



Encountering God: The Heart of Prayer

KNOWN: EXPERIENCING GOD IN DAILY PRAYER
SESSION 01



Overview:

From the Rosary to the Mass itself, the topics related to prayer are innumerable. But the purpose of this study is singular: To help young people form the habit of daily, personal prayer. This first session will open the subject of the importance of this habit of prayer and discuss common misgivings a young person might have about prayer.

A Note About our Middle School Guides for Known:

This series is recommended for 7th and 8th grade students. It is probably not developmentally appropriate for younger than 7th grade students. While there is nuance in these guides, the Middle School Guides have less variation from the High School Guides than other series. This is intentional. Simply by the experiential nature of this series, it is already concrete which aligns with middle schoolers' concrete thinking.

This session has approximately 12 minutes of video segments.

Theme Scripture:

JOHN 4:7-10

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." His disciples had gone to town to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, "How can you, a Jew, ask me for a drink?" (For Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.



A Key to Using this Guide:

ANYTHING IN ITALICS: Important information for leaders. Not necessary to share with the group.

REGULAR FONT: To be shared aloud with the group.

LEADER TIPS: Check out the “Leader Tip” boxes in the margins for helpful hints.

User Agreement

NET Ministries gladly grants permission to parishes, schools, and other licensees to tailor YDisciple resources to fit their unique leadership requirements, locale, and format preferences, including duplication and electronic transfer to multiple leaders in the same subscribing entity. However, no changes may be made to the substantive content of the material.

These resources are intended to be downloaded, printed for use, and duplicated by the subscribing entity only, and may not be electronically transferred or duplicated to a non-subscribing entity. Any unauthorized reproduction of this material or incorporation into a new work is a direct violation of US copyright laws. YDisciple and the YDisciple logo are trademarks of NET Ministries, Inc.

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the New American Bible may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

Writers: Annie Grandell; Ali Hoffman; Dan Driver | Theological/Catechetical Advisors: Fr. Brian Park; Mark Berchem, MTS, MSW; David Rinaldi, MTS | Youth Ministry Advisors: Manuel Huerta; Jenny Boran; Bobby Moren; Vianney Nguyen; Jared Cunio; Sarah Rae LaValla; Elie Laville; Kiersten Salazar; Allie DeBolt

Adapted for Middle School by Jennifer Boran.

Connect

1. Check-In

It is always good to check-in and ask, "How was your week?" demonstrating that you care about what is going on beyond your small group. You can ask generally or have them share "Highs and Lows." (High - best part of your week; Low - worst part)

2. Accountability

In the last session of The Invitation, your group was introduced to the concept of "The 5 S's of Accountability." These are 5 things that a disciple should be striving toward. Check-in each time you meet to see how everyone is progressing.

The 5 S's of Accountability: Service, Praying with Scripture, Sacraments, Overcoming Sin, Sharing Jesus with Others

3. Optional Activity

VIRAL!

Ask your Small Group to find and share their favorite viral video on their phones, or show you the most popular video of their favorite influencer. Before they show you the video, ask them to cover up the number of views the video has with their finger. After seeing the video, you and the group have to guess how many views you think that video has, the person who is closest to the amount of views without going over the correct amount of views gets a point. (Make sure to remind your group, if you think it's necessary, to keep it appropriate, and check that the video is not too long, 2 minutes is a good time limit.)

Leader Tip

Activities in these guides are always optional. Know your group and tailor your activities to suit their needs and interests.

Leader Tip

Some middle schoolers may not have smart-phones. Use one device to avoid a person being singled out.

Discuss

Watch Video Segment #1

Share with your group: In this first segment, we will be introduced to our first presenter, Ali Hoffman, who might be familiar to you since she and her dad made some viral lip-sync videos on YouTube that have received millions of views.

- WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD 'PRAYER' WHAT IS THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND FOR YOU?
- WHAT ELSE STOOD OUT TO YOU IN ALI'S STORY?
- SHE DRAWS A CONNECTION BETWEEN HER RELATIONSHIP WITH HER DAD, GOD THE FATHER, AND PRAYER. IN WHAT WAYS IS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD LIKE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A CHILD AND A FATHER?
- ALL OF OUR HUMAN FATHERS, EVEN THE BEST ONES, ARE IMPERFECT SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY ARE HUMAN. DO YOU THINK THAT OUR EXPERIENCE OF OUR HUMAN FATHERS IMPACTS OUR VIEW OF GOD THE FATHER? HOW SO?

Leader Tip

This might be a sensitive topic for your students if they have a strained or even non-existent relationship with their father. Allow them to speak freely, but do not force them to share if they are uncomfortable. If you see someone is struggling, follow up with them after the group time.

Watch Video Segment #2

- WHAT IS ONE THING THAT STOOD OUT TO YOU IN THAT CLIP?

Now open your Bibles to John 4.

Before you read the passage, give them the following context:

- **This passage takes place in Samaria.** *The people of Samaria, known as Samaritans, had once been Jewish like the people in Jerusalem and like Jesus himself, but had over the years adopted many religious practices of other pagan religions around them. They were considered by the Jews in Jerusalem to be “religious half-breeds.” Because of this, there was deep hatred between the Jews and Samaritans.*
- *In Jesus’ time, it would be highly irregular for a Jewish man to speak directly to a woman he did not know.*
- *Remember that this takes place in the Middle East, which is a very hot, arid climate. Most women would go to the well in the morning before it was too hot and carrying back a large water jug would be laborious.*

Read John 4:4-29


Invite your students to read along in their own Bibles and underline any words or phrases that stand out to them.

There will be time in a later session to come back to this passage and reflect further. For the purposes of this session, we want to start becoming familiar with the story itself and the context. These questions may seem simplistic, but they are intended to help students look more closely at the scriptures.

- **THIS STORY HAS A LOT OF VERY SPECIFIC DETAILS IN IT. WHAT WAS ONE INTERESTING DETAIL THAT YOU NOTICED?**
- **WHY DID JESUS GO TO THE WELL?** *He had to pass through Samaria. He was resting while the disciples were getting food.*
- **WHY WAS THE WOMAN AT THE WELL?** *To draw water. People didn’t have indoor plumbing back then. They needed to go to a central place like this well, fill their jugs with water for the day, and carry it home!*

Leader Tip

This series depends a lot on reading directly from scripture.. Make sure they have Bibles and bring them every week.

- 
- **WHY DID SHE GO AT NOON?** *Remember the notes about the context. No one else would be there at noon. She was avoiding people.*
 - **WHO INITIATES CONVERSATION? JESUS OR THE WOMAN?** *Jesus.*
 - **FROM HER CONVERSATION, WHAT CAN YOU TELL ABOUT WHAT KIND OF PERSON SHE WAS?** *She had a reputation. It is also clear she is carrying around shame herself.*
 - **WHAT DOES JESUS ASK HER FOR?** *A drink of water. It is easy to forget that Jesus was a real person. He was God, yes, but also fully human. He had needs like thirst and hunger.*
 - **HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE WOMAN'S RESPONSE?**
 - **HOW DOES JESUS TURN THE TABLES ON HER IN VERSE 10?** *He tells her that she would ask him for a drink if she knew who he was.*
 - **WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE "LIVING WATER" TO WHICH HE REFERS?**
 - **WHAT DID THE WOMAN DO WHEN SHE REALIZED WHO JESUS REALLY IS?** *She goes back to the town, where she is unwelcome, and tells everyone about him.*

Watch Video Segment #3

- **WHAT STOOD OUT TO YOU IN THAT CLIP?**

Ali shares the following quote from the Catechism that breaks open the passage we just read from the Gospel of John:

"If you knew the gift of God!" The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him." (CCC 2560)

- **IF GOD IS PERFECT AND THEREFORE DOESN'T NEED ANYTHING, WHY DO YOU THINK HE "THIRSTS" FOR MY PRAYER?**

Jesus is talking about so much more than physical thirst. Blaise Pascal, a French philosopher, once said: "There is a God-shaped [void] in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus."

- **WHAT WAS THE WOMAN AT THE WELL TRYING TO FILL HER "GOD-SHAPED [VOID]" WITH?**
- **WHAT ARE SOME COMMON THINGS THAT PEOPLE TODAY TRY TO SATISFY THEMSELVES WITH?**
- **DO YOU THINK IT IS POSSIBLE FOR GOD TO TRULY SATISFY US? WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?**

Ali says, "prayer is so much more than a Christmas list" and that "prayer is the relationship" with God.


- **HOW DOES THIS CHALLENGE WHAT MOST PEOPLE THINK ABOUT PRAYER?**
- **PRAYER IS ULTIMATELY ABOUT MOVING BEYOND KNOWING ABOUT GOD TO KNOWING HIM. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "KNOWING ABOUT SOMEONE" AND "KNOWING SOMEONE"?**
- **WHO IS SOMEONE IN YOUR LIFE WITH WHOM YOU CAN BE VULNERABLE? WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE VULNERABLE WITH SOMEONE?**
- **DO YOU FIND IT EASY OR DIFFICULT TO BE VULNERABLE WITH GOD?**
- **WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE OF PRAYER?**
- **IF YOU PRAY, WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE? (FREQUENCY, TYPES, ETC.)**

Leader Tip

If they struggle to answer, they may not understand what you mean by "vulnerability". Give them synonyms like: open, transparent, etc.

Leader Tip

They may be embarrassed to admit to you that they don't pray at all. Remind them that discipleship is about GROWING in our relationship with God. We don't expect them to already have this habit down and that is the purpose of this study.

- 
- IN THIS SERIES, WE ARE GOING TO BE FOCUSING ON BUILDING A HABIT OF DAILY, PERSONAL PRAYER. DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO DOES THIS? WHAT DO THEY DO IN THEIR DAILY PRAYER TIME? HOW DOES IT AFFECT THEM? DO YOU NOTICE ANYTHING DIFFERENT ABOUT THEM?

Commit

Each meeting, we commit to applying what we discuss to our lives. This week, we are not asking you to start praying for an hour every day. Rather, we want to simply grow in our desire to pray. This week, pray every day: **GOD, GIVE ME THE DESIRE TO PRAY.**

Follow-up Checklist

- Send the Parent Sheet.
- Remind them to bring a Bible to every meeting.
- Consider sending them a reminder between sessions of the COMMIT.
- Did you know we have a Prayer Journal designed to go with this series? They aren't required but will greatly benefit your students. Check them out at YDisciple.shop.
- Pray! As you are helping them build a habit of prayer, take time to deepen your own prayer life.