

Pray Persistently and Humbly

LUKE 18:1-14

2



GOAL

Youth understand that God listens to and responds to their prayers.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

God, draw me close to you—your love, your presence, your compassion, and your care. In all things, may I turn to you. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Jesus calls us to pray and not lose heart, even when it feels like our prayers go unanswered. Prayer calls for persistence, because the problems may not be solved in our lifetimes; and humility in approaching God, because situations require more than we can give, and we must call upon God. We are called to pray to God in all things, even when we have doubts, have a hard time forming words, are ashamed, or feel defeated when life feels too big. Throughout the Christian tradition, people have said, sung, and embodied laments in their doubts and struggles. These tools help us practice praying even when we wonder if God hears or heeds our prayers.

THE BIBLE STORY

In Luke 18:1–14, Jesus offers two parables with complementary lessons on faithful followers approaching God in prayer: persistently and humbly. In Luke 18:1–8, a woman repeatedly and relentlessly approaches a judge to request support and justice. While the judge grants her request only out of annoyance, Jesus reminds us that a just God actively listens and responds to our prayers.

Luke 18:9–14 features a devout religious man and a tax collector who is known to be greedy and cheat others. When the religious man approaches God, he praises God that he is better than other people. He describes the extravagant good that he does. The tax collector, however, approaches God with humility and simply requests God's mercy.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Many people, including youth, can feel frustrated or doubtful when they do not immediately see God responding to prayer requests. Youth often crave immediate satisfaction and thrive with clear boundaries and results. In being assured that God is always listening to us and responds on our behalf in good, albeit mysterious ways, youth will feel encouraged to persist in praying.

SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Praying Practices” (p. 12): Obtain the *Pray* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 2 Set).
- “Collaborative Playlist” (p. 15): Use a smartphone music app to create a playlist of songs to inspire persistent and humble prayer. Select a few songs to include.
- “One Thing Learned” (p. 15): Display “One Thing Learned” newsprint from session 1 (p. 9).

GETTING STARTED

☐ Newsprint and markers

PRACTICING

C

Greet youth as they arrive. Invite them to list on newsprint activities they engage in that include regular, ongoing practice.

Introduce the session theme, “Pray Persistently and Humbly.” Explain that, as with learning any new skill, prayer also takes practice and persistence.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

PRAYING PSALM 136

QC

Welcome youth with your usual opening activities. Invite participants to join you in the following litany with their response: “God’s steadfast love endures forever.”

Give thanks to God, for God is good.

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Who answers the cries of the wronged—

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Who showers us with mercy—

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Who lifts up the humble—

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Give thanks to the God of heaven and earth:

God’s steadfast love endures forever.

☐ Pray infographic poster (Year 2 Set)

PRAYING PRACTICES

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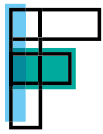
Display the *Pray* infographic poster. Invite youth to notice the different words and actions associated with prayer. Have them call out the words that they experience with prayer. Encourage volunteers to describe their prayer practices or experiences.

DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES

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Use these questions to focus young people’s understanding of key terms for this session.

- ➔ What is *persistence*? Give examples of when you have shown or needed persistence.
- ➔ What is *humility*? Give examples of when you have shown or needed humility.
- ➔ How might *persistence* and *humility* apply to praying?



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

ENACTING THE PARABLES

D AM

☐ Bibles

Form two groups. Assign one group Luke 18:1–8, and the other Luke 18:9–14. Have groups read their assigned passage and develop a skit to enact the narrative. Encourage them to be creative in their presentation of the passage. Once completed, have the groups present their skits. Select from these questions for discussion.

- ➔ In the skits, how was persistence displayed? What was the effect of the person's persistence?
- ➔ How was humility displayed? What was the effect of the person's humility?
- ➔ What was Jesus teaching in these two parables?
- ➔ How might Jesus' teaching apply to your practice of prayer?

IMAGINING THE PARABLES

C

☐ Bibles

Form two groups. Assign one group Luke 18:1–8, and the other Luke 18:9–14. Have groups read their assigned passage. Encourage each youth to select one character in their parable and imagine themselves as that character. Think about what that character might pray for. Have youth respond to these statements as they apply:

- If I were the widow in this story, I would pray for justice for . . .
- If I were the judge in this story, I would seek justice for the widow by . . .
- If I were the tax collector in this story, I would confess . . .
- If I were the scribe in this story, I would brag about my . . .

Gather the groups and invite volunteers to summarize what their characters would pray about/for. Discuss the effect of persistence and humility in our praying.

PSALM 42

AT

- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 1
☐ Colored pencils

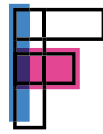
Distribute copies of Resource Page 1. Have youth select two different colored pencils. Invite volunteers to read aloud Psalm 42 stanza by stanza.

Have youth work independently to reread Psalm 42. They may use one color to mark the lines in the psalm representing persistence (like the widow from Luke 18:1–8). Use another color to mark lines when the psalm represents the humility of the tax collector in Luke 18:9–14.

Gather the group and discuss words from the psalm that indicate humility and persistence. Discuss how these words could help them when praying.



Teaching Tip: If your group is composed mostly of younger youth, complete this activity as a group.



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

☐ Internet-connected device

MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA

T C

Show the YouTube video “Mother Teresa—20th Century Humanitarian—Biography” (bit.ly/FMMotherTBio, 2:52). Invite participants to talk about their impressions of the video and of Mother Teresa’s life.

Continue discussion with these questions:

- ➔ What actions shown in Mother Teresa’s life demonstrate persistence and humility?
- ➔ What effects did her persistence and humility have for others?
- ➔ In what ways could Mother Teresa’s life be called a prayer?

☐ Internet-connected device

KYRIE ELEISON

T M

Explain that *Kyrie Eleison*, *Christe Eleison* is a Greek chant meaning “Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.” The ancient Christian church used these phrases as common responses voiced by worshipers in the midst of long prayers. Chants and prayers repeated over and over become engraved in our hearts and minds, calling to God in times of need or hope.

Compare two contemporary versions of this worshipful chant. Show “Kyrie Eleison” (bit.ly/FMKyrieE, 1:06). Then show a *Taizé* version, “Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison” (bit.ly/FMKyrieChriste, 1:59). Invite participants to talk about their impressions of the two versions. If they have a preferred version, discuss what appeals to them about it. Replay the young people’s preferred version and encourage them to learn it for their personal prayer.

☐ Copies of Resource Page 2

LAMENT PRAYERS

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Explain that *lament* is a form of prayer found in Scripture that brings together humility and persistence. Lament can express the pain of an individual person or an entire community. Distribute copies of Resource Page 2. Review the typical structure of a lament: Invocation, Complaint, Plea for Help, Affirmation, Praise. Use the Resource Page to show youth how the lament format plays out in Psalm 13. Use the questions provided for group discussion.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

☐ Internet-connected device

☐ Copies of Resource Page 3

☐ Drawing supplies

COLORING ANYWAY

A AT

Use an internet-connected device to locate Kent M. Keith’s poem, “The Paradoxical Commandments” (bit.ly/FMAnyway). Explain that a quotation found on the wall of Mother Teresa’s home for homeless children in Calcutta mimics Keith’s poem. Invite two volunteers to alternate reading aloud the black and red text of the poem. Discuss the contrast between the red and black lines. Wonder together which lines of the poem they find most powerful. What does it mean to do something *anyway*?

Distribute copies of Resource Page 3. Invite youth to reflect on when they might need to hear these words. Encourage them to write sentences on the horizontal lines to go along with (or to contrast) the words, creating

their own *anyway* poem. Use drawing supplies to color the bubble letters and decorate the page.

BREATH PRAYER

QC

Explain that a breath prayer uses a short phrase to focus on when praying. This can be used when it is difficult to form words or when a person wants a simple prayer to repeat meditatively. One phrase is repeated when one breathes in and another when one breathes out. The phrases are repeated with each breath. Share the breath prayer examples from the sidebar, and invite youth to select one.

Have youth assume a comfortable prayer position. Tell them to breathe in through their nose and out through their mouth as they repeat and reflect on the short phrases they selected. Encourage youth to notice how their breath moves throughout their body as they pray. Allow youth to practice for one minute before concluding the prayer. Discuss together:

- What was that prayer like for you?
- When can you see yourself praying in a similar way?
- What additional phrases might you use?



Breath prayer examples:

- “Holy God (*breathe in*),” “Have mercy (*breathe out*).”
- “Creator God (*breathe in*),” “You made all things good (*breathe out*).”
- “Humble and Gentle One (*breathe in*),” “Give rest for my soul (*breathe out*).”
- “Be still (*breathe in*),” “And know God’s presence (*breathe out*).”

COLLABORATIVE PLAYLIST

M T X

Explain that listening to and creating music can be a practice of prayer. Share the link to the collaborative playlist you prepared. Use an internet-connected device to play brief clips of the music. Invite youth to think about songs that inspire them to pray. List these on newsprint. If youth have access to personal internet-connected devices, allow them to add songs to the collaborative playlist, creating a composite of the prayer music for youth to listen to anywhere and everywhere.

- ☐ Personal internet-connected devices
- ☐ Newsprint and markers



You can share the link by email or on social media so people who were not able to attend this session can still participate.



FOLLOWING JESUS

ONE THING LEARNED

Write “Pray Persistently and Humbly” down the right side of the newsprint. Invite youth to write what they learned about praying persistently and humbly. Save the newsprint for future sessions.

CT

- ☐ “One Thing Learned” newsprint from session 1 (p. 9)
- ☐ Markers

CLOSING PRAYER

QC

Invite youth to join in praying the following litany by repeating “we pray” at the end of each line.

O God, to you /
When times are hard /
When we are full of joy /
When others are on our mind /
We seek a relationship with you, and so /
In all things /
Amen.

Psalm 42 NRSVue

¹As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.

²My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

When shall I come and behold
the face of God?

³My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,
“Where is your God?”

⁴These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng
and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall again praise him,
⁶my help and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.

⁷Deep calls to deep
at the thunder of your torrents;
all your waves and your billows
have gone over me.

⁸By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

⁹I say to God, my rock,
“Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because the enemy oppresses me?”

¹⁰As with a deadly wound in my body,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually,
“Where is your God?”

¹¹Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

Praying Laments

Lament is a form of prayer that brings together humility and persistence. Throughout Scripture, laments express the pain of an individual person or an entire community.

Laments follow a particular structure: Invocation, Complaint, Plea for Help, Affirmation, Praise. Prayers of lament allow the person praying to express emotions, complaints, and pleas for God's help while also embracing the belief that God will come through, even in the most difficult circumstances.

- 1. Invocation:** Words addressing God, often framed as “crying out” to God or requesting (even demanding!) God's presence.
- 2. Complaint:** A description of what is going wrong. (Yes, complaining is allowed in prayer.)
- 3. Plea for Help:** A request for God's help.
- 4. Affirmation:** The prayer begins to turn away from the situation at hand and toward the goodness of God. The lament affirms that God will surely come through with salvation and deliverance.
- 5. Praise:** Like many forms of prayer, laments typically end in a statement of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Lament offers the opportunity to practice persistence. Like the widow, we can pray in lament for deliverance and justice, making our complaint known to God. Lamenting also keeps us humble: the turn toward affirmation and praise acknowledges that God is above all things (including us) and is the source of our salvation.

See how this format plays out in Psalm 13:

Invocation:

How long, O LORD?

Complaint:

Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Plea for Help:

Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed”;
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

Affirmation:

But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

Praise:

I will sing to the LORD
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

DISCUSS:

- ➡ Do you think Psalm 13 presents the words of an individual or of a group of people? Why?
- ➡ Where do you see persistence in the words of Psalm 13?
- ➡ What is the psalmist lamenting?
- ➡ What words indicate humility?
- ➡ How do you know that the psalmist believes that God listens and will respond?

Forgive anyway.

Be kind anyway.

Be honest anyway.

Create anyway.

Be happy anyway.

Do good anyway.

Help others anyway.

Give your best anyway.