emotions, you can help by validating their emotions and not telling them an emotion they are experiencing is good or bad. You can also share with them an experience you had with an emotion they are experiencing.

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

Stick with the Walking on Water story focus on

1. Jesus taking time to be alone with God to pray
2. The feelings and emotions of Peter
3. If the pictionary/charades activity is not going well, have them brainstorm emotions and have them name the emotion based on the situation.
4. Talk about what it means to be present and be aware of our own emotions and feelings.
    a. Have them share a time when they were excited or grateful, like what the disciples experienced when Jesus and Peter got in the boat.

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

"I AM" Statements

When God came to Moses in the burning bush in Exodus 3, Moses asked God, if the Israelites ask me, what is his name, what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

So God refers to God's self as "I AM".

This is why it is important for us to recognize this is what Jesus calls himself in our passage for today. When Jesus says, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." The phrase "It is I" in Greek is actually "ego eimi" literally translated to "I AM".

This occurs five times in the Gospel of John:

- John 6:20, "But he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.'"
- John 8:24, "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins."
- John 8:28, "So Jesus said to them, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.'"
- John 8:58, "Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.'"
- John 18:5, They answered him, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said to them, 'I am he.' Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them."

Jesus also seven times where Jesus uses I am metaphorically:

- I am the bread of life in John 6:35, 48, 51
- I am the light of the world in John 8:12; 9:5
- I am the door of the sheep in John 10:7, 9
- I am the resurrection and the life in John 11:25
- I am the way, the truth, and the life in John 14:6
- I am the true vine in John 15:1

The significance of Jesus using these "I AM" statements is that Jesus is claiming to be divine and he is claiming to be the son of God. The authors of the gospels are writing their books to prove to the readers that Jesus is God and the Son of God.

So, for Jesus to say, "Take courage! I AM. Don't be afraid." The disciples could truly understand that Jesus is God; especially with the ability to walk on water and then calm the winds.

Taking our Eyes off of Jesus
Do you find it hard to constantly keep your eyes on Jesus? As we go through our life, go to school, do sports or music or other activities and always have your eyes on Jesus? Do you think you can always have your eyes on Jesus and not be considered a Jesus freak? Is that something you worry about?

Paul writes in Romans 8:5-6, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."

What does it look like to live according to the flesh? According to the Spirit? What does he mean by death? What does he mean by life and peace?

How can we live according to the Spirit in our world today where our world is so fast paced, when we are so busy and

Awareness of God or God Revealed
When Jesus and Peter got back in the boat, the wind died down and the other disciples worshiped Jesus saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Ask the campers, has there been a time in your life when God has been revealed to you and you were able to say God is here, God is alive, this is God, or thank you God for…?

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture: Matthew 14:22-33

Reflection: The goal of today is to introduce the theme for the week, to be present and to be aware of ourselves, our emotions and our feelings. This will be easy for some and it will be hard for some. Our hope is that it will be enlightening and impactful for all as we open our hands and our hearts to Jesus. The story of Jesus walking on water reveals the importance of taking time to be with God in prayer; as well as the emotions of Peter as he is terrified that there may be a ghost, amazed that he is walking on water, afraid because of the wind, grateful to Jesus for saving him and at peace when he too realizes Jesus is truly the Son of God.

Activity:
Where are your arms and hands right now? Are your arms crossed or your hands in a fist? Are your arms open and hands open?

Take a moment to clinch your fists and squeeze them. What do you feel? What do you notice about your body, your arms, your legs, your chest, your neck, your breath, your heart, your heart

beat? Are you tensing up, are your breaths shallow and are you closing out the things around you or shutting down?

Now release. Did you just sigh as you released or take a deep breath? Now, take a deep breath. Breathe in and relax your body as you breathe out.

Take a moment to now open your hands. What do you feel? What do you notice about your body, your arms, your legs, your chest, your neck, your breath, your heart, your heart beat? Are you more relaxed, are you breathing deeper and are you open to what is around you?

Now release and take a deep breath.

How did you feel when you had your hands opened compared to when you had your hands closed and fists clinched? This exercise helps us to be aware of our body, our emotions and our feelings as we are aware of what we are doing with our hands. When we are present and aware of ourselves, we can be more aware of God's presence in our world and in our life. For God is with us always, working in us and through us.

Prayer: Let us pray, Lord God, I ask you to be with me this day as I go through a variety of emotions and feelings with my child(ren) at camp.. Help me to be present this day and be at peace knowing you love me and are with me always. Helm my child (ren) to have an amazing week at camp. Thank you for your presence with us always. Amen.

K. SUMMER STAFF SECTION

- What new feelings or emotions are you experiencing this week as you begin another week of camp?
- How have your emotions changed throughout the summer?
- How has God revealed God's self to you throughout this summer?
- Have you been able to have more quality time in prayer as you do morning watch and spend time with God in the beauty of God's creation up here at camp throughout the summer?
- Have you felt God working in and through you to help lift up and catch campers or other staff in their time of need or when they have called out? Has there been times where you have felt like Peter and took that step out in faith to then doubt and begin to sink? Was there someone there to catch you? Who are those people in your life that are there to catch you?

2026 RAINBOW TRAIL BIBLE STUDY
HANDS WIDE OPEN
DAY 2: ANXIETY WITH CLOSED FISTS

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

"An uneasy state of mind usually over the possibility of an anticipated misfortune or trouble."
Fear, concern, worry, unease, concernment, nervousness, uneasiness, fearfulness, uncertainty
agitation, apprehension, and the list goes on. Whatever you call it, welcome dear ones to the great dance of anxiety. The large party that just keeps going and exhausts us in our daily living AND can support us in strange ways.

Yesterday you heard our theme verses from Philippians 4:6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

You heard from Pastor Brad yesterday an invitation to open our hands. He reminded us about releasing the tense nature we may find ourselves with closed hands when we engage in our lives. We discussed how our emotions serve us or interfere with our daily lives. They are part of who we are and we need to learn how to walk with them. We explored how to be in relationship with God who loves us with all our emotions.

For a moment I invite you to see the character *Anxiety* from the movie Inside/Out 2. This, dear ones, is one of my favorite movies for indeed we do not talk freely about our emotions in our world. Imagine *Anxiety* in her itchy turtleneck sweater, high pants, and tight boots, all which make her appear to be in a constant state of discomfort. Her hair looks like carrot greens: stiff at the root and light at the tips, which adds to her nervous movements. Her eyes are intense, her smile just a little too wide, and yet you just want to give her a hug and say: *Dear Anxiety, BREATHE.*

Friends as much as anxiety can be considered a negative emotion in our world, I ask you to consider that it can be a helpful tool for us as we keep it in perspective. You heard from the Philippians text: "Do not be anxious about anything" and I pray that you do not hear a shame or blame reception of that verse. For indeed we will be anxious: Jesus, as human, was anxious. Jesus has long prayers that asks for God to be with him, to protect the disciples, to heal those who were in pain, to remove things from him like going to the cross. AND Jesus did not see that anxiety as who he was nor did Jesus feel that he was alone in his anxiety. God was present. God would provide. The additional invitation is this: "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." And then? Peace upon peace.

Fear, concern, worry, unease, concernment, nervousness, uneasiness, fearfulness, uncertainty
agitation, and apprehension. I too have felt anxiety in my life. As I grew in a home with a parent with mental health issues, I was on high alert to be ready for anything and honestly everything. As I learned to drive, making As on my test and impressing the driving instructor was not enough, what if I get in an accident? As a student in high school and in college, even after studying really hard and going to class, the thought of "what if I do not pass this exam" came with energy. When I got married: do I know this amazing man whom I love with my whole heart? As a new parent I wondered if I really knew how to change a diaper although I had received gold stars from my parenting class. Then professionally it came: As a social worker can I really help these students who have really challenging life situations? And as a pastor: can I really live into the gospel of Jesus that we all are so blessed to have so that it matters for others?

Anxiety is powerful. Anxiety is real. It can usurp control of our plans, our joy, and our peace. Our brains are hard-wired to protect us, which means they are hard-wired to look out for danger and worst-case scenarios. It can also support us in meeting deadlines, to push through challenging times and if we are willing it will invite us into a time of prayer. It can invite us into a time where we take a deep breath, and lean into the presence of God to provide what we need.

Today we went on a hike. Were any of your campers a little worried about the hike they signed up for? Did they (or you) miss your friends from your village if they went on a different hike? Did they worry about being in the back, with the "slow ones" with the med pack carrying counselor? Did the elevation take their breath away…literally? Did they worry about what was in the gorp? 😊

And now…what was provided for them? Did you as counselors give campers good directions? Did you or the campers figure out the many, many, many riddles you heard or shared today? Did campers make new friends and did you deepen yours? What came to mind during your quiet time? Did you walk in some way, on some trail, in God's creation setting down the anxiety of unmet expectations? Did you see movement in your closed fists that may have been tight with worry to opening just a little?

In this study, during this week, we will explore how we can embrace anxiety, not as who we are, but as a tool to move us to rely on God. We will read from Hebrews 13:6: "So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid; what can anyone do to me?'" We will explore how anxiety can make us feel alone and yet God is always present. We will travel from our closed fists to a finger or two lifted to our hands of gratitude cupped open to receive the gifts God has to our journey into leaning into the peace that God provides one moment, one day at a time.

B. <u>OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY</u>

- Campers will explore what anxiety looks like in their lives and how it can be an obstacle in their relationship with God.

- Campers will read scriptures that invite us into a relationship with God that waits with open cupped hands of provision and hope.
- Campers will learn how anxiety can help us in our journey to move into a place of peace.
- Staff will model how anxiety has impacted their lives and increase their ability to see anxiety as a tool and support.

C. MORNING WATCH

Common Welcome
Good morning friends. As we begin this day, I invite you to rest your hands open in your lap, a sign of trust and readiness to receive. Paul reminds us in Philippians that we don't earn God's peace by worrying less – we receive it as we bring everything to God in prayer. Today, let's start with open hands, trusting that the peace of Christ will guard our hearts and minds as we walk through this day together.

Introduction to the Day
Welcome to Hike Day dear ones. Welcome to our continuing exploration of how we live with Hands Wide Open. Today we will be discussing anxiety. Our world is filled with so much anxiety. There even a book called The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt. Anxiety in our world is real. So, the questions come: How do we name our anxiety? How can we use it as a tool to help us accomplish the things we feel called to do? We will talk about our hands and their need to be closed and tightly clinched when we are worried, afraid, and frustrated. We will learn about God's presence, provision, and peace.

Why we chose the Passage and Scripture
Why we chose the passage and Scriptures: Through the journey of our faith history folks following God's will and the way of Jesus have been anxious. Being anxious does not mean you are not being faithful. Being anxious tells you that something is not right, not in place, something you need to address. Hear these words of Jesus in Matthew 6:24 -35:

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Song: "Anxious Heart" by Jeremy Camp

Locked up and I'm so in my head
Heart starts racing and I can't slow it down
Hands shaking and I'm losing my breath
Paralyzed with a mind spinning out

My strength has grown weak
No words left to speak
I fall to my knees
Cause I know what I need

You are the light when my world goes dark
You hold me together when I'm torn apart
And when my thoughts have run way too far
You're the calm for my anxious heart
You're the calm for my anxious heart
You're the calm for my anxious heart

Wrapped up in the arms of Your love
Stilled by the silence above all the noise
Burden's light when You're lifting it up
Fears terrified by the sound of Your voice

Cause You don't grow weak
Your word is peace
I fall to my knees
Cause I know what I need

You are the light when my world goes dark
You hold me together when I'm torn apart
And when my thoughts have run way too far
You're the calm for my anxious heart
You're the calm for my anxious heart

You know everything about me
You come and surround me
And everything that holds my soul
Falling in surrender
Learning to remember
You're the One who's in control

You are the light when my world goes dark
You hold me together when I'm torn apart
And when my thoughts have run way too far
You're the calm for my anxious heart

You are the life when my breath is gone
You are the hope when I'm stuck in the storm
And I know this is still who You who are

You're the calm for my anxious heart
You're the calm for my anxious heart
You're the calm for my anxious heart

Questions for Consideration

- Is there something that made you feel anxious this week?
- Who do you talk to when you are feeling overwhelmed?
- What does anxiety feel like for you?
- What does peace feel like for you?
- When do you feel most safe?
- What do you think adults misunderstand about teens today? (For junior high and high school)
- Who really sees you for who you are?
- What is a question you are asking that no one seems to answer? Will you take this to God in prayer?

Closing Prayer

Dear God, today I seek strength and wisdom to face my anxiety. I ask that you allow me to see the wisdom of anxiety and the gift and tool it can be to give me resilience to overcome fear, trusting in your care. Fill me with courage, affirming Your presence. Remind me that I am not alone. Help me to open my hands. In Jesus' name. Amen.

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

As you begin your time with your campers ask them to name each other as they learn each others' names. Then ask them to tightened their fists and release and breathe. Ask them about things this week so far that have been highs and lows, anxious moments, or great joy, etc.

Then invite your campers into an exercise to embody a time of study:

"Where are your arms and hands right now? Are your arms crossed or your hands in a fist? Are your arms open and hands open?

Take a moment to clinch your fists and squeeze them. What do you feel? What do you notice about your body, your arms, your legs, your chest, your neck, your breath, your heart, your heartbeat? Are you tensing up, are your breaths shallow and are you closing out the things around you or shutting down?

Now release. Did you just sigh as you released or take a deep breath? Now, take a deep breath. Breathe in and relax your body as you breathe out.

Take a moment to now open your hands. What do you feel? What do you notice about your body, your arms, your legs, your chest, your neck, your breath, your heart, your heartbeat? Are you more relaxed, are you breathing deeper and are you open to what is around you.

Now release and take a deep breath."

Say: Today we are going to explore anxiety. We are going to talk about what it is and how it can help us or get in our way.

Ask for a volunteer to read Matthew 6:25-34. Please remember to increase every camper's knowledge of the Bible by saying: **Let us read from Matthew. Is Matthew in the Old or New Testament? What do we call the first four books of the New Testament?** Please remember some campers have never been in a church or may have never opened a Bible. Please remember that Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp has free Bibles for campers to use during the week and take home with them down the mountain. And you as the Bible study leader are invited to write in their Bibles a blessing or hope for their study of the word.

Say: As (Camper Joan) reads this text from Matthew please notice what jumps out at you. What did you agree with? What do you wonder?"

"Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today."

Say: Thank you, Camper Joan, for reading.

Say: What did you notice? What did you wonder? All thoughts are okay. All questions are good.

Keep in mind as you lead your study: This text is part of The Sermon on the Mount as Jesus taught his disciples and those in his listening.

During this time Judea and Galilee were under Roman rule, administered through Herod Antipas in Galilee and the prefect Pontius Pilate in Judea. Heavy tribute, customs tolls, and indirect taxes pressured subsistence farmers and fishermen. An estimated 2–3 percent of the populace controlled most landholdings, while the majority lived at or below subsistence. Keep in mind these are folks without many resources and here is Jesus is saying: "Do not worry about your life…" They had every logical right to worry. And yet…

Jesus is asking those in his listening to trust. Jesus is asking them to think about God's provision and how God has a desire for all of God's children (yes that is all of us) to be

provided for, cared for, loved. May we all have the courage to recognize God when God show up outside of the mold, the box, the imaginations of our hearts. For indeed dear staff, God reveals Godself where no one expects.

Say: Let us talk a little more about anxiety. What do you think or understand anxiety to be? Let answers flow and see if there are common thoughts or definitions.

You may use the words in the Introduction to this day: "Fear, concern, worry, unease, concernment, nervousness, uneasiness, fearfulness, uncertainty, agitation, or apprehension." See if the campers can name how it feels in their bodies. Maybe if they have a lot of energy (or are falling asleep) have them do an acting out of each word with their bodies. Consider asking how the adults in their lives talk about anxiety.

Say: Our world may say that anxiety is bad and that if we just have enough faith, we will not be anxious. It is helpful to remember that anxiety can help us get our homework done, clean our rooms before mom and dad get home, study for a test to address the worry of failing. Weirdly anxiety can be a tool for us if we do not let it overwhelm us.

Remind them that although social media tell us our world needs to be perfect, God invites us to trust God, pray for God's provision, and know that even the smallest action makes the word a different place. As Mother Teresa famously said, "If you can't feed a hundred people, then feed just one." Mother Teresa understood that even one child of God matters. Even one kind act, makes the world different. One movement forward can reduce our anxiety.

Say: Will someone please read Proverbs 3:5-6: (Keeping in mind OT/NT placement)

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

Say: Do you ever wonder if there is only one path for you or if God is with you on each path?

Say: May I have a volunteer to read Hebrews 13:6:

"So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid; what can anyone do to me?'"

Say: Please remember that we will have times when we are afraid, times when we do not have answers. Times when we feel alone and yet we have the "great helper" who loves us, who wants the best for us, who is the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness does not, cannot, and will not overcome it.

Who has been a wonderful helper in your life? Can you imagine God in this similar role?

Say: And will someone else please read Luke 12:25:

"He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest?"

Say: Can you imagine yourself leaning into these promises of God knowing God is with you and will provide? Can you be at peace that you may be provided with what God wishes you to have verses what you think you should have?

For High School campers say: Will someone read this poem called "A time of fear" written by Sima:

"I'm feeling so scared,
I can't breathe but I must.
Thinking so many thoughts,
Trying so hard to trust.

These fears are irrational,
But I can't make them stop.
I just wish that they'd leave,
That my heart rate would drop.

I can't catch my breath,
My heart's running a race,
Against my emotions,
Struggling to keep pace.

I struggle to breathe,
But each sound makes it worse.
My world seems so dark,
I'm trying to reverse.

Away from the triggers,
Away from the pain,
All my muscles are tense,
Why can't it be explained?

There is no good reason,
But I can't press pause.
I don't think this is normal,
I can't find the cause.

God, I need you,
I can't live on my own
You're the only one who knows
Where my fears are sewn.

Why do they come?
What's the cause of this pain?
I want to let go,
But I can't just the same.

I try to calm down,
But my fears just won't quit.
I can't find air to breathe.
I'm stuck in this pit."

For the juniors or junior highs read this from Dr. Suess:

"Today you are You, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is You-er than You."

"Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don't matter, and those who matter don't mind."

"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself, any direction you choose."

"You're off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting, So…get on your way!"

Say: And hear God's invitation:

1 Peter 5:7: *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."*

Joshua 1:9: *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."*

What did you hear? What did you notice?

Keep in mind as you are talking about anxiety that it has been named as a "frenetic whirlwind" that wakes us at night and cause pain in our stomachs. It has also been identified as a positive emotion as it masters the situation and comes across as forward-looking to help us avoid negative consequences. Anxiety can be helpful if it does not become overwhelming. Sometimes anxiety gets a little carried away, but it is not malicious: it is just our brain trying to help. We can help the campers have a more complex understanding that part of anxiety's role is imagining setbacks and planning out possible ways to overcome them. We must be honest that deadlines are met due to anxiety and once anxiety helps us, we can gently guide it to a seat and rest.

When talking to high school students you can name that this feeling can be related to "Caffeinated Calculus" or "Desire to Belong" or "Obsessive-Compulsive Social Climbing FOMO." They may see themselves in these words.

Jesus saw anxiety in the hearts of everyone he met. He asked Zacchaeus to come down from the tree and take him to his home for conversation. He saw the woman at the well and talked to her,

saw her, and saw her as she was…we can imagine her anxiety as saw talked to this rabbi. Jesus also heard the anxiety of those on the cross as they died and assured them of the love of God.

Say: Jesus loves us even when we are anxious. Jesus loves us as we are. Jesus sees us, really sees us, and not judging but holding up our truth and bringing healing with understanding.

Say: Being honest about our anxieties, about our truths, allows us to have complex, layered and deep relationships that are based on truth, unafraid of the hard stuff. Just like God is looking for with us.

Even as anxiety can be helpful, we need to be aware that anxiety can separate us from our core self. It can make us prickly especially when we think we are alone. Anxiety can keep us from being our best self. AND worrying about the worst consequences can help us avoid some of those worst consequences. As strange as it may seem, sometimes we need to sit with fear, misery, and self-loathing so we are not completely unprepared when they show up unexpected, as they almost certainly will.

May we also remember that anxiety is often a form of caring. When I am anxious, it is often because I am worrying about my loved ones. As many parents know, nothing makes you as anxious as a threat to your child. You may know that a threat to your best friend brings up anxiety.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

Read this story and ask the campers to see themselves in this situation:

From Social Anxiety to Social Butterfly: Emily's Story

Emily thrived in the quiet solitude of her home, her comfort zone confined to the familiar walls and predictable routines. Social interactions triggered overwhelming self-consciousness, making even ordering a coffee an anxiety-inducing ordeal. However, Emily's desire for connection fueled her
desire for change. She joined social anxiety support groups, finding solace in shared experiences and practical coping strategies. One step at a time, she ventured outside her comfort zone, striking up conversations with cashiers, attending small potlucks, and gradually expanding her social circle. Today, Emily organizes community events, her once silent voice now a beacon of warmth and inclusivity. She trusted the process and being connected with others brought forth possibilities she did not imagine could be possible.

* Also more advanced ideas that may stimulate discussion for a more advanced group:

Ask the campers to share stories of how they may have overcome anxiety. As you can imagine each
story is unique, each individual a testament to the human spirit's resilience. What unites them is the

power of community and vulnerability. By sharing their struggles, campers may find support,
understanding, and practical tools to manage their anxiety. Their vulnerability can empower others
to do the same, creating a ripple effect of hope and encouragement.

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Activities:
Trust walk: have campers pair up and have one member lead and one member be guided with a blindfold. Process the anxiety of not knowing where you are going and how you can trust your camper friend and ultimately God even when you cannot see the future.

Duck Duck Goose: How does your body feel while you are waiting to be tapped on the head? Does your body tighten? Are you ready to run?

Alphabet game of positive: If our worries, fears or anxiety get the best of us we can focus on the positive things we have in our lives. See if your campers can use the alphabet to identify positive things. This can be a good reminder as well as a healthy distraction.

Worry Stones: Take your campers down to the river and seek stones that are smooth or really cool. They can take markers or paint pens to write words of comfort like peace, hope, breathe or love on them. Invite them to carry these or have them where they can pick them up and remember this journey with anxiety.

Worship ideas: Considering having worship in a new location and the curiosity of being in a new spot and the good things we learn.

For the evening worship consider including candles in worship to let the light of God's peace work through the anxious places we may have in our lives. We could also write anxious things on a piece of paper and toss them into the evening worship fire.

Have the campers take deep breaths and settle into the sacred moment of this night and consider using this liturgy during the evening worship from *Every moment Holy* Volume III:

"Grant me, O most loving Lord, to rest in you above all else—
above all creatures,
above all health and beauty
above all glory and honor,
above all power and dignity,
above all knowledge and cleverness,
above all riches and art,
above all fame and praise,
above all sweetness and comfort,
above all hope and promise,
above all gifts and favors that you can give,
above all happiness my mind can fee;
above all that is not you, O God.

Anything you bestow on me or reveal to me or promise to me is too small and unsatisfying if I do not see or meet you in it.

For surely my heart cannot truly rest, or ever be fully contented, unless it rest in you. Amen."

Be at peace dear ones and rest well.

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

Songs from the camp song sheet:

Borning Cry #34	Prince of Peace #66	Goodnight Everybody #87 (at end of worship)
Breathe #68	Did You Feel The Mountains Tremble? #78	
Just Be #51	Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying #90	
Seek Ye First #3	Those Who Wait On The Lord #101	

Other new songs:

I Speak Jesus by Charity Gayle and Steven Musso
I Speak the Name of Jesus Over You by Katy Nichole
Firm Foundation (He Won't) by Cody Carnes
Desperate by Jamie MacDonald
I Will Fear No More by The Afters
All My Praise by Lauren Daigle and Eminem
(And just because this is relevant in this time😊) Dusty Bibles by Josiah Queen

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

For the littles (intro or juniors) using words like fear, worry, and scared to talk about anxiety may be helpful. They also may use their bodies to show what this feels like and you can name it "Anxiety Charades."

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

Please be aware that in this age group from 14 to 18 they may be very knowledgeable about anxiety and they may have no clue. As one of our colleagues noted, he did not know the complexity of emotions until he was in his 20s. They also may want to talk about their therapy or their medications and having good boundaries around this and having another adult to support their experience without going down the "story hole" of mental health issues is a good boundary to have.

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture: Matthew 6:24-35

Reflection: Today we learned about the emotion of anxiety. We explored with the campers that anxiety can be a tool to help us get things done and at the same time can be an obstacle for us to move forward. We have been working with our embodiment of this emotion with our hands. We begin with the closed fists of anxiety and by Friday we will be learning to lift our hands in praise to God as we have peace in our lives. We talked in Bible Study about the many ways folks have been anxious and how Jesus accepts us with our anxieties and all of our emotions.

An Activity for your family: Ask your camper to explain the hand motions we used this week as we walked through anxiety into thanksgiving and into peace. Think about deep breathing as a family especially if there is stress, disagreements, or misunderstandings. Do you feel comfortable talking with your camper about your own anxiety? Do you feel that you can share what you do when you are anxious? Please keep in mind that even if we do not think children and youth understand anxiety from a logical perspective, they can feel it, they can feel yours.

Prayer: Dear God thank you for our emotions. When worry or fear creeps in, let Your peace take over. Give us the assurance that You are in control. Remind us of how we can use our anxiety to move forward in the things you call us to do. Thank you for never leaving us alone in our anxiety. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

K. SUMMER STAFF SECTION

During the summer debrief each Saturday after the campers leave, think about asking staff members to name a time that week when they were anxious. Did they feel like the character "Anxiety" in Inside/Out 2 with hair on fire, eyes wide open, and the smile a tight wide mess? What did they do? Did someone on site help with their anxiety? What did they learn from their anxiety?

Let's consider putting one word or couple of words into their affirmation "affie" bags [if we have that again?] Words such as: Breathe. Stretch with arms wide open. Smile. You are not alone. All feelings are valid. You are a beloved child of God. Peace be with you.

Dear staff, journal writing can be your friend. If you write those things that you see as connected to your anxiety and then reflect on what you wrote at a later time when your energy levels are not so high, you may see insight or solutions to what you are facing. Remember, you are not alone. You are a beloved child of God.

2026 RAINBOW TRAIL BIBLE STUDY
HANDS WIDE OPEN
DAY 3: THANKSGIVING

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Philippians 4:6-7
Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving**, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

When I was 10 years old, I had an ulcer. It wasn't because of smoking or drinking, which are the major causes of an internal intestinal issue. It was because my life was stressful. My family was stressful. The stress was caused by a lack of a reliable male role model in my life. Like most people, I had a dad. But he and my mother were divorced when I was a baby. And he had effectively abandoned me. He had gone on with his life, and really didn't think about me much unless he was obligated to acknowledge my existence.

Then I had a step-father. This was not an upgrade. He was abusive. And I remember, as a child, having to face anger and uncertainty on a daily basis. There were several times, my mother and her children had to sneak out the back door of our house and find safety with our grandparents. Needless to say, there was great relief when he moved out and we moved on.

That's the bad part of the story. Now the good. About that time, in the midst of all my internal conflict and the swirling sucking vortex of despair that defined my life, a new pastor moved to town. He was a young guy. He had played college football, so he was a big guy. However, he was strangely normal. Not too pastor-ish. He didn't use big words. He didn't wear a collar. He didn't try to prove himself worthy. He just was who he was.

One day, I saw this new pastor walking on the opposite side of mainstreet in my small Iowa hometown. Like most winters, there were great piles of snow lining the street on both sides. And for some reason, I thought it would be a good idea to make a snow ball and throw it across the street in the general direction of this new pastor. Unfortunately this was the one time where my aim exceeded my natural ability and the snow ball hit him squarely in the head. You know in cartoons when a character is angry and steam blows out of the ears and their face turns red, I think that actually happened. And there I was, guilty as could be. A ninety pound skinny kid who had just made a big mistake.

The new pastor ran across the frozen street. He looked like an angry bull or a run away freight train. He was a big guy and was moving faster than I thought possible. I was stunned. Until he picked me up above his head and skillfully inserted me into the snow bank. He didn't say a word. He just walked away.

Now. I know this may sound silly, but in the midst of the chaos of my life, I felt like he noticed me. I was honestly thankful that he came across the street and body slammed me into the snow. Because he saw me. He cared about me enough to make this effort to hold me accountable. And that was just the beginning. Eventually, he became my mentor and my friend. He taught me more about loving Jesus and living out my faith than anyone else ever had. That moment changed the direction and the quality of my life. Instead of focusing on all the pain, which was real, I began to see that there was hope.

To see and be seen.

There is something crucially important to us as humans about being seen, acknowledged, and maybe even loved. We all want to feel valued. And if we don't feel those good things in our lives, sometimes we become overwhelmed with the negative and hurtful things. And that is not the way God wants us to live. Jesus said very clearly in John 10:10, "I came that you would have life, and have it abundantly." God wants us to live a life that is full and good and filled with wonder. But that's not always easy for us.

So how do we set ourselves up for the good?

I would propose to you that being thankful, also known as GRATITUDE, stands in opposition to anxiety, fear, and worry. When I could focus on someone caring about me, it helped me deal with more difficult aspects of my life. When I stopped to think about the good God had put in my life, which was there the whole time, my heart began to heal. Slowly, but surely.

The phrase "with thanksgiving" from the Philippians bible lesson really sets the stage for how we not only deal with anxiety, fear, and worry, but also tells us how we prepare our hearts to pray to our God. We do all this anxiety-fighting and praying centered in and focused on thanking God for... well, everything. If we begin with an acknowledgement that God is good and God cares about us and loves us, then we can begin to see and name the good in our own lives. We can be thankful.

1 Peter 5:7, "Cast all your anxiety on God, because GOD cares for you."

With that said, there are two hurdles to being more thankful. First is believing that God cares for YOU. Not just Y'ALL, like a general blanket of love and concern for all of humanity. But specifically God cares for you. God loves you. God provides for you on a daily basis what you need to not only survive, but to thrive in God's love. We are invited to come to a place where we understand and acknowledge that God sees ME, and more than that, God loves me.

So maybe we take all those bible verses that say, "for you", and put our name in that place. Like the Christmas story in Luke 2:11, where it says, "For to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord." Change it. Put your name in there. "For to **[insert your name]** is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord." And fully embrace the idea that Jesus was born for YOU.

Do it with these verses too:
Jeremiah 29:11 "I know the plans I have for **[insert name]**, to give you a future and a hope."
Isaiah 43:4 "**[insert name]** is precious and honored in my sight, and I love **[insert name]**"

Anyway, you get the idea. God's love is general for all people, and specific for you. On this day of the study, it's good to begin with the idea that you are loved, because the next step is to name how you are loved.

The second hurdle is taking the time to name and claim the goodness of God in your own life. Being thankful takes time out of our overly busy lives. And maybe that's why we can't see how good God has been to us. Maybe we're too busy. So on this day of the study we are going to encourage the campers, counselors, and staff, to take time to think about what God has done for you, specifically you. And that can be anything you want to name, from giving me life and hope in Jesus to the smell of the pine trees. There are no rules, because there are no limitations to God's goodness. Therefore there can be no limitations to our thankfulness.

In the introduction to this entire study, we talked about moving our hands from clenched and held tightly, to having hands wide open to God. Today, we invite you to hold your hands cupped open. We do this to indicate our openness to God's goodness, but also to acknowledge our hands are constantly filled by God.
Also, we will study a bible story from John 4, where an anxious person encounters Jesus and through a powerful interaction is seen by Jesus for who she really is and loved by Jesus. We will discuss how this interaction empowered her to go back to her hometown and to the people who made her afraid. And when back home, she was able to point to the goodness of Jesus.

And so on this day, our goal is quite simply to be thankful. We challenge ourselves to approach our lives and this world with thankful hearts and minds. And to name for ourselves the goodness of God. Or like the psalmist wrote:

Psalm 34:8 Taste and see that the Lord is good.

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

- Campers will learn that anxiety, fear, and worry can be lessened through practicing thankfulness and gratitude.
- Campers will practice being able to see themselves as someone who is loved and treasured by our God. This will be accomplished by putting themselves into the bible verses that are generically "for you".
- Campers will be encouraged to take some quiet time and find an authentic way to think about the people, things, and situations for which they are thankful.
- Campers will take time to envision cupped hands filled with God's provision.

C. MORNING WATCH

Common Welcome
Good morning, friends. As we begin this day, I invite you to rest your hands open in your lap, a sign of trust and readiness to receive. Paul reminds us in Philippians that we don’t earn God’s peace by worrying less—we receive it as we bring everything to God in prayer. Today, let’s start with open hands, trusting that the peace of Christ will guard our hearts and minds as we walk through this day together.

Introduction to the Day
Give thanks to the LORD, for God is good! (1 Chronicles 16:34)
Today we are going to talk about how we can fight against our anxiety, fears, and worries by being thankful for all that God has done. When we know that we are loved by God, we can begin to understand that God wants us to have a good life! And we can also begin to see how good God is to us. Instead of looking for the bad things, we can look for the good. So let's talk about how God has loved us and cup our hands to continue to receive God's goodness!

Why we chose the Passage and Scripture
The bible verse for today tells the story of an unnamed Samaritan woman who went to her local well in the middle of the day. When the sun was high in the sky. When it was really hot. No one went at that time of day... unless... they were worried about other people. Unless they were anxious. She was anxious. She had been rejected and outcast by the people of the town because she didn't fit in. But she met Jesus at the well. And they had an awesome discussion-argument. And in the process of all this stuff, she learned that Jesus was the Messiah and HE did not reject her. At the end of the story, she goes back to her people, the people who made her afraid and said, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have done! He can't be the Messiah, can he?" BUT she knew that Jesus was the Messiah. And she knew that Jesus did not reject her. Jesus loved her. And because of his love, she was so thankful, that even though she may have been afraid, she told them about Jesus!

John 4:6-10
[Jesus went to a Samaritan city called Sychar] Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." **AND** 4:28-30 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Song: "Thankful" by Forrest Frank

I've got so much to be thankful for

Look, I've got a roof and a bed
A couple groceries to stay fed
I've got a phone and clean water
And some shoes when I wanna go farther

Today, I've got so much to be thankful for (hey)
I woke up this morning thinking, "Thank You, Lord" (hey)
For giving me everything I could ever need and more
I've got so much to be thankful for (oh, yeah, run it back)

Ayy, I have lights and a fan
A couple people who know who I am (know)
I have a car and clean clothes
Pots and pans I can cook on the stove

I have the sun and air in my lungs
And a big mess that I get to clean up
But most of all, one thing's true
Jesus, I'm grateful for You (you, You, ah)

Today I've got so much to be thankful for (thankful for)
I woke up this morning thinking, "Thank You, Lord" (thank You)
For giving me everything I could ever need and more (need and more)
I've got so much to be thankful for (ayy)

One more time
Today, I've got so much to be thankful for (thankful for)
I woke up this morning thinking, "Thank You, Lord" (thank You, Lord)
For giving me everything I could ever need and more
I've got so much to be thankful for
Oh, say it again, say it again
I've got so much to be thankful for

Questions to Consider

- Have you ever been anxious or afraid like the Samaritan woman? Can you think of one time that you were worried about how other people looked or thought about you? And you were worried about not fitting in?
- What does it feel like to know that God DOES NOT REJECT YOU? God sees you and loves you right now, just the way you are, no matter what!
- How can being loved and accepted by Jesus make you less anxious or afraid?
- Since God loves you and provides for you, what are some good things you're thankful for in your life?
- Can you hold your hands cupped together, and imagine God has filled your life with good things? What would some of those good things be?

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus, just like you loved the Samaritan woman, I know you love me. Help me to take time today to be thankful for your love and for all the blessings you have given me. I know that even though I get anxious, worried, or afraid, your love for me never goes away. You are with me everywhere, all the time. So help me to focus on all the good in my life and to receive those good things with open hands. In your holy name I pray. Amen.

D. <u>SCRIPTURE STUDY</u>

John 4: 1-42 - selected pieces below.

John 4:6-10 ***[Jesus went to a Samaritan city called Sychar]*** *Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."* ***AND*** *4:28-30 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.*

Dear counselors, here's the problem. This amazing story from the Gospel of St. John is so long, it will put your children immediately into a bible stupor. Not sure that's a good idea. So I trimmed the lesson into two bite-size pieces I THINK are the most important. You certainly can disagree and expand the lesson, but this is what I have chosen. The main points of this lesson are that Jesus is going into a foreign land, Samaria. This was an area he had to travel through because it was between Galilee and Jerusalem (look at a map). Anyway. The Samaritan people and the Jewish people both claimed to the "true people of God." So it was considered bad form for Jesus to hang out with a Samaritan. It was also bad form for Jesus to hang out with a women ALONE. This was not a good situation. And to make it all even worse, this woman had been rejected by her people. It probably had to do with the fact that she had five husbands, which meant she probably couldn't have children and was divorced, repeatedly. So in order to avoid people who would hurt her, she came to get water at high noon. This was not a good time. The heat of the day was at its worst. But that's what she had to do, because she was anxious. Now, there is a LONG interaction-argument with Jesus. She is awesome. Very smart and willing to fight back. But in the course of the discussion, Jesus reveals that he is the Messiah for whom they have been waiting. Woohoo!

Please notice. Jesus did not run away from her screaming... or try to hurt her in any way. He treated her like a person, with love and respect. I really think he enjoyed this encounter. Then. She ran back home, to the people who rejected her. How could she do that? Well... the anxiety in her heart had been tempered by the love that Jesus had shown her. She had something good, given to her. And that gave her the strength to go home and tell other people about Jesus. She was thankful and shared her thankfulness with others.

Philippians 4:6-7
Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, ***with thanksgiving****, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

This is the focus verse for the whole study, Hands Open Wide. The reason I'm duplicating it at this point is to put the emphasis on the words "with thanksgiving". Please notice we intentionally put the thanksgiving lesson (day 3) **BEFORE** the prayer lesson (day 4). We did this because in these verses the prayer presupposes thanksgiving, which means that thanksgiving is woven into our prayers. So in order to pray with our hearts in the right place, we first are grounded in thankfulness for all that God has done and all that God has given us.

It also fits with the idea of opening our hands and ourselves to God throughout the whole week. We move from the clenched fists of anxiety, to the cupped hands of thankfulness, to the open hands of prayer, and open and wide hands of peace. Within our cupped hands, we can envision the blessings of God. And don't be confined by the usual suspects of thankfulness; like this day, for my friends, the food, the counselors, this camp, etc. Challenge the campers to expand those things and people for which they are thankful.

1 Peter 5:7
Cast all your anxiety on God, because GOD cares for you.

This verse is short, sweet, and pretty clear. In order to combat anxiety, worry, and fear, one of the tools is knowing that God cares about you. The idea is if we find ourselves in a world that doesn't seem to like us very much at this moment, that the care of God goes beyond this present moment. God has been with you since the beginning and God will be with you to the very end. God is present in your life. God is working and active in your life. God is providing for you every single day. And in order to stave off the loneliness that compounds anxiety, we can proclaim to each other that God cares for you. You are a precious child of God. You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever [baptism words]. Nothing in all of creation has the power to separate you from the love of God [Romans 8:31]. So don't believe you are alone. God is with you. God provides what you need. You are seen by God. Now see God back. See the wondrous ways God gives you what you need.

John 10:10
Jesus said, "I came that you would have life, and have it abundantly".

What if we assumed, based on these words of Jesus, that God's intention is that we have a full, complete, and lovely life? Jesus said very clearly the reason he came into this world is so that YOU would have life and have it abundantly. He does not intend for us to live in bondage to our fears and anxieties. He wants us to be free. So what does it mean that Jesus, who was there are the beginning of creation and will be there at the last day, wants us to have life? He is the Son of God. It is his intention that we live and have fullness of life. Who are we to argue?

Actual Bible Study

So you know. Start with a Prayer. I am disinclined to write a prayer for you. The reason being, I think you can do it. And I sincerely believe it's good for you to try. Remember you are the role models for the young people you serve. If you are willing to try to pray, and show them it's not so hard, then maybe they will be inspired by you to try too. So keep it simple:

- Address God ***[use your favorite title -or- how you see God most in your own life]***
- Ask God for what you want or need related to the study.
- Tell God what you're thankful for today and keep it real. Don't make it sound pretty - make it honest from your heart. You know God knows you already, even before you speak. So don't try to be all church-fancy. If you want you can cup your hands!
- Bring it home ***[like in Jesus' name we pray. Amen]***

You can do it. I believe in you.

Do you like Thanksgiving?
What's your favorite part?

What if I told you that Thanksgiving is not...
About all the things we just talked about.

It's not about food.
It's not about football.
It's not even about family.

Thanksgiving is designed to be a day..
When EVERYONE in the whole country...
Can stop and give thanks to God!

Abraham Lincoln made it official...
Back in 1863... right in the middle of the American Civil War.
All the fighting and hatred and bloodshed...
Going on in our country.

And he said,
Even though we are surrounded with this anxiety...
And chaos and fear and war.
We need to stop and thank God...
For everything God has provided.

How could he do that?
How could he find a time and place...
To be thankful.
And more than that...
Call the whole country...
Every single citizen...
To stop and give thanks...

When everything...
Seemed so bad?

Well... that's what we are going to talk about today.
About the power of finding thankfulness...
In our hearts... during times of anxiety, fear, or worry.

So let's open our bibles.
To the gospel of John chapter 4.
We will start at verse 6.
And read through verse 10.
This is a story about Jesus...
Who had been traveling with his disciples.
Through an area called Samaria.

He was from Galilee which is in the north.
Toward the end of his life...
He traveled to Jerusalem...
Which was in the south.

But Samaria was this non-Jewish area...
In the middle of all that.
You can find it on the map...
In the back of your bible.

And when he and the disciples were traveling...
They needed to stop...
To get food and supplies.

While the disciples went into town...
Jesus stayed out of the town...
And went to the well.
A place where people came...
To get water.

You know... water is important...
Especially in this part of the world.
It would be kind of like California.
Hot and humid and thirsty.

So people needed to go to the well...
Outside of town...
To get water...
For their families.

They usually did it early in the morning...
Before the sun became too hot.
Or later at night...
When the sun was going down.

And they would gather...
And hang out with their friends...
Gossip...
Get their water...
And go home.

Please NOTICE:
Jesus was there at the well...
And it was the middle of the day.
NOON - when the sun is straight up...
Above your heads...
And it was hot.

When suddenly this woman came...

To the well...
To get her water.

It didn't make sense.
It was the wrong time of day.
People in "good standing"...
Nice people.
Good people.
Did not come to the well...
At high noon.

Something was wrong.
This woman was avoiding other people.
She was worried about what other people...
Thought about her...
How other people...
Were going to treat her.

She was not going to fit in...
With all the good people...
Because... well... because...
She had been married five times.
And apparently... didn't have any children.
So... no one wanted her around.

But Jesus was there.
Already. Before she got there.
And Jesus did a few things...
That according to all the social rules...
He should NOT have done.

He talked to her.
Which may not seem like a big deal to us...
We can talk to most anyone...
We choose to talk to...

But back in the bible times...
A Jewish person was not supposed to talk...
To a Samaritan person.

They were enemies.
They both thought they were God's SPECIAL people.
They both thought they were the only ones.
They both thought the other people...
Were WRONG.

So the first mistake was talking to a Samaritan.

But there was something else.

He was a man. Alone.
She was a woman. Alone.
They should not have talked to each other.
As a Jewish teacher....

Jesus was not supposed to talk...
To a woman all by himself.

The disciples had gone to get groceries.
He should have waited for them.
He should have gone with them.
He should not have engaged...
In a conversation.

But he did.

Because he was more concerned about her...
Than he was about the rules.

So they got into this big discussion-argument-fight.
All about who was right.
The Samaritans or the Jews.

Then Jesus told her all kinds of things...
He knew about her!
He had never met her before.
He hadn't talked to other people.
He just knew her... because...
He was and is the Son of God.

So he told her.
She was shocked.
That he knew about her...
And STILL talked to her.
And treated her with respect.

Then he told her a secret.
That he was the Messiah.
The One who was going to save EVERYBODY.

Let's open our bibles again...
To the gospel of John chapter 4.
We will start at verse 28.
And read through verse 30.

LOOK WHAT HAPPENED.
Remember this woman...
Who was at the well...
At the WRONG time of the day...

And didn't want see anyone else...

After she met Jesus.
After he listened to her... and loved her.
After he told her what he knew about her...
And STILL talked to her.

And told her he was the Messiah.

SHE RAN BACK TO TOWN.
Right into all those people...
Who were mean...
And critical...
And kicked her out...
And treated her badly...
And said she was no good.

She ran back to them.
And told them.
Who she had met.
What he had said.
And who he really was...
The Messiah.

This was a response.
To Jesus' love and acceptance.

She was so thankful...
For her time with him..
And for his love.
And for his words.
And that he treated her...
LIKE SHE WAS A REAL PERSON...
AND THAT HE COULD SEE HER!

That she wasn't filled with fear...
About the people anymore.
She wasn't anxious.
She wasn't worried...
About what they might say or do.

She was filled with LOVE.
She was filled with JOY.
She knew Jesus.
She was loved.

And she was stronger...
And able to face her fears...
Because she was **thankful** for Jesus.

So listen.
Sometimes we find ourselves in same position...
As the woman in the story...
We feel a certain amount of anxiety.
Fear about other people.
Worry about fitting in.
Just swirling...
In our own heads...
Which leads to hurt in our hearts.

But we don't have to live in that place.
There are some things we can learn...
From the story of Jesus...
And the woman at the well...

First of all.
We can learn that we have value to God.
She thought no-one cared about her.
She thought she shouldn't be around other people.
She thought she was beyond...
Having someone love...
And respect her.

That's why she went to the well at NOON.

But the truth is...
She was not beyond hope.
She was not beyond God's love and care.
And neither are you.

Let's try something.
When we say that God loves you...
Sometimes we think it means...
God loves y'all.
Like God loves everybody.
And that's true.

But it's also true that God loves YOU... in particular.
God specifically cares for you.
And we are invited to come to a place...
Where we UNDERSTAND and ACKNOWLEDGE...
That God sees YOU...
God knows YOU...
And God loves YOU.

So... let's take some bible verses...
That have the words... "for you"...
And put your name in that place.

For example...

In the Christmas story in Luke 2:11,
Where it says,
"For to you
Is born this day in the city of David,
A Savior, who is Christ, the Lord."

Change it.
Put your name in there.

"For to **[insert your name]**
Is born this day in the city of David,
A Savior, who is Christ, the Lord."

And fully embrace the idea that Jesus was born for YOU.
God sent Jesus into this world...
To LOVE YOU.

Do it with these verses too:
Jeremiah 29:11 "I know the plans I have for **[insert name]**, to give you a future and a hope."
Isaiah 43:4 "**[insert name]** is precious and honored in my sight, and I love **[insert name]**"

Anyway. You get the idea.
God's love is general for all people...
And specific for you.

On this day of the study,
It's good to begin with the idea that you are loved,
Because the next step is to name how you are loved.

Like the woman at the well...
Faced her fear...
By going back...
To the people who disliked her...
And said to them...

I met a man who knows everything about me...
And next sentence is implied...
And loved me.
Wasn't afraid of me.
Didn't hate me.
Didn't reject me.
He loved me.

See... the next step for her...
Was to express her gratitude...
To say... thank you Jesus...

For loving me.

So. Our theme today is thankfulness.
And the idea is...
That being thankful...
For what God has done for me...
Has the power...
To make my anxiety...
My fear...
My worries...
Less.

But I have to focus on the good.
What God has done.
Instead of the bad.

So let's do that.

To end our study today.
I would invite you to cup your hands.
Like someone is going to give you something...
Place it right into your open hands...
Like it's a gift.
Something for you.
Something that shows you...
How much they love you.

Now imagine it's God...
Putting something good...
Right in your hands.

What has God given you?
What are you thankful for?
Who are you thankful for?

I'll start.
I'm thankful for...
[Tell the campers what you really believe and stretch yourself...
You know what I mean. More than just camp or trees or food...
What is really important to you that God has given you?
What are you thankful for that brings tears to your eyes?
What do you love?
Who do you love?
What gives you hope?
What makes your life worth living?
Focus on the REAL GOODNESS OF GOD for you.
Because I'm telling you... God has been good to you...
And this is a chance to say thank you and teach campers how to be thankful!]

[You can do this as a large group -or- have them get into smaller groups]

Closing prayer.
How about we keep our hands cupped?
And let's pray.

Dear God.
You have given us so much. And I am so thankful.
Thank you for loving me.
Thank you for loving each one of us.
Thank you for Jesus who gives us life and hope.
Thank you for loving me...
Even when I'm anxious.
Help me to believe... that you are with me and you will always care for me.

We pray this in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

Brief Bible Study Outline

Outline for Day 3 - Hands Wide Open - Thankfulness

- Opening Prayer
- Favorite part of Thanksgiving?
- What Thanksgiving really means?
- Being thankful in the middle of anxiety, fear, or worry.
- Read John 4:6-10.
- Woman at the Well at the WRONG time. Why?
- Jesus sees her and treats her like a HUMAN.
- Read John 4:28-30.
- The woman faced her fears by going back to town.
- She is thankful for Jesus' love.
- Being thankful helps her to overcome her fear.
- Understanding that Jesus loves YOU too... in particular.
- Put your name in the "for you" bible verses.
- Take some time to cup your hands and be thankful.
- And know your thankfulness is one tool to help fight against anxiety, fear, and worry.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

EVENING WORSHIP - Communion
When we teach first communion class, we emphasize the fact position of our hands. When we receive the body of christ, we typically hold our hands cupped to receive, acknowledging that this is a gift from God. I have done nothing to deserve the forgiveness, love, and mercy that being given to me right this minute. HAVE COMMUNION TOGETHER! And invite the people who commune to CUP their hands and RECEIVE the goodness of God. For those who

have not had their first communion, invite them to cup their hands to receive a blessing. Make the sign of the cross in the palm of their hands. And remind them of what Isaiah said in 49:16 "See! I have inscribed you on the palm of my hands!"

ACTIVITY - Thankfulness Scavenger Hunt
Create cards with prompts like
"Find something God made that shows His creativity" or
"Find something that reminds you of God's love."
Have the campers randomly draw a card. And go seek out an answer around camp.
Then come back and share how their item connects to thankfulness to God for THEM.

Thankfulness Scavenger Hunt Card Ideas:

Creation-Focused Cards
Find something God made that shows His creativity.
Find something that reminds you of how big God is.
Find something from nature that helps you thank God.
Find something that grows and thank God for life.
Find something beautiful that God created.

God's Care & Provision
Find something that reminds you God takes care of us.
Find something that helps meet our daily needs.
Find something that makes you feel safe and thank God for it.
Find something you use every day and thank God for providing it.
Find something that reminds you God is always with you.

People & Relationships
Find something that reminds you of someone God gave you.
Find something that shows love and kindness.
Find something that reminds you to thank God for your family.
Find something that reminds you of a friend God has given you.
Find something that reminds you of your church family.

Joy & Blessings
Find something that makes you smile and thank God for joy.
Find something fun and thank God for playtime.
Find something that reminds you to thank God even on hard days.
Find something that brings you peace.
Find something that reminds you God loves you.

Faith & Trust
Find something that reminds you to trust God.
Find something that reminds you of prayer.
Find something that reminds you God keeps His promises.
Find something that reminds you of Jesus.
Find something that helps you remember to thank God always.

ACTIVITY - "God's Gifts" Guessing Jar
A jar filled with slips of paper listing God's blessings (big and small).
Kids take turns drawing a slip and guessing why that gift is from God.
Then they explain why that blessing is meaningful to them.

"God's Gifts" Slips of Paper for the jar:

Basic & Concrete:
Sunshine, Rain, Food, Water, Air to breathe,
Animals, Flowers, Trees, Nighttime for sleeping
A warm home

People & Relationships:
Mom, Dad, Parents or caregivers, Brothers and sisters
Friends, Teachers, Church family, Neighbors
Someone who helps me, Someone who loves me

Everyday Blessings:
A bed to sleep in, Clothes, Shoes, Toys,
Books, School, Playtime, Laughter, Music, A hug

Spiritual Gifts:
God's love, Forgiveness, Jesus, The Bible
Prayer, God listening to us, Peace
Hope, Joy, Faith

Creation & Big Picture Blessings:
The earth, The sky, Stars, Mountains, Oceans
Seasons, God's protection, God's promises

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

ONE THING. I think it would be really fun to have spontaneous check-ins during the day. If the counselor or staff members could hold their cupped hands in front of campers and ask them... tell me one thing that God has given you, one thing that makes you thankful.

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

"Give Thanks" is a song in This Far by Faith 292. It's a pretty simple repetitive song.
"Sanctuary" page 37 in the Rainbow Trail Song Book. Mentions "with thanksgiving".

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

I know that other sections of this study have mentioned the movie "Inside Out". I'm thinking that, in contrast to the Anxiety character, this might be a good opportunity to talk about Joy. In the movie, Joy is an independent character inside of Riley, but each one of us has the potential for Joy. Joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit [Galatians 5:22-23]. J**oy is defined as a deep, spiritual delight in God, not dependent on circumstances.** That seems to fit quite well. Anxiety and fear are based on current circumstances or what might potentially happen in the future. But Joy is not determined by our circumstances. It is determined by our relationship with God. Knowing who God is and recognizing what God has done for us.

So the anxiety part might be hard for younger people. In order to speak to this we might talk about worry or fear. What makes you scared? Or what are you scared of? Probably don't want to stay there too long. But the idea that Jesus doesn't want us to be scared in this life. That's why came to us. To let us know that we are not alone and we don't have to be afraid. That's what he taught the woman at the well.

And how about a timed contest. What if you asked them to think of "as many things as they can" that they are thankful for, in a given amount of time? Give them paper and a pencil. You have one minute. Ready, set, go. Then count them up and compare. Maybe even another wrinkle, you could eliminate answers they have in common. If more than one person says "mom", they can't count that as a point. So encourage them to think more broadly about thankfulness. I would pick MICROBES. We have 30 trillion in our body, living inside of us. Without them we could not exist. So thank you God for Microbes.

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

I don't think many adjustments are necessary. I think the study is written to the level that would meet the needs of Sr. Highs. The only thing I think I would add would be to be more direct about the anxieties that they face. I think you could talk about the struggle to deal with their anxieties and worries. And just the general anxieties in our world today. They may be more willing to articulate their stresses in the larger group. They also know that their families face stresses in the world. Maybe their parents don't share anxieties with them, but family stress is real and they can feel it. Those are just a couple of thoughts.

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture: John 4:6-10; 28-30

Reflection: As you have already read, our theme for this summer has been, "Hands Open Wide". And so far this week your campers have focused on how we are going to move from anxiety and having our hands clutched tightly to the last day when we encourage them to open their hands up to God with a sense of peace. On this day we talked about the power of giving thanks to God to help us work through our anxieties. The biblical example we use was the story of the Woman at the Well. She was an outcast from her town and her people, which is evidenced by her going to the well to draw water at high noon. This was not a good time to get water. She did it so she wouldn't have to encounter other people. She didn't want to deal with their criticism of her, their negative glares, and their hurtful gossip. She was considered an outcast because she had been married five times. The speculation is that she was married five times because she couldn't produce children for her husbands, so they divorced her. At any rate, she met Jesus at the well. And he did not flinch. He didn't run away from her. He didn't shun her or shut her down. He engaged her. And in the process broke several cultural taboos. Jewish people didn't associate with Samaritan people. Jewish teachers were not supposed to be alone with women. The disciples were not with him. At any rate. After experiencing the acceptance, love, and grace of Jesus, she did something so courageous. She went back to the town where she had been rejected, and told them. She told them how good Jesus had been to her. She told them she thought he might be the MESSIAH. Is it possible. And she gave thanks to God for Jesus... and it changed her life. She went from anxiety and fear to thankfulness and

joy. So we asked your campers to acknowledge their anxieties, but to focus on how God has blessed them, what God has provided, and what good they have in their lives. And how much God loves them, in particular, Jesus loves them by name.

Activity: What an incredible opportunity for you to model thankfulness to your children. So I would encourage you to take the lead. The way we did it at camp is we encouraged them to cup their hands like they were receiving something, a gift from God. And then to take the time to name the good things and people in their lives. So remind them and invite them to hold their hands cupped together and name what God has given them. And maybe even to tell each other what makes those things and people so good in your life.

Prayer:
Dear God. You have given us so much. And I am sincerely thankful.
Thank you for loving me.
Thank you for loving each one of us.
Thank you for giving me this family and our friends.
Thank you for Jesus who gives us life and hope.

Thank you for loving me...
Even when I'm anxious.
Help me to believe and know...
That you will always care for me.

We pray this in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

K. SUMMER STAFF SECTION

1. Hey there friends. So glad God has called you to be a leader and a mentor at this camp. You have been called for a reason. God wants you here. God wants you to work with these campers. So let me ask you a few questions:

2. Are there any anxieties, fears, or worries on your heart this summer? Are these negative things affecting how you live, move, and breathe?

3. Were you able to seriously focus on your gratitude toward God? What is the most important thing or person for which you are thankful? Does your thankfulness help elevate some of your fear and anxiety?

4. Is there something you discovered about yourself when you did this study? Did anything strike you as particularly meaningful or important?

5. Did you see anything cool happen with the campers during this study? Did they say or do anything that surprised you? Did they say or do anything that caught you off guard?

2026 RAINBOW TRAIL BIBLE STUDY
HANDS WIDE OPEN
DAY 4: PRAYER

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Today we are focusing on prayer. When we recognize our worry (anxiety) and find ourselves being close-fisted, we can opt to stay there, or we can turn and give thanks to God for God's presence and start to open our fist and make cupped hands. We can then know that prayer may come as the natural next step!

Today we will look at some biblical examples of people who prayed in several different ways, and from their examples of prayer they can help us today as we practice praying.

THEME VERSE: *Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* I Thessalonians 5:16-18

The image of my father kneeling in prayer is etched on my heart. I grew up in a denomination that had a midweek prayer service that we attended regularly as a family. When the time came for prayer, my mom, dad, sisters and I would turn around in our pews to kneel and to pray. I remember our pastor calling out ideas or themes, and then all those assembled would, in their own words and in their own way, pray. The sound of people praying to this day moves me to tears.

My dad's left knee was permanently damaged from a motorcycle accident, so when he was knelt to pray, he looked more like those football players who "take a knee" when something bad happens to a player during the course of a game. Seeing him this way, with his head bowed, supported by one hand with his lips moving as he talked with God, made me feel safe and connected to a power beyond myself. And, because of his example, I gained the courage to pray for myself. My prayers were not elegant; they were not sensational; they were simply a conversation that I had with God, my young voice joining in with the congregation as we prayed together!

We prayed together as a family at our evening meal. So many times it was this prayer: God is good, God is great, and we thank him for our food. By his hands we are fed, give us Lord our daily bread. Amen.

And at bedtime we usually prayed this prayer together, (which I modified for our own children) which went like this: Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take [my modified version of the last sentence is: guide me safely through the night and wake me with the morning light]. Amen

All that said, just what is prayer? Why pray? What difference does my prayer make in the vastness of the universe? Does God really WANT to hear my prayers?

When we, as Christians, think of prayer, there are many biblical examples that we can turn to in both testaments. In Genesis chapter 18, we see Abraham having a long and detailed conversation with God about the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In Exodus chapter 3, Moses and God have a long conversation about the people was to lead from slavery into freedom.

In 1 Samuel 2, Hannah prays for a child. Eli, the priest encourages her and gives her the assurance that her prayer was heard.

In the Gospels we have many examples of Jesus talking with God. After his baptism in chapter 4 of Matthew's gospel, Jesus spent days in the wilderness talking with God and getting the direction he needed to start his earthly ministry. In this time away, silence and listening to God was as important as talking out loud was.

Then, in Matthew chapter 6, in the section of his book scholars have entitled, "The Sermon on the Mount," Jesus gave those listeners (and us), a formula for prayer we know as The Lord's Prayer. In many Christian churches this prayer is prayed every week in worship.

Moving on in the New Testament, Paul, writing to the church in Thessalonica, encouraged this congregation to pray without ceasing. Whatever does this mean?

When Paul wrote to the churches in Rome, he uses the idea that sometimes prayer doesn't even have to have words! How can prayer be speechless?

In this study, we will talk about what prayer is (an honest, open conversation with God), and what it isn't (God is not a vending machine, dispensing what we ask for – just because we pray).

We will also talk about prayer postures and what words to use when praying. We will share a brief history of prayer from the Old Testament, to Jesus and Paul, to Martin Luther and the Reformation.

We will open discussion for the many ways we can use prayer in our daily life as we go about our day, thinking about the physical hand postures that we have practiced this week, adding open hands!

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

- Understand prayer as a conversation between God and us.
- Study some examples from the Bible of people praying.
- Practice the hand postures to connect the body, mind and spirit in prayer
- Implement these learnings so that every camper can pray in their own way!

C. MORNING WATCH

Common Welcome
Good morning friends. As we begin this day, I invite you to rest your hands open in your lap, a sign of trust and readiness to receive. Paul reminds us in Philippians that we don't earn God's peace by worrying less – we receive it as we bring everything to God in prayer. Today, let's start with open hands, trusting that the peace of Christ will guard our hearts and minds as we walk through this day together.

Introduction to the Day

So far this week, we've talked about what it feels like to have closed fists—when we're anxious, stressed, or holding onto control. We've also started to open our hands, learning to trust and receive. Today is really the next step in that journey. When we begin to open our hands, we create space—and that space is where prayer happens. Prayer is how we connect with God in real, honest ways. It's not about having the perfect words or sounding impressive. It's simply a conversation.Today, we're going to explore how prayer can be a natural, everyday part of our lives—something we can do anywhere, anytime, in any situation.

Why we chose the Passage and Scripture

We chose this passage because it shows us that prayer isn't meant to be something we only do at certain times or in certain places. It's meant to be a constant connection with God throughout our day.

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. **I Thessalonians 5: 16-18**

Song: "Don't Stop Praying" by Matthew West

What's your impossible? Your "I need a miracle"
What's got you barely hanging by a single thread?
What looks so hopeless now? What weighs down your heart with doubt?
You beg for a breakthrough, but no sign of breakthrough yet

When you've cried, and you've cried 'til your tears run dry
The answer won't come, and you don't know why
And you wonder if you can bow your head even one more time

Don't stop praying
Don't stop calling on Jesus' name
Keep on pounding on Heaven's door
And let your knees wear out the floor
Don't stop believing
'Cause mountains move with just a little faith
And your Father's heard every single word you're saying
So, don't stop praying

He's close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit
The Alpha and Omega knows how your story ends

When you've cried, and you've cried 'til your tears run dry
The answer won't come, and you don't know why
And you wonder if you can bow your head even one more time
Oh, do it one more time

And don't stop praying
Don't stop calling on Jesus' name
Keep on pounding on Heaven's door
And let your knees wear out the floor
Don't stop believing
'Cause mountains move with just a little faith
And your Father's heard every single word you're saying
So, don't stop praying

Oh-oh
(Don't stop, don't stop praying) oh, don't stop praying
(Don't stop, don't stop praying)
Oh-oh

Don't stop praying for the prodigal
Don't stop praying for the miracle
Hallelujah, hallelujah, and amen
Don't stop praying that addictions end
Don't stop praying for deliverance
Hallelujah, hallelujah, and amen

Oh, don't stop praying for the sickness healed
Don't stop praying for His power revealed
Hallelujah, hallelujah, and amen
No, don't stop praying for the Kingdom come
Don't stop praying that His will be done
Hallelujah, hallelujah, and amen

Don't stop praying
Don't stop calling on Jesus' name
Keep on pounding on Heaven's door
Let your knees wear out the floor
Don't stop believing
'Cause mountains move with just a little faith
And your Father's heard every single word you're sayin'
So, don't stop praying

Oh, don't stop praying
(Don't stop, don't stop praying) hey, don't you give up now
No, don't stop praying

Questions for Consideration

- Do you pray? Why or why not?
- Have you ever thought about how you talk with God? What do you talk about (or what would you talk about to God if you prayed?)
- Do you feel comfortable talking with God through all of your emotions? Why or why not?
- How do you feel about silence as a part prayer?

Closing Prayer

Hey God! As we go through this day, help me to be open to you in my life and to take the time (no matter how short), to pray so we can be in conversation today in a new way. In all of my emotions, in all of my circumstances, help me to know that your amazing love and presence are with me always! Amen

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

Read together the theme verse for today: *Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* I Thessalonians 5:16-18

- Ask these questions: What is prayer? Why pray? What difference does my prayer make in the vastness of the universe? Does God really WANT to hear my prayers?
- When we, as Christians, think of prayer, there are many biblical examples that we can turn to in both testaments. Have campers find 2 Old Testament and 2 (or 3 if you have time) New Testament passages in their Bibles. [Please don't try to do ALL of these passages! You won't have time! By now you will know your group and because of the work you have done, you will know what passages are the best for them. Trust yourself!]

Genesis 18: 20-33	Exodus 3:1-12	1 Samuel 1:9-17	
Matthew 6:9-13	Mark 14: 32-36	Romans 8:26-27	1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

- After all of this Bible study, what do you think prayer is in its most basic form? Answer: an honest, open conversation with God that involves both speaking and listening – just like with your best friend.
- Prayer does NOT make God a vending machine, dispensing what we ask for – just because we pray. It helps to know that God can answer our prayers in 4 basic ways:
    - 1) yes 2) no 3) wait 4)here is something entirely different!
- Prayer doesn't always have to be happy-clappy! We can pray when we are angry or anxious, and our hands are clenched like we learned on Tuesday. We can pray with gratitude and have our hands cupped like we learned yesterday.
- Today as we think about prayer: how can our hands/bodies be?
    - Clenched? Cupped? Folded? Interlaced? Up and open? Up and extended? YES!!!! What other hand positions can you think of for prayer?
- How can our bodies be positioned when we think of prayer?
    - Standing? Kneeling? Sitting? Walking? Prone? YES!!!

    - What other body positions can you think of for prayer? [One of my own confirmation students shared that one of the girls from her village prayed prone – so she could smell the earth as she prayed! So awesome]
- Do you think your eyes should always be closed when you pray? Why or why not?
- Where can you pray?
- Will you promise yourself to pray every day?
- A BIT OF HISTORY
    - In the Old Testament days, the only people who were considered holy enough to pray were the Priests, Levites, and Rabbis. Jesus and Paul worked to break down that barrier so that all people were free to pray for themselves. Somehow, probably beginning in the 3 -4th century with the rise of monasticism, the idea of everyday people praying faded away. People began to ask the priests, monks and nuns to pray for them. When Martin Luther came on the scene in the 1500's, he encouraged people to pray for themselves once again. His daily prayers (morning, evening and table blessings) are part of the Small Catechism to this day!

BIBLE STUDY

OLD TESTAMENT

In Genesis chapter 18, we read about Abraham having a long and detailed conversation with God about the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Read Genesis 18:20-33

Abraham Pleads for Sodom

20 Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so
grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has
reached me. If not, I will know."
22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the
Lord. 23 Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the
wicked? 24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and
not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? 25 Far be it from you to do
such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike.
Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?"
26 The Lord said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole
place for their sake."
27 Then Abraham spoke up again: "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though
I am nothing but dust and ashes, 28 what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will
you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?"
"If I find forty-five there," he said, "I will not destroy it."
29 Once again he spoke to him, "What if only forty are found there?"
He said, "For the sake of forty, I will not do it."
30 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found
there?"
He answered, "I will not do it if I find thirty there."

31 Abraham said, "Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?"
He said, "For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it."
32 Then he said, "May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?"
He answered, "For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."
33 When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Background
God has just promised Abraham that he and Sarah will have a child together at their old age. Abraham has a nephew, Lot, who came with him and Sarah to this new land and who lives in Sodom. Things are not good in Sodom and its neighboring city, Gomorrah. God and Abraham have this discussion about whether all the people of these two cities should be destroyed – both good people and bad people.
Abraham bargains and bargains and finally they agree on a number of righteous people – 10. Ten people weren't found – and the cities were destroyed.

Questions
What kind of a prayer/conversation is this?
Have you ever bargained with God?
How did it come out?
What position do you think Abraham's hands were in when he was talking with God?

In Exodus chapter 3, Moses and God have a long conversation about the people he will lead from slavery into freedom.

Moses and the Burning Bush

1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."
4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"
And Moses said, "Here I am."
5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.
7 The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

[11]But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"
[12]And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Background

Moses was a Hebrew child who was raised as a prince of Egypt. He always knew he was adopted. One day Moses saw a man hurting another man and killed him. In fear, he ran away and started a new life. Moses even got married and became a shepherd when God called him to be the one to free the Hebrew people from the Egyptians. God asked him to back to his adopted home, to the Pharaoh, and to ask for the Hebrews' freedom.

Moses gives excuse after excuse for not going. God is persistent and keeps on giving solutions to Moses' excuses.

Questions

God started this conversation with Moses! Has God ever started a conversation with you? What did God say?

How did you answer?

How do you know when you are on holy ground like Moses was?

What position would your hands be in if you were Moses and God started talking with you?

What kind of prayer do you pray when you realize that you are in God's presence?

In 1 Samuel 2, Hannah prays for a child. Eli, the priest encourages her and gives her the assurance that her prayer was heard.

Hannah's prayer

[9]Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. [10]In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. [11]And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

[12]As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. [13]Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk [14]and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."
[15]"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. [16]Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."
[17]Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

Background

Hanna was a typical woman in her day. She was married to a wonderful man named Elkanah. But, she didn't have any children and that was a very bad thing in her day; it meant that she didn't have good standing with God! So, she went to the temple and prayed, and prayed and prayed for God to bless her with a baby. God heard this prayer and she gave birth to Samuel. Samuel was the last of the Old Testament judges and the first of the Old Testament prophets. He also had the privilege of anointing the first two Kings of Israel.

Questions

Why was Hannah so distressed?

Have you ever poured your heart out to the Lord? Do you think God heard your prayer?

What position do you think Hannah's hands were in as she prayed?

NEW TESTAMENT

In the Gospels we have many examples of Jesus talking with God. In Matthew chapter 4: 1, Jesus spent days in the wilderness talking with God and getting the direction he needed to start his ministry. In this time away, silence, listening to God was as important as talking to God out loud.

Then, in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus is preaching his first sermon, and in it, he teaches the listeners (and us) how to pray:

The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13

9 "This, then, is how you should pray:
" 'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
10 your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us today our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

Background

Matthew chapter 6, in the section of his book scholars have entitled, "The Sermon on the Mount," Jesus gave those listeners (and us), a formula for prayer we know as The Lord's Prayer. In many Christian churches this prayer is prayed every week in worship. Jesus, in Matthew, is giving his first sermon and he covers a LOT of ground! He is laying out what his ministry will be about and how peoples' lives will be changed because of who Jesus is. This

prayer, which a lot of campers studied (or are studying) in confirmation, holds a lot of value and a great way to pray!

Questions

How does this prayer start?

Why does this prayer include daily bread? And forgiveness? And freedom from temptation?

Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane.

[32] They went to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." [33] He took with him Peter and James and John and began to be distressed and agitated. [34] And he said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." [35] And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. [36] He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me, yet not what I want but what you want." Mark 14:32-36

In this passage, Jesus is speaking to God right before he is going to be arrested, tried, and killed by crucifixion. He is in agony and is begging God not to let this gruesome death happen to him. Yet it does. Soldiers come and arrest him and Jesus is tried and beaten and crucified.

What can we learn from this prayer? (God is not a pocket genie who grants our wishes just because we want what we want)

What kind of emotions/feelings do you see in this prayer?

What does that mean for us when we pray?

What hand position, what body position do you see Jesus using here?

How does this prayer change the way you think about praying/prayer?

Paul writes to the community at Thessalonica.

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. I Thessalonians 5: 16-18

Background

Paul and his companion, Silas started a church in Thessalonica. It was not easy as the Jewish leaders didn't like this new movement at all! They were chased out of town! That didn't stop this little church from making a huge difference in the area! Their faithfulness and their prayers mattered!

Questions

What do you think it mean to pray without ceasing?

How can you pray without ceasing in your daily life?

What do you think the position of Paul's and Silas' hands were as they prayed?

Romans 8:26-27 reads: *[26] Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. [27] And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*

Background

As with all Paul's epistles to the churches, his purpose in writing was to proclaim the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ by teaching doctrine and edify and encourage the believers who would receive his letter. Of particular concern to Paul were those to whom this letter was written—those in Rome who were "loved by God and called to be saints" (Romans 1:7). Because he himself was a Roman citizen, he had a unique passion for those in the assembly of believers in Rome. Since he had not, to this point, visited the church in Rome, this letter also served as his introduction to them.

Questions

How do you feel knowing that the Holy Spirit is with us?

Can you share a time when you didn't know, or have, the words to express what you were thinking or feeling?

How do you feel knowing that in those times, the Holy Spirit was groaning your prayer, thoughts, feelings, to God?

How do you think Paul's hands were when he wrote this book?

How do you think the readers of Romans hands were when they heard this book?

Please DO NOT omit this part!

- After all of this Bible study, what do you think prayer is in its most basic form? Answer: an honest, open conversation with God.
- Prayer does NOT make God a vending machine, dispensing what we ask for – just because we pray. It helps to know that God can answer our prayers in 4 basic ways:
  - yes
  - no
  - wait
  - here is something entirely different!

- Prayer doesn't always have to be happy-clappy! We can pray when we are angry or anxious, and our hands are clenched like we learned on Tuesday. We can pray with gratitude and have our hands cupped like we learned yesterday.
- Today as we think about prayer: how can our hands/bodies be?

  Clenched? Cupped? Folded? Interlaced? Up and open? Up and extended? YES!!!! What other hand positions can you think of for prayer?

- How can our bodies be positioned when we think of prayer?

Standing? Kneeling? Sitting?? Walking? Prone? YES!!! What other body positions can you think of for prayer? [One of my own confirmation students shared that one of the girls from her village prayed prone – so she could smell the earth as she prayed! So awesome]

- Do you think your eyes should always be closed when you pray? Why or why not?
- Where can you pray?
- Will you promise yourself to pray every day?

A BIT OF HISTORY

In the Old Testament days, the only people who were considered holy enough to pray were the Priests, Levites, and Rabbis. Jesus and Paul worked to break down that barrier so that all people were free to pray for themselves. Somehow, probably beginning in the 3 -4th century with the rise of monasticism, the idea of everyday people praying faded away. People began to ask the priests, monks and nuns to pray for them. When Martin Luther came on the scene in the 1500's, he encouraged people to pray for themselves once again. His daily prayers (morning, evening and table blessings) are part of the Small Catechism to this day!

We will open discussion for the many ways we can use prayer in our daily life as we go about our day, thinking about the physical hand postures that we have practiced this week, adding open hands!

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

If things aren't going well…then pray…together…asking the campers to get real about prayer petitions. What is happening at home? at school? with their friends? with their families? in the world?

How many times in an average worship service do we pray?

Does someone's Bible have a brief Concordance in the back? If so, how many times do the words pray, prayer, prayed and praying occur?

F. IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Activities - pray without ceasing calisthenics (stand up, sit down, kneel, walk, prone, eyes open, eyes closed, hands in fists, hands cupped, hands open, hands up)

Morning and evening worship ideas for morning worship a skit about praying without ceasing could be fun to act out.

For evening worship: close the worship by praying the Lord's Prayer, starting with whispering and ending with shouting!

All camp evening activities

Any types of meals used to emphasize the theme

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

Songs from the camp song sheet

Lord, Listen to your Children Praying

The Spirit Intercedes

Other new songs (list titles and source)

Additional scriptures:

Any supporting stories: from the internet: **Martin Rinkart** **(Hymn Writer):** During the Thirty Years' War and a devastating plague, Pastor Rinkart wrote the hymn "Now Thank We All Our God" while burying his wife and thousands of others, demonstrating gratitude amidst overwhelming grief and death.

Corrie ten Boom **(The Hiding Place):** In a Nazi concentration camp, Corrie's sister Betsy thanked God for the fleas plaguing their barracks, leading to a guard avoiding the area. This demonstrated finding a purpose for God even in unpleasantness, inspiring Corrie to thank God in all situations.

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

Do some play acting with praying without ceasing. What would praying without ceasing look like: before a test? When you are feeling like you want to pick a fight with someone? When you are in the car? When you are waiting for your turn in line? When you are happy? sad? mad? scared? frustrated?

I. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS

Dig deeper into some of the Bible passages and understand more of context as well as content. Think of practical applications of praying with all your emotions.

J. PARENT DEVOTIONAL

Scripture: *Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* I Thessalonians 5: 16-18

Reflection: As we continue to think about our week's Bible verse from Philippians 4:6-7 - *6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus,* today's emphasis is on prayer.

How do you pray as a family? Do you pray as a family? When could prayer be incorporated into your very busy daily routines?

A short **Activity** for the family: together, figure out a time and place to make prayer a part of your life and then do it!

Prayer: God, we know you are always with us. Today, help me to keep that awareness a part of my routine and to give thanks for your constant, never-ending love. Amen

K. SUMMER STAFF SECTION

Is there something we can do for staff that will be fresh each week? What about a prayer chart? Petitions and answers?

2026 RAINBOW TRAIL BIBLE STUDY
HANDS WIDE OPEN
DAY 5: PEACE

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

My early life was filled with Jesus. So much so, that it wasn't until middle/high school that I realized not everyone grew up saturated in Jesus the way I was and not everyone understood the love of Jesus as I did. Jesus was ever present – from family devotions before bed, bedtime and table prayers, church communities, Christian school…Jesus was a part of the very air I breathed. Faith wasn't something I had to hold onto tightly, it was simply there, resting in open hands. I cannot remember I day when I didn't know that Jesus loved me. And Jesus also became synonymous with going to church.

But like most people I know, there came a time when dwelling in the love of Jesus wasn't my first identifier – meaning, I sought for my identity, my sense of belonging and worth in all the normal places: friends, school, older youth I knew and idolized, TV, magazines, and all the subtle messages from so many unnamed sources. Soon my "Jesus life" and my "real" life were two distinct boxes. And rarely did they cross. And without realizing it, my hands started to clench—trying to manage faith in one box and life in the other. When I left for college, my attitude was "Jesus has had me every Sunday for 18 years – he's not going to miss me for a few". So, during college, I started out not going to church at all – except when the choir I sang in sang in a church, the campus ministry I was apart of was at a church (did you catch that – I wasn't "going to church" but I still somehow surrounded myself with faith-filled people – some perhaps, looking back, way more intentional about their faith than I was!).

And I struggled to figure out how this faith thing really worked once I wasn't at home. I didn't know what I believed, beyond accepting that Jesus loved me. It didn't seem as important as all the fun I wanted to have. And yet, I couldn't shake this faith thing either. Once I graduated from college, and because of God's sense of humor, I ended up doing youth ministry – perhaps in part because "church" was a world I knew. I got connected with a young adult group where I then learned that "good" Christians had quiet time every morning, with God, a journal and pen. At least 30min. You had to read, journal, pray – at the beginning of your day – and then memorize

scripture, be a part of a deep Bible study group, and serve others sometimes, too….and then you were doing what God wanted. Read: In order to not disappoint God – there were certain things one had to do or so I believed. And the harder I tried, the tighter my fists became.

I wrestled with these ideas – trying – in vain – to stay faithful and working hard not to disappoint God. And always feeling like I did. There was effort, but very little peace. I stayed in youth and family ministry, branched out into worship ministry and eventually even went to seminary. And I still was plagued by the worry that I was somehow disappointing God. It wasn't until about 10 years ago when I started to take hold of this radical idea – what if I wasn't a disappointment to God – ever?! What if God loved me the same whether I had a Quiet time, journaled, memorized scripture, etc or not? What if I was a beloved one because I simply…am? What if God wasn't asking me to prove anything, but simply to open my hands and receive? How would I see God differently if I wasn't striving to please God all the time? It was a totally new way of looking at things for me – and it breathed life into me. For the first time in a long time, I felt peace instead of pressure.

I stopped striving to "do" all the things I thought I "should" be doing. And started to embrace simply being a beloved child of God – no matter what. What joy! What freedom! As long as my soul was filled with anxiety around not disappointing God – I couldn't experience the love of God for me, truly, deeply. When I opened my fists from the death grip I had around "doing the right things" and opened my arms wide to embrace a God who is bigger than I can imagine or comprehend, who finds joy in creating mountains and seas, blue skies and me, who has a sense of humor and a love for all way deeper than I can fathom…a sense of deep abiding peace started to creep into my heart. Peace wasn't something I chased, it's something I discovered when I stopped clenching.

It's not that Bible study, worship, quiet times, even journaling (sometimes the bane of my existence and sometimes life giving) aren't good things- they are - but when they command my heart space before God – when they become notches in the "Christian belt" of things I "have' to do – they can cause more anxiety than connection. Today – my spiritual practices are not about tightening my grip on God, but about keeping my hands open - music – singing and listening, simply being still in the midst of God's glorious creation, learning to be present where my feet are(not where my phone can take me), being with children, having deep conversations around faith and what it means to be a Jesus follower today, finding ways to serve God by serving others. They are things that connect me to the heart of God and remind me of the vastness of God's love for me…for all. This kind of freedom, this kind of peace, this feeling of falling into the arms of God can be yours and your campers as well.

Tomorrow, we go down the mountain. This week has been a time of discovery – we've named some of our fears and worries – things that make us anxious. We have realized the gift of thankfulness can take us from fists closed tightly with anxiousness, to cupped hands filled with gratitude, to open hands overflowing with prayer. And it would be very easy for the anxiety to start creeping back in as we think about "going home". Where do we find the peace God promises when schedules fill up again, when expectations return, when our fists are tempted to clench? How do we stay open without gripping peace so tightly that is slips away, steals our joy? Today, we will immerse ourselves in the story of Elijah hearing the voice of God – the voice that brings peace and we will set ourselves and our campers up with some possible plans for tapping into the peace of God which is ours when we let go of striving, when we embrace our belovedness, and when we intentionally find ways to connect our heart to the heart of God. Can we really go home

with hands wide open? The answer is some days yes…and some days no…but know this – God's hands remain open toward us always! So, today, we'll see what we can do to set ourselves up to embrace God, reach out for God with hands wide open – not just here on the mountain, but when we go down the mountain, too!

B. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS DAY OF THE STUDY

- Campers will be reminded of their beloved status as a child of God
- Campers will come to understand how intentionality helps us connect our heart to the heart of God – and there's not just one way to do this!
- Campers will walk away with their own plan for how to keep connected to the heart of God down the mountain

C. MORNING WATCH

Common Welcome
Good morning, friends. As we begin this day, I invite you to rest your hands open in your lap, a sign of trust and readiness to receive. Paul reminds us in Philippians that we don't earn God's peace by worrying less—we receive it as we bring everything to God in prayer. Today, let's start with open hands, trusting that the peace of Christ will guard our hearts and minds as we walk through this day together.

Introduction to the day
Welcome to your last full day at camp! What a week it's been! Today, we want to look at the peace that God can give us, not just here on the mountain but at home as well. What could it look like? Feel like? Be like? This peace can be yours with some choices on your part. Today, you'll see it's possible!

Why we chose the Passage and Scripture
Today's scripture reminds us that God's voice is not always heard in the noise of our lives. But if we come with hearts and hands wide open, reaching out to God – God will be there with us and his voice will whisper in our ears and hearts – you are beloved!

Song: "Peace" by Hillsong Young and Free

You will stay true
Even when the lies come
Your Word remains truth
Even when my thoughts don't line up
I will stand tall on each promise You made
Let the rest fade away

There's a peace far beyond all understanding
May it ever set my heart at ease
Dare anxiety come I'll remember

That peace is a promise You keep
Peace is a promise You keep

You will stay true
Even in the chaos
Your Word remains truth
Even when my mind wreaks havoc
I will be still for I've known all along
My Jehovah Shalom

There's a peace far beyond all understanding
May it ever set my heart at ease
What anxiety fails to remember
Is peace is a promise You keep
Peace is a promise You keep

You are peace to a restless soul
Peace when my thoughts wage war
Peace to the anxious heart
That's who You are
That's who You are

You are peace when my fear takes hold
Peace when I feel enclosed
Peace when I lose control
That's who You are
That's who You are

I've found peace far beyond all understanding
Let it flow when my mind's under siege
All anxiety bows in the presence
Of Jesus the keeper of peace
And peace is a promise He keeps

Writer(s): Michael John Fatkin, Benjamin William Hastings, Melodie Mezieres-wagner

Questions for consideration

- Where are your hands? What are they doing? Place them on your knees or held slightly in front of you, palms up – as if you're waiting to receive something. Take a deep breath. Sit and listen to the voices around you…the wind in the trees, the birds, the bubbling water – what do you hear?
- Tomorrow you will go down the mountain and return home. Is there anything about this that makes you worried? Scared? Sad?
- Jesus wants us to know he's not just here on the mountain, but he's at home with you too. Where do you see or feel Jesus at home? What makes it hard to hear Jesus at home?
- Try sitting quietly and simply listening for a little bit. What do you hear? How do you feel? Sometimes we think we want God to shout out at us – but God often speaks softly. Can you hear anything this morning that reminds you of God?

Closing Prayer
Dear Jesus, I want to feel your presence, the peace you can bring to my life. Too often I fill my life with noise and so hearing and feeling you is hard. Help me stop long enough each day to breathe in and feel your presence with me always. Amen.

D. SCRIPTURE STUDY

Peace – we often think of peace as the absence of something – noise, demands, war – you find peace when things are gone. Yet, if that were true, no one would ever find peace because we cannot separate ourselves from the world we live in and all the noise, drama, trauma, demands, wars, and on and on this world holds. As followers of Jesus, we are often told if we "believe enough," God's peace will come over us and "everything will be peaceful and good". Not true. So how do we find this elusive peace?

First step: accept that our lives will never be free from distractions, noise, demands, anxiousness and more. So God's peace is not about the absence of things but rather connecting oneself to the heart of God in ways that peace flows to us in the midst of the storms of life. This takes intentionality on our part.

Second Step: Be intentional. Figure out what connects your heart to the heart of God. Then make time to engage in those places and/or activities. Actively listen to hear God's whispers. Allow the Spirit to fill you with peace and so much more! Our texts for today will help us understand this and we'll look at how to do this!

I Kings 19:3-13a NRSVUE– Peace is Not Found Where We Expect It
Prior to these verses, Elijah has just had a mountaintop experience, a major victory over the prophets of the idol Baal. Elijah was obedient, courageous and effective. Yet…as soon as this event is over he is overwhelmed by fear. (Could have had something to do with the queen wanting to kill him!)

Vs 3 – 4: *Then he [Elijah] was afraid; he got up and fled for his life and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there.* **4** *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors."*

Elijah's initial response is to run away – fast! His fear causes him to leave community, isolate himself and collapse emotionally – "take my life now, Lord". Can you see Elijah dropping down under the tree, shaking his fists at God and praying/yelling with clenched fists? God does not get upset with Elijah for his fear. God responds to Elijah's humanity.

Vs 5-8: *Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat."* **6** *He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again.* **7** *The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for*

you." [8] He got up and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

Elijah rails out to God – then lays down and falls asleep. And what does God do? He sends an angel – not with judgement but with bread, water and rest. God knows Elijah (and us) needs to be cared for, cared about. And so God comforts Elijah with provision. The peace that begins to seep in comes not as a result of Elijah's performance, but by God's providing. The lesson for us here? Peace begins when we stop striving, and receive what God has to give.

Once Elijah was able to receive, he had the strength to continue following God's plan – for him to go to Mt Horeb. The amazing thing for us in this is that when we stop trying so hard, and receive what God has to offer – we can tap into a strength we never knew we had.

Vs 9-10: *At that place he came to a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" [10] He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts, for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."*

The question the Lord asks here – "what are you doing here, Elijah?" is not God asking Elijah where he is geographically. It's a question for Elijah's heart. And Elijah answers honestly – I've tried really, really hard and I am alone – left all alone – and there are people trying to find me so they can kill me. Now, while some of these statements might be a bit exaggerated, God doesn't interrupt or correct Elijah – God simply listens. Meeting Elijah in the midst of his emotions.

The same is true for us. God wants to know our hearts. Not the prettied-up edition – rather the true, honest, raw truth. And God meets us there – not with shame, or judgement but with a heart that listens.

Vs 11-13: *"Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. [12] And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. [13] When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave…*

Wind. Earthquake. Fire. All things that are powerful, mighty and can be all consuming. Yet, for Elijah God is not found in the midst of the power and might. Rather…it's the sound of a gentle whisper where Elijah hears and finds God – and then goes to stand in front of him.

Aren't we just the same way? We want the power of God, the power and might to show up and be amazing. To show us signs and wonders – do miracles! But that's not always how God works. Often in today's world God uses soft whispers – and we have to, need to slow down, breathe deeply enough to be able to hear.

If you are paying attention to details – you might ask – why did Elijah cover his face when he went out to meet the Lord? He did this because at this time people believed if they looked up, if

they saw God's actual being, they would die. So, Elijah covers his face our of respect for God, and possibly out of some fear. The interesting thing is that Elijah has just earlier said he wanted to die – and this would be an easy way to do it – just look at God's being. Yet after God has met him in his emotional state cared about and for him – Elijah clearly no longer wishes to die – and covers his face.

Amazing what a little care and attention can do! Sometimes we think we want God to show up is this magical amazing ways – and often God meets us in the still, the quiet, wanting to refresh, renew our strength and soul. Thing to remember here is that God does not overpower Elijah's fear, God outlasts it.

God goes on in the following verses to restore Elijah's sense of purpose, yet he does so without pressure. God re-asks his question – but now Elijah is rested, has been heard and seen and has encountered God's peace. God does not say "try harder", rather God says, "go, return, you're not finished."

Philippians 4:6-7
We've already looked at this verse, but let's review and look again!

Vs 6 – **Do not be anxious about anything but by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.**
This is not a command, but rather an invitation. Paul knows anxiety is a reality in people's lives – he's simply inviting us to redirect what we do with that anxiety. It's not suppressing emotions – but rather releasing them.

Then notice the movement:
Anxiety = tight fists
Thanksgiving = cupped hands
Prayer = hands opening
Prayer is not gripping God – not trying to get God to do things our ways – rather it is placing our worries, cares and lives in to God's hands.

Vs 7 – *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

This is the important verse for today!
When you read this verse – know this:
- God's peace cannot be reasoned into existence – God simply gives it
- God's peace can guard us – protect us – it's not a passive peace, but one with action
- God's peace is not based on the circumstances, habits, perfection of us – we cannot manufacture peace by doing what is right, or by doing faith correctly – it is something God gives when we loosen our grip. That's worth repeating: God's peace is not something we can make happen by doing faith "correctly", it is something that God gives when we loosen our grip!

Peace is not the absence of trouble – it is the presence of God received with open hands. Peac is something received, not achieved!

POSSIBLE ACTUAL STUDY

Getting Started

- Highs and lows – give each camper a chance to share one high and one low from the last 24 hours. Rules are you don't have to have a low, but you have to have at least 1 high.

- **Hand exercise (from day 1)**

Where are your arms and hands right now? Are your arms crossed or your hands in a fist? Are your arms open and hands open?

Take a moment to clinch your fists and squeeze them. What do you feel? What do you notice about your body, your arms, your legs, your chest, your neck, your breath, your heart, your heartbeat? Are you tensing up, are your breaths shallow and are you closing out the things around you or shutting down?

Now release. Did you just sigh as you released or take a deep breath? Now, take a deep breath. Breathe in and relax your body as you breathe out.

Take a moment to now open your hands. What do you feel? What do you notice about your body, your arms, your legs, your chest, your neck, your breath, your heart, your heartbeat? Are you more relaxed, are you breathing deeper and are you open to what is around you?

Now release and take a deep breath.

Let campers know today, we're going to be talking about the peace God can give us when we stop striving/trying and simply trust we are loved by God and then listen for God's gentle voice.

6. **Elijah's Story**
    - Explain:
        Elijah was a prophet – someone who spoke for God
        Right before our story, Elijah had a HUGE win with God over the priests of Baal – an idol people worshipped
        Right after that everything falls apart – and the queen wants Elijah dead
    - Ask: Have you ever had a great moment and then suddenly felt super stressed or scared?
        Let campers answer and affirm all answers
        Affirm that sometimes the hardest moment isn't before a big thing – it's after
    - Scripture Reading – I Kings 19:3-8
        Have different campers read short sections – but don't *make* anyone read
        Ask:
        - Why do you think Elijah ran away?
        - What emotions do you think Elijah was feeling?
        - Have you ever felt like you had to "try harder" to be a good son/daughter, student, team player, Christian?
        - Do you think God loves you more on your good days than your bad days? What makes you say what you say?

Point to make: God doesn't yell at Elijah or tell him to do better – God takes care of Elijah

7. **God's Whisper**
   - Have the group continue reading with vs 9-13
   - Ask where was God here?

8. **God's Whisper Game**
   - Have campers sit in a circle
   - Tell them you're going to do this activity twice – once with noise being made and once in the quiet
   - Noisy Round: Have kids start tapping, clapping, making noise. Tell them to keep making noise. Whisper the phrase "You are not alone" to one camper and tell them to pass it on to the next camper. Make sure the message goes all the way around the circle while the noise keeps going as well. Have the last person say the message out loud.
   - Quiet Round: Now, have the circle be absolutely quiet and send the same whisper message around, having the last person say it out loud.
   - After both rounds ask:

     Which time was it easier to hear?
     Why do you think God whispered instead of shouted?
     Where do you think God's gentle voice might show up in your life?

POINT TO MAKE:

Sometimes when life is loud – school, friends, social media – it's really hard to hear or feel God.

ASK: What are some "loud" things in your life that make it hard to feel God's peace?

Tell campers something like this:

God's peace doesn't come from trying harder – God's peace comes from opening our hearts and hands to God and remembering I AM LOVED – just as we each are. God doesn't just love us collectively, you loves each one of you – deeply and forever – NO MATTER WHAT!

9. **Down the Mountain**

Intro to this section:

- Like Elijah – we have come to the mountain to hear God.
- Just like Elijah there comes a time when we go back home. Tomorrow is that day for us. Schedules return. Stress returns. Expectations return.
- Some days your hands will remain open
- Some days your hands will clench again
- Here's the GOOD NEWS we take with us: God's hands are always open – ALWAYS.
- Peace isn't something we hang onto – it's something we come back to again and again and again.

So today…before we go home tomorrow – gonna set up a plan – because we know when we're intentional about things – they happen way more often!

Hand out the My Plan for Falling into God's Peace

- **Walk your campers through the sheet:**
  - Have them write down some of the "louds" in their life
  - Have them write down some of the ways their heart can connect to God (this can include going to church, youth group, etc…but help them think outside the box – where could they go, what could they do for 1-5 minutes that would calm their heart and help them listen to God's whispers? These could include this like:
    - listening to music (good message music or instrumental music)
    - serving others – not for being paid – but because God calls us to
    - writing in a journal
    - going outside to simply breath in God's creation
    - going for a walk to see the beauty around them
    - put their phone away and instead read a book or Bible
    - drawing, painting, coloring
    - and any idea they come up with that helps them intentionally focus on God's presence, God's goodness, God's peace
  - Have them write down who can help them
  - Have them circle or write down who they will actually ask to help them

- **Encourage them**

We know we're more successful when we invite others to help us – strongly encourage you to ask 1-2 people help you stay open to God's whispers. Plan time for it – and then do it.

It's not so God will be happy with you – it's so you can feel God's presence already with you – and that peace that only God can give.

Going down the mountain doesn't mean you leave all the people who will walk with you behind you – there are a lot of people who can and will walk with you, help you – you just have to be brave enough to ask.

And know this: some days you'll feel close to God
Some days you won't
THE GOOD NEWS = God's presence doesn't depend on your spiritual consistency. God is always present with you!

10. Blessing Out

A couple different options:

Option 1:

Have each camper one at a time, turn to a camper next to them, look them in the eye and say*: Remember you are loved and you are not alone*. Once the whole group, including you,

have had those words spoken to you…close the time in prayer – however your group wants to pray.

Option 2:

Have your group stand in a circle. One at a time, have each camper come to the middle and have the group lay hands on them.

(You might need to explain the laying on of hands – something we do to specially bless people. Hands are placed lightly on shoulders, arms, heads, backs. BE SURE AND ASK each camper if it's OK to lay hands on them! If they aren't comfortable with the whole group laying hands on them – the group can hold hands around the camper)

Have each camper around the outside circle say to the camper in the middle –

Remember you are loved and you are not alone.

Once everyone has said that – say a specific prayer for that camper.
Do this for each individual camper.

E. ADDITIONAL STUDY IDEAS

*If your group struggles to sit still – movement is always good!

- Go back to one of the activities/games and play again. Or suddenly without saying why – get up and simply tell them the next part of Bible study is happening somewhere else and follow me. Take them to a new spot and restart where you left off.
- Or plan to do each part of your Bible Study in a different place right off the bat
- Do a **Rock/Paper/Scissors contest**. Everyone gets a partner. They play a round of RPS with their partner. Once done, switch partners with someone else. Once a player has lost 2 complete rounds they are out until another round starts. Last person in wins!
- Do some **Would You Rather**: Have the whole group get up and stand in the middle of your area. Tell them you are going to give them two options as an answer to each question of "Would you rather…". They have to pick a side. There's no staying neutral in the middle! 😖 Then go thru some of the following:

Would you rather…

To the right:	*To the left:*
Live in a treehouse	Live in an igloo
Sit on nails	Sit on ice
Go to PE	Go to the library
Lose all your teeth	Lose all your hair
Skip forward in time	Go back in time
Have a dog	Have a cat
Explore space	Explore the ocean
Never be able to cry	Or never laugh
Sell all of your possessions	Sell 1 of your organs

If your group is struggling with the story or they struggle with reading* – know the story well
enough to simply tell it – but tell it with excitement, and movement on your part. Make sure you really know the story – not just reading it yourself.

- ***If they are struggling with the God's Voice Plan sheets*** – ask them what they like to do? What brings them joy? What's fun – not stressful? Then ask how they might be able to see or hear God while doing those things.

  Help your campers understand it's not so much WHAT you do, as it is the HEART and

  MINDSET you do it with

- ***If you have a group that's a little more advanced:***
  - they might be able to identify some things each other like to do or are good at – to help fill out the God's Voice Plan sheet.
  - Take more time with the story – ask about feelings and talk through how Elijah railed at God – a little dramatically. Ask your campers if they have ever wanted to yell at God. If the answer is yes – invite them to do it now. Each camper could do it on their own – OR the whole group could shout at God at the same time. Then ask them how they feel. Remind them God can handle their anger, their struggles and God still loves them as they are!!!
  - Be sure and take Option 2 on the Blessing Out portion of the study
  - Have individual campers pray for other individual campers – don't give them a set prayer – simply let each person pray what's on their heart OR have each individual say a prayer for every person when their in the middle of the group.

F. <u>IDEAS TO INCORPORATE THEME THROUGHOUT THE DAY</u>

*** Hippie (Peace man) Day**

- Tye dye could be carried throughout the day – decorations could be tie-dyed or filled with

  lots of peace signs, paper flower crowns, Peace and Love banners
- All Camp activities could include:
  - making paper crowns
  - tie-dying things
  - making peace rocks – rocks decorated with kind words or symbols
  - making friendship bracelets
- All Camp Games could be non-competitive things
  - dance
  - Group challenges where everyone must finish together
  - Stations with bubbles, chalk art, non-competitive games
- Could also have a Spread the Peace/Love Challenge
  - Give each camper a paper heart or peace sign
  - Have them pass it on by doing an act of kindness
  - Share stories at Roundup or Campfire
- Worship – can center on peace – God's peace that is ours – sing My Light House, share

the peace with each other using the peace sign as well aswords

***True North Peace Day**

- focus on God giving us peace through being our guide through life
- decorations could be around compasses and maps
- All Camp could a game where groups have to use maps to find different stations where they have to do something (sing a song, do a dance, tell you something from the Bible, name 5 counselors, etc – when they've completed the task, the staff at that station signs their map. Which ever team gets done first – gets to go to snack first!

- Worship can center of the comfort/peace the following God's ways can bring us – that God's peace doesn't depend on our ability to navigate life! SONGS could include: My Lighthouse, History Maker, Peace Like a River, - SCRIPTURE would be Philippians 4:6-7

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

*** Songs from the camp song sheet**

#97 My Lighthouse
#9 Wounded Soldier
#25 Psalm 25
#43 Isaiah 43
#45 Dance With Me
#65 Little Room
#69 Open the Eyes of my Heart
#81 Grace Like Rain
#82 Reckless Love
#98 Stand in Your Love
#103 Goodness of God

* Other new songs (list titles and source)

- It Is Well – Bethel Music
- That's Enough – Brandon Heath

* Additional scriptures

- John 14: 27 – Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives, so don't be troubled or afraid.
- Colossians 3:13-14 - Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. **14** Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts.

* Any supporting stories (list source)

One of the greatest stories I know that shows the power of the peace that only God can give is the story behind the hymn/song It Is Well With My Soul:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

The author, Horatio G. Spafford (1828-1888), was a Presbyterian layman from Chicago. He had established a very successful legal practice as a young businessman and was also a devout Christian. Among his close friends were several evangelists including the famous Dwight L. Moody, also from Chicago.

Spafford's fortune evaporated in the wake of the great Chicago Fire of 1871. Having invested heavily in real estate along Lake Michigan's shoreline, he lost everything overnight. In a saga reminiscent of Job, his son died a short time before his financial disaster. But the worst was yet to come.

Desiring a rest for his wife and four daughters as well as wishing to join and assist Moody in one of his campaigns in Great Britain, Spafford planned a European trip for his family in 1873. In November of that year, due to unexpected last-minute business developments, he had to remain in Chicago but sent his wife and four daughters on ahead as scheduled on the S.S. Ville du Havre. He expected to follow in a few days.

On November 22 the ship was struck by the Lochearn, an English vessel, and sank in twelve minutes. Several days later the survivors were finally landed at Cardiff, Wales, and Mrs. Spafford cabled her husband, 'Saved alone.'"

Spafford left immediately to join his wife. This hymn is said to have been penned as he approached the area of the ocean thought to be where the ship carrying his daughters had sunk.
https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-it-is-well-with-my-soul

H. IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY DOWN FOR JUNIORS

*Juniors are much more concrete – so use smaller words – like tight hands vs clenched fists

*When it comes to the Elijah story – have them look it up in the Bible – to help kids continue to work

on the skill of finding things in the Bible – but TELL the story instead of reading it. It's good to use

simple words too. For instance:

Elijah was a prophet—someone who helped people listen to God.
Elijah had just done something really brave for God.
But some people didn't like what Elijah had done and wanted to kill him.
So then Elijah got scared.
He ran away.
He was tired. He was hungry and he felt all alone.
Elijah was cranky and he yelled out to God about how unfair things were.
Then he laid down under a tree and took a nap.
During his nap God sent an angel with food and water
After eating Elijah slept some more

And God didn't get mad.
Because God cares about tired people
Then God told Elijah to go up a mountain
A strong wind came (whoosh!)
An earthquake happened (shake!)
Then a fire flew by (flicker hands!)
But God was not in any of those
Then came a quiet gentle whisper
And Elijah knew – God was there

You could add other motions to the story as well to make it even more interactive and have campers do the motions with you!

***With the MyPlan for Falling into God's Peace sheet** – you could use the simpler version of the sheets and say something like this:

When we go home from camp, sometimes worries come back.
But God's love doesn't go away
And God's peace doesn't have to go away
When you are worried you can:

- Open your hands
- Take a deep breath
- And remember: God is with me.

Then ask your campers:

- where are some places you could go that are calm where you could do this?
- Who are some people you could ask to help you do this?

- Help your campers name these places and people and then write them on their sheets. You could have them pick the one person they feel confident to ask to help them. Then circle that person's name.

- The Blessing Out – juniors can do this and it can be really meaningful for them. By this time you'll know your group well enough to know which option will work best for them…but please don't skip this part!!

I. <u>IDEAS TO ADJUST STUDY UP FOR SR HIGHS</u>

*** Setting the stage for the day** – after you do Hands exercise you could add a few questions like:

- How many of you feel busy most of the time?
- How many of you fee like you're supposed to have life figured out already?
- How many of you feel pressure to be "good" at faith?

Then say something like this:

High school is LOUD! Expectations are loud. And faith can get loud too – full of "you shoulds". Today we're going to look at a story where God shows up in a very different way.

- **After doing Elijah's story…ask:**
  - Why do you think God starts with rest and food instead of a lecture?

        - Would that response be helpful to you?
    - What could the wind, earthquake and fire represent in real life for you today?
        - Answers could be something like:
            - Constant Noise (lack of silence)
            - Pressure
            - Chaos
            - Expectations
            - Social media
    - Why do you think God chooses to speak in a whisper?

- **After the discussion you could say something like:**
    - A lot of us assume God is most pleased when:
        - We read our Bibles more
        - Pray better
        - Mess up less
        - Try harder

      But Elijah doesn't do *anything* to earn God's peace.
    - God doesn't say:
        - "Fix yourself."
        - "Be better."
        - "Prove you still care."
    - God says: "I'm here."
    - **Say clearly:**
      Faith rooted in performance creates pressure.
      Faith rooted in love creates peace.
- **If you need/want another activity:**
    - Give campers a piece of paper
    - Ask them to write:
        - Things that make life loud
        - Things that make faith feel heavy or hard
        - Voices that tell them they're "not enough"
    - Then ask:
        - Which of these voices sound like God? Which don't?
    - Then say:
        - God's voice is often quieter – but it is never cruel.
- **OR a different activity could be:**
    - Say: This activity is not about forcing or coercing God into speaking. It's about creating space.
    - Instruct them to sit comfortably. Let their hands be open or resting
    - Let them know you're all going to sit for 1-2 minutes of silence
    - During that time think about this question: If God were to say one true thing about you right now, what might it be and what would you like God to say to you right now?

J. <u>PARENT DEVOTIONAL</u>

Scripture: I Kings 19:3-13a and Philippians 4:6-7

Reflection: On the day's study from camp
Today your camper spent time with the story of Elijah on the mountain – a story that can remind us that God's peace doesn't come from doing more, trying harder or being louder. Elijah was tired, afraid and alone. He complained to God and wished he was dead. God didn't scold him for his behavior – rather he cared for Elijah's needs – food, water, rest and having God's gentle presence. Through the story we learned God often meets us not in the noise of our worries and expectations, but in moments of stillness. We talked about moving from clenched fists to open hands – instead of trying to live through the pressures and noise, instead, take time to breathe deeply and open our hands to God's love and presence with us.

We talked about going down the mountain and the return to everyday routines. We mapped out a
plan on ways to connect our hearts to the heart of God so that we are in a space to receive God's gentle presence and in that God's peace.

Activity: In Bible study today – your camper created a simple plan that can help them open themselves up to God's presence and peace. Ask about that plan and then make your own plan to share with your camper. Maybe you all can revise your plans to include some family time where you are together, putting yourselves in a place to be able to receive God's presence and peace together. What might that look like? Will you commit to trying? **And know this:** One of the greatest examples your camper has to follow is yours – in life and in faith. Even if you don't do things perfectly, (and you won't!) let your camper see you engaging in practices that connect your heart to the heart of God too…it truly does make a difference!

Prayer: Dear God, when life is loud, help us notice your quiet presence. When we feel the pressure to perform, remind us we are already loved and will always be loved. Teach us to rest – not just physically but soulfully in you. In your name and power we pray, Amen.

K. FOR SUMMER STAFF

Is there something we do for staff that will be fresh each week?

A number of years ago, I discovered the idea that just like we all have different personalities, we also have different ways our hearts connect to the heart of God. For some people it's through deep Bible study, for others is can be through serving others. Still for some it's about being an advocate for justice or immersing oneself in music or God's beauty in creation. For still others, it happens when they are worshipping with others and others find their hearts most deeply connected in silence and stillness.

None of these are the only way or the "right way". So how, where and what connects your heart to the heart of God and to God's presence? Explore this summer. Try a different practice each week. For instance, journal one week and the next be intentional about taking a hike/walk with the intentional of really seeing God in the nature around you. Another week, you could listen to Christan music, or you could create music centered on God. Another week, you could take time to do your own Bible study. The possibilities are endless! Think about what makes your heart sing – then try it for a week focused on seeing/feeling/experiencing God's presence with open heart and hands.

And remember: You're not trying to "do it right" – you're on a path of discovery. Also – these are not ways to manipulate God into doing what you want – you are looking for things that make you aware and feel more deeply connected to God.