

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Adapted from Camp Lutherlyn

DAY 1: RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

OBJECTIVE: To help your children discover the importance of conversation in building and sustaining relationships.

FOCUS EVENT: Have your children sit back to back. If you have one child or an odd number of kids, sit down and be a participant yourself. Introduce this as an activity to get to know one another better. Ask your children to find out something new about their partner—but without talking. Allow them to complain about the difficulty or impossibility of the task. Then start, no talking. After a minute or two of struggling, offer them the option of speaking Italian or Greek. At the end, ask them why they think it is so important to be able to talk in order to build a relationship with another person. Comment that this task seems to be difficult and invite them to express their feelings about the situation as follows:

EXPRESSION: Ask your kids to find an object in nature that symbolizes or expresses how they are feeling about this task. e.g. a gnarled branch might suggest confusion or frustration, a rock might suggest being "unable to speak," and a broken twig might suggest being "cut off."

EXPLANATION: Why or how does that object show or express how you felt? What features, textures, appearance, weight, color, etc. of that object show your feelings?

BIBLE:

TELL: Ongoing conversation is the essential glue that builds relationships and holds them together. Conversation helps keep people up to date on what is happening in other people's lives - their hopes, dreams, accomplishments, disappointments, joys, etc. Conversation sustains relationships by helping us to share our needs, desires, feelings, and convictions even when people or circumstances change dramatically.

READ AND DISCUSS:

Matthew 26:69-75	Peter's Denial
John 21:15-19	Peter, do you love me?

REFLECTION:

- What if the people in the Bible had not said what they said?
- Can you think of a time in your life when lack of conversation helped or hurt a relationship?
- What purpose does conversation serve?
- Why is conversation important in relationships?
- Are there ways to have conversation with others if you can't speak?
- What must happen before two people who don't speak the same language can communicate?

COVENANT: Have children commit to spending time during the week in conversation with each other, you, and God.

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DAY 2: OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

OBJECTIVE: To help your kids discover the life-giving God who wants to connect with them and be in conversation with them. To see that to know God you must listen with more than just your ears.

FOCUS EVENT: Nature hike: As you hike ask your kids to find natural items they consider to be special gifts and assemble them into a "nature bouquet." Ask them to tell you about the special qualities of what they've gathered, explaining how each is a gift in itself. Talk about the relationships of each part of the bouquet. Ask how people are related to the nature bouquet. Ask how God is related to the bouquet.

EXPRESSION: Using nature objects or providing some materials (play-doh, sticks, mud, string, etc.) make a collage, picture or sculpture that shows how you feel people are related to God.

EXPLANATION: Invite campers to describe their creations and how they reflect the feelings about having a relationship with God.

BIBLE:

TELL: God has initiated a loving, life-giving relationship with us by providing a diverse bounty of gifts so that we might know how much God loves us.

In creation God is revealed to us as the Creator, as the source of life and of all gifts that make life possible, as the faithful One who sustains us and all life, as the One who keeps all promises.

In considering the relationship of people to God's bouquet, explain that our relationship with creation is hurt by sin. There are ways we humans destroy nature because of selfishness and only thinking about what we want and not what's best for the whole. Our relationship with God is also hurt by sin, in much the same way—by our selfishness and only thinking about what we want and not God's will for us (and God's will is actually what's best for the whole and for us as individuals!) In Jesus Christ God healed and restored our relationship with God and with all creation and God invited us into conversation so that we can build and sustain our relationship with God.

Conversation with God is prayer. Conversation in prayer has always been a very important part of the connection between people and God. To hear God we must learn to listen with more than our ears.

READ AND DISCUSS:

1 Kings 19:9-13 God's quiet voice

REFLECTION: Christians believe that God created and sustains everything and everyone in the universe and that all people have a relationship with God whether they recognize it or not.

Are you aware of your relationship with God?

Is your relationship with God important to you?

Is prayer a daily part of your relationship?

Have you learned to hear God with more than your ears?

COVENANT: Ask for (make a list) concrete ways to increase the strength of your connected relationship with God (ways to listen with more than our ears, respond in prayer and actions, etc.).

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DAY 3: LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

OBJECTIVE: To help your kids be aware that conversation with God is prayer. God invites us to lift up our joys, needs, sorrows, concerns, thanks, and praise in prayer in a variety of ways and settings.

FOCUS EVENT: SWISS ARMY KNIFE (OR OTHER MULTI-PURPOSE TOOL OR A TOOLBOX) - Use it in a couple of situations then ask: What else can we use this for? How do you know what these parts for? How can we find out about the tools we don't know about? What good is a tool that you don't know how to use or if you don't know all its uses?

Conversation is very important and we are required to communicate in a lot of different situations. As a multi-purpose tool is capable of being used in different ways to solve problems in different situations, communication also needs to be a multi-purpose tool. Talk about how you can build a "Swiss Army knife" of communication (many tools of communicating) that can allow you to converse in as many situations as you can imagine. (examples: storytelling, writing, teaching, listening, asking questions, humor, musicals and plays, body language, sign language, tone of voice, etc.)

EXPRESSION: Choose one of the communication tools you imagined and "sculpt" another camper to show how it could be used to have a conversation with God.

EXPLANATION: Explain your "human sculpture" and say something about conversation with God.

BIBLE:

TELL: Conversation is a tool that helps us build and sustain relationships with people. Conversation is also a tool that we are invited to use to build and sustain our relationship with God. Conversation with God is prayer.

For some of us, prayer may be something we do only out of habit or out of desperation in times of need. We may pray at meal times. We may pray at church. We may pray when we are ill or in pain and need help. But God invites us to keep an on-going conversation that can take place wherever we go, in every situation. God has given us a variety of ways to pray, by which to nurture our continuing conversation, lifting all things to God's attention. We can learn from Jesus' example and from the model He gave us in the Lord's Prayer when the disciples asked, "Lord, teach us to pray."

READ AND DISCUSS:

Matthew 6:5-15	The Lord's Prayer (Only talk about it as a model for daily prayer - more about this tomorrow!)
Luke 22:37-46	The Garden prayer "Thy will be done" (Only talk about it as a model for prayer when things look really scary - more about this on Thursday!)
James 5:13-16	Pray in all circumstances

REFLECTION: What can we talk to God about?
How does God want us to pray?
Where and when can we pray?

COVENANT: Each child create a space in your home to pray. Their own "prayer corner" set up with bibles, religious images, or items from nature. Use this prayer space to pray to God or to sit in silence with God.

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DAY 4: EXPECTATIONS AND ANSWERS (A mature way of understanding prayer)

OBJECTIVE: To help children realize that God hears and answers prayers.

FOCUS EVENT: On a casual walk find a "wishing spot." This could be a wishing well or pool, a wishing rock, bridge, or tree, the first star of evening, etc. Think aloud about the idea of wishes. Ask kids to talk about their dearest wishes.

ASK: How would you know if a wish was granted? Is a wish the same thing as a prayer?
How would you know if a prayer was answered?

EXPRESSION: Have your child divide a piece of paper into four parts. Ask them to draw the following in the sections: 1. something you wish for 2. a picture of the wish granted 3. something you pray for 4. a picture of the prayer answered.

EXPLANATION: Share your pictures and talk about the differences between prayers and wishes and the answers to each.

COMMUNITY STORY:

TELL: A prayer is not a wish and God is not a genie or Santa Claus. God is not someone we can control if we say the right words. God is rather one who hears all our prayers with love and concern and gives us what is needed and appropriate for us in our lives.

God doesn't always answer us in the way we want or expect. God knows what we need and answers in that way. God doesn't promise to give us everything we want or to take all our suffering away, but God does promise to present with us in all things and at all times (especially the hard times).

Sometimes, because our prayer wasn't answered "correctly" or as we thought it should be, we may wonder whether God hear us or cares about us. Our relationship with God makes us confident that God is there and hears our prayers. God has invited us to bring all our concerns from desperate need to joyful praise to Him in prayer. What can we expect from God?

READ AND DISCUSS:

Matthew 7:7-12 LIFE GIVING GIFTS: God gives the gifts that give life to those who ask. God does not give a scorpion instead of bread...or evil when we ask for good. Neither does God give us a scorpion (evil) if we are foolish enough to ask for it.

John 15:7 PRAYING IN JESUS' NAME: One of the three passages in John's gospel that say, in effect, "...if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you." These must be read in their full context. 16:23 talks about a future time when Christ returns. 15:7 and 16b occur in the context of Chapter 15 which is the "Vine and branches...lay down one's life for one's friends" chapter. The chapter paints a very clear picture of what it means to be living "in Jesus' name." When we "abide (live) in Christ" and pray "in Jesus' name" our prayers will glorify God and be wide open to God's Logos (God's Word - the blueprint for life in the universe).

Matthew 6:5-15 THE LORD'S PRAYER: When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray he gave them this prayer as a model. Look at the kinds of things Jesus said should be our prayer concerns. Praying for God's will to be done... When we learn to ask for God's will to be done, our perception, understanding, use, and expectations of prayer change and mature.

REFLECTION: In what ways has God given you the good things that give you life and that make life good? What has happened in your life that was hard at the time, but that you saw was good later?

COVENANT: Ask children to commit to mature prayers rather than “wishing” prayers.

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DAY 5: GROWING IN PRAYER (How prayer can change us)

OBJECTIVE: To help your child(ren) understand that prayer changes their lives.

FOCUS EVENT: Note a spot on your neighborhood where a part of nature has had to adapt (change) to continue to grow.

Examples: A tree growing out from under an overhanging boulder, a tree growing out from under another tree that has fallen on it. A stream that flows around an obstacle it can't wash away.

EXPRESSION: Look around the area and identify things which would never have to change because of a confrontation with another element of the environment, and things that, in any confrontation, would probably always have to change. (They may see boulders or a lake or a mountain as immune to change; and flowers or butterflies as fragile victims of change.)

EXPLANATION: Describe the nature and the role of change in life as you discover it in nature. (In reality everything changes: the boulder may not be changed by the seedling and force it to adapt, but the boulder may be changed by water over the span of geologic time.)

BIBLE:

TELL: People often pray to ask God to change things: to make someone healthy, to fix a broken relationship, to keep someone from dying, to make the world a peaceful place, and so on. In teaching the disciples to pray, Jesus invites us to know ourselves as the beloved children of a loving God who wants good and life-giving things for us. When we place our lives with our concerns, worries, needs, and hopes before God in prayer we often find that what changes or needs to be changed is us. The challenge and excitement of that change gives meaning to our lives.

READ AND DISCUSS:

Matthew 26:36-46 Jesus' Garden prayer...Let this cup pass...

What is happening in this passage?

What did Jesus pray about?

What do you think Jesus means when he says "My father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done"?

How is Jesus changed through this prayer?

How is Jesus' prayer answered?

How does this relate to us? There is no growth without change. We cannot grow in our relationship with God unless we are open to the possibility of change. This is the way Jesus prayed. This is what it means to open to God's will. This is what it means to pray in Jesus' name.

REFLECTION:

Someone once said that when it comes to prayer: "Don't ask for tasks equal to your strength; ask for strength equal to your tasks." What do you think about this idea?

Most of us would rather pray that God change our situation rather than pray for God to change us.

How do you feel about changing or growing to meet difficult challenges? Why? Is there any way that God is pushing you to grow through a situation now? What is your prayer? What will you do?

COVENANT: Pray that God's will be done in your life. Pray that God will help you grow into whatever God desires your life to be. Like Jesus, be open to whatever God's will is for you.

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DAY 6: I CAN BE AN ANSWER TO PRAYER (How prayer leads to action)

OBJECTIVE: To help kids see that prayer needs to be connected to action and by their actions people can be an answer to prayer.

FOCUS EVENT: Place some litter near a trash can before starting. Now with your kids, begin to talk to the garbage and encourage it to hop by itself into the trash can. Enlist the help of your kids...try yelling, demanding, AND EVENTUALLY PRAYING...anything to convince the garbage to leap into the can on its own. THEN... after all other efforts are exhausted someone put the garbage into the can.

YOU MAY substitute the doing of any chore for the litter problem - sweeping the floor, cleaning a table, turning off the morning alarm clock. You get the picture!

ASK: Did the garbage get into the can because we prayed or because someone threw it in?

EXPRESSION: Ask your child(ren) to draw a picture of God's hands.

EXPLANATION: Have them explain their picture.

COMMUNITY STORY:

TELL: A story is told about a man who was floating down a flooded river on the roof of his house. He was praying for God to save him. As he floated along, someone in a boat came by and asked him if he wanted a ride to safety. The man said, "No, God will save me." Later someone on a tree branch overhanging the river threw the man a rope and offered to pull him to safety. The man said, "No, God will save me." Still later, a helicopter flew overhead and dropped a line and voice told him to tie on. The man said, "No, God will save me." Then the house hit a rock, broke apart and the man drowned. When he got to heaven, he asked God why he didn't answer his prayer and save him. God said, "I sent you a boat, I sent you a rope, and I sent you a helicopter! I tried three times!"

Prayer is powerful and miracles do happen because of prayer, but sometimes we are God's hands and we are called to use our gifts, talents, and abilities in action to be part of the answer to our own or other's prayers.

Martin Luther said, "Work as if prayer does no good and pray as if work does nothing." Prayer is more than simply a conversation with God. It is the way in which we respond to God's love through action that makes this relationship a complete one.

God invites us to pray. God also invites and expects us to make ourselves available to him to be a part of the answer to prayer. When we combine prayers and our own efforts, God can do great things through us.

Jesus followed prayer with action and the Bible is full of examples in which a person using prayer accompanies it with action.

READ AND DISCUSS:

Micah 6:8 Honor God by doing acts of justice

John 14:12 We will do even greater things than Jesus; with our God-inspired actions we will change the world!

REFLECTION: Where in your life have prayer and action together made a difference? Has someone else been an answer for you? When have you been the answer to prayer for someone else? How can you be an answer to someone's prayer?

COVENANT: Commit to doing some action that will be the answer to someone else's prayer.