

Pray with Your Whole Self 4

2 SAMUEL 6:12–15; 1 KINGS 19:3–6



GOAL

Youth experience prayer practices filled with expression and embodiment.

- 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

O God, may the meditation of my heart and the actions of my hands and feet be offerings to you. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Creative prayer encompasses emotions and embodiment. Praying with our whole body and all of our emotions allows people with different bodies and different experiences of emotions to be included. We are invited to mourn, celebrate, and lament; to dance, kneel, and shout. Perhaps we can think of praying like drawing. The materials are simple (like pencil and paper), yet those who are considered masters of the art form constantly learn and try new and fascinating methods to express themselves and to connect with God in deep and meaningful ways.

THE BIBLE STORY

Two Bible stories present the range of emotion and embodiment of prayer. In 1 Kings 19:3–6, Elijah wrestles with depressive thoughts while navigating a tough situation: Queen Jezebel has threatened his life. He prays to God and requests that God end his life. God sends an angel who urges Elijah to care for his body. Elijah prays during one of his lowest lows; God responds with instructions for physical self-care.

In 2 Samuel 6:12–15, King David uses his whole body to express gratitude and praise to God. After hearing that the Ark of the Covenant blessed the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite, David brings the Ark back to Jerusalem. When it arrives, David unashamedly rejoices in prayer, dance, and song, showing exuberant thanks for God's blessings.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Young people are developing individuality and seeking ways to express interests and voices. Youth connect to praying with their whole selves as authentic sharing who they are with God. When they learn that they can be expressive and real in prayer, they develop a closer relationship with God.

Youth may know someone experiencing anxiety, depression, or other mental illness, or they may experience a mental ailment themselves. Be prepared to appropriately support youth with compassion and resources.

SESSION PREPARATION

- “Praying Emotions” (p. 28): Obtain the *Pray* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 2 Set).
- Depending on the options you choose:
- “Christian Icons” (p. 30): Print “A Mother’s Love Holds the World” icon from the Vanderbilt Digital Library (bit.ly/FMMaryIcon).
- “Prayer Collage” (p. 31): Obtain magazines and recommended supplies.
- “One Thing Learned” (p. 31): Display “One Thing Learned” newsprint from session 3 (p. 23).

GETTING STARTED

☐ Pray infographic poster (Year 2 Set)

PRAYING EMOTIONS

C CT AT

Display the *Pray* infographic poster. Invite youth to notice emotions that can be expressed through different prayer practices included on the infographic poster. Challenge them to name various ways that emotions can be expressed in prayer, from quiet meditation to singing or dancing.

Gather youth and invite them to summarize highlights from the previous sessions: Pray Honestly, Pray Persistently and Humbly, and Pray with and for Others.



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.

EMBODIED PRAYER

AM

Lead young people in prayer that involves both their voices and their bodies. Begin by inviting the youth to inhale deeply through their nose and exhale through their mouth. Repeat this intentional breathing throughout this activity.

Model the physical movement as you say aloud the words of the prayer. Make simple adjustments for people with mobility challenges. Encourage the youth to follow you. Repeat the embodied prayer at least three times.

Stand tall with hands resting in prayer position in front of chest and feet firmly planted.

Pray: I know.

(Extend arms above head and reach and look up.)

Pray: I know you call me to participate in your creation.

(Bend over to touch toes.)

Pray: I know sometimes I mess up, and I need grace.

(Keep hands on toes and bend knees into squatting position.)

Pray: I know I am loved for who I am.

(Stand and repeat.)

Discuss what youth noticed about using their body as they moved through the prayer. In what ways did the movements and the words support the prayer?

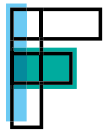
PRAYING A HYMN

M T X

☐ Internet-connected device

Before showing the video, invite youth to pay attention to their feelings, emotions, and movement in response to the lyrics and music. Show the YouTube video “What a Friend We Have in Jesus (Lyric Video)—Celtic Worship Ft. Steph Macleod” (bit.ly/FMFriendJesus, 4:43).

Invite youth to talk about what stood out for them in the video. Discuss the feelings that they noticed in response to the lyrics, the music, and the visual images. Ask if anyone felt like moving or praying during the video. How is viewing the video an opportunity to pray?



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

EMOTIONS AND ACTIONS

C CT

☐ Bibles

Form two groups. Have one group read 1 Kings 19:3–6 and the other read 2 Samuel 6:12–15. Encourage each group to:

- Identify the feelings of the main character.
- Name adjectives about the prayer from the Scripture passage.
- Prepare a summary of the passage.

Gather the groups. Have each small group summarize their passage and respond to the following prompts:

- ➡ What feelings were present in the passage you read?
- ➡ How was prayer described in the passage?
- ➡ What do these two passages show about the range of emotions and actions that can accompany prayer?

SHARING PRAYER STORIES

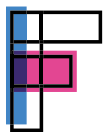
C AT

☐ Bibles

Invite volunteers to read 1 Kings 19:3–6 and 2 Samuel 6:12–15 while youth follow along in their Bibles. Invite each person to think of a time when they prayed to God in ways similar to either Elijah or David.

Form pairs. Have youth take turns talking about their example of praying like Elijah or David. Discuss within the pairs what was surprising about their prayer. Also discuss how or if they experienced God’s response to their prayer.

Gather the group and discuss whether God was pleased with their prayer and why they think this. Recall together what they have learned in this study about God’s desire for our praying.



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP DANCES

AM T

☐ Internet-connected device
☐ Colorful scarves, fabric, or paper streamers (optional)

Explain that in recent years, contemporary dance has become an increasingly common practice of worship in Norwegian Christian culture. Some dances have specific steps and movement. Others display free expression and movement.

Show the YouTube video “Dreamer—Spontaneous Worship Dance—Finnøy, Norway” (bit.ly/FMDreamDance, 4:29). You may provide colorful scarves, fabric, or paper streamers for youth to dance and move (optional).

Invite youth to talk about what stood out for them in the video. Discuss what they think prayer looks like and if there is a right or wrong way to pray.

- ☐ Internet-connected device
- ☐ Copies of Resource Page 1



Teaching Option: To fully embody the labyrinth experience, you may make a floor labyrinth before the session, or invite youth to help you make one as part of the session activity. See “How to Make a Quick and Easy Labyrinth! in 3 Minutes!!” (bit.ly/FMFloorLab, 4:46).

- ☐ Copy of “A Mother’s Love Holds the World” icon (bit.ly/FMMaryIcon)



Teaching Tip: This walk can be done as a whole group, in pairs, or in smaller groups.

LABYRINTH



Explain that a labyrinth is similar to a maze, except a person cannot get lost in a labyrinth. One path takes the traveler in to the center and back out. These prayer paths have been found in cultures across the globe for thousands of years. Show the YouTube video “Labyrinth History & Walking” (bit.ly/FMLabHistory, 1:40). Ask the youth why people might walk a labyrinth as a prayer practice.

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1. Play quiet music. Invite youth to take a deep breath and release all thoughts from their mind. Use their fingers to trace the path of the labyrinth. As they trace, they may pray or simply let their fingers follow the path without thought or intention.

When it appears that youth have completed their finger labyrinth, gather the group and invite their reflections on the labyrinth tracing experience.

CHRISTIAN ICONS



Explain that the word *icon* comes from a Greek word that means image or resemblance. It is not simply a holy picture displaying a physical or photographic reality. An icon seeks to portray a spiritual reality. Many Christian traditions use icons in their worship practices.

Display “A Mother’s Love Holds the World” icon from the Vanderbilt Digital Library (bit.ly/FMMaryIcon). Allow youth 30 seconds to contemplate the image. Ask youth what emotions arise for them as they look at the image. Have them name what they notice depicted in the image. Encourage youth to describe the meaning or “spiritual reality” they believe the image depicts.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

PRAYER WALK



Lead the youth in a walk around the church building, either inside or outside. As you walk, pause periodically and pray for the different people and things you see and hear.

After five minutes, return to your learning space. Invite youth to give a short summary of their prayer walk. Compare the various details and prayers people encountered.

WATERFALL PRAYER



Engage youth in a Waterfall Prayer, which is described briefly in the foundational essay that begins on page 33. Explain that each person contributes a personal, oral prayer. Their voices will ebb and flow together like a waterfall. Encourage youth to not worry about the words they say but to feel confident to offer a stream-of-consciousness conversation with God.

Have youth spread out in the gathering space. Explain that, during the prayer, you will raise and lower your hands to prompt youth to raise or lower their voice volume. As they pray, encourage them to watch for your prompts and listen to the ebb and flow of sound. Invite youth to begin praying out loud. Allow two minutes of prayer time.

Gather the youth and discuss what they noticed during the Waterfall Prayer. Invite them to comment on praying out loud, on praying and listening and watching concurrently, and on praying their own prayers in the presence of others.

PRAYER COLLAGE



Distribute card-stock paper and make available magazines, scissors, and glue sticks. Invite youth to work quietly to make a collage as a prayer. Explain that both the process and the final product are prayers. Encourage them to look through magazines and cut out words, pictures, colors, or messages to include in their prayer.

Have youth work on their collages for seven minutes. If time allows, invite volunteers to display and discuss their prayer collages. Youth may use ziplock plastic bags to take home pieces they cut from magazines to complete their collages.

- ☐ Magazines
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Card-stock paper
- ☐ Glue sticks
- ☐ Gallon-size ziplock plastic bags



FOLLOWING JESUS

ONE THING LEARNED



Write “Pray with Your Whole Self” across the bottom of the “One Thing Learned” newsprint. Invite youth to write what they learned about praying with their full selves.

To wrap up this practice, invite youth to reflect on the four aspects of prayer presented in this unit. Invite their responses to this question: What do you think is the most important thing to know about praying?

- ☐ “One Thing Learned” newsprint from session 3 (p. 23)
- ☐ Markers

CLOSING PRAYER



Demonstrate the following prayer and invite youth to join you. Begin by folding hands in a prayer position.

O God, to you we pray.
 Honestly (*place hands over heart*)
 we pray. (*fold hands in prayer position*)
 Persistently (*wave arms over head*)
 and humbly (*cover head with arms*)
 we pray. (*fold hands in prayer position*)
 With and for others (*motion to those in the room*)
 we pray. (*fold hands in prayer position*)
 With our whole selves (*touch head, shoulders, knees, then toes*)
 we pray (*fold hands in prayer position*) to you, O God.
 Amen.



Teaching Tip: If time permits, invite youth to design motions for each part of the prayer.

Finger Labyrinth

