



Prayer: 4-Week Series

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PRAYER: 4-WEEK SERIES OVERVIEW

Lesson 1: The Power of Prayer

Bible: James 5:14-16

Description: Most of the time, when we think about prayer, we think of it as asking God for something, or asking Him to do something. Really, though, prayer is just talking to God. Prayer isn't powerful because of who is praying; prayer is powerful because of who is being prayed to. Being able to talk to God is something that is incredibly powerful.

Lesson 2: Learning to Pray

Bible: Matthew 6:9-13

Description: Prayer is all about talking to God. There isn't a set of rules you have to follow. God isn't sitting up in heaven making sure you don't mess up your prayer; He just wants to hear from you! In fact, Jesus actually has already taught us how we can talk to God.

Lesson 3: Unanswered Prayers

Bible: Proverbs 3:5-6

Description: It can be frustrating when we feel like our prayers are not answered the way we want them to be. However, God sees the big picture and knows what's best for us. He answers our prayers exactly the way they should be answered. Even if we don't understand it at the time, we can trust His answers because we trust Him.

Lesson 4: Recognizing God's Voice

Bible: John 10:27

Description: We can all agree that we want to hear from God, but how exactly does that happen? It can be difficult to hear and recognize God's voice when we have so many other "voices" speaking into our lives, so it's important to make sure we put ourselves in a position to know God's voice.

Prayer

Lesson 1: The Power of Prayer

Bible: James 5:14-16

Description: Most of the time, when we think about prayer, we think of it as asking God for something, or asking Him to do something. Really, though, prayer is just talking to God. Prayer isn't powerful because of who is praying; prayer is powerful because of who is being prayed to. Being able to talk to God is something that is incredibly powerful.

Supplies

- A jumbo puzzle (like a toddler puzzle with fewer, large pieces)
- A jump rope
- A hula-hoop
- Ice
- Two pieces of paper with "advantages" written on them. One that says, "You can skip the puzzle" and one that says, "You don't have to melt the ice." If you have more than two teams playing, make more advantages, such as, "You can pass the hula-hoop section."

Game: An Unfair Advantage

Divide the group into two (or more, if you have a big group) teams. Explain that this game is to see which team can work together the fastest. Each team will select someone to jump rope, someone to hula-hoop, someone to melt ice, and someone to put a puzzle together.

Tell the teams that they must complete the tasks in the following order while you time them:

1. Jump rope 20 times
2. Hula-hoop 30 times
3. Melt three pieces of ice only using their hands
4. Put the puzzle together.

Give each team an advantage. Have the piece of paper folded up where they can't see it. Explain that these are advantages that will help them in the game, but they can't open them until you say so.

Time the first team competing the challenge, and then allow the second team to go, and so on, if you have more than two teams. The team with the shortest time wins!

Teach

If I asked you what prayer was, what would you say? You don't have to answer out loud, but just think about it. What exactly is prayer? What's the point of it? Why do we pray, anyway?

If we're honest, there are times when we think that prayer is a way to ask God to do something for us. We only pray when we need something from God. We view prayer as a tool to tell God what we want Him to do.

If that's what popped into your head when I asked that question, that's okay! That's why we're here, so we can talk about prayer. But I want to go ahead and tell you guys that is not what prayer is. Actually, prayer is something much more powerful than just asking for things.

Prayer is talking to God.

That sounds pretty simple, right? It probably doesn't sound all that powerful.

But I have to tell you...being able to talk to God is one of the most powerful things in the world.

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. – James 5:14-16

So let's get this straight...praying can make a sick person well, it can heal, and it can forgive sins? All because of you saying a few words?

Well, not exactly. You see, prayer isn't powerful because you're praying or because of the words that you are saying. Prayer is powerful because of who you're praying to.

See, if you believe in God - if you believe that He created the whole world, that He created you, and that He has a plan for your life - then you know just how powerful He is. So there's nothing magical about the words you are praying. It's the fact that you're having a conversation with God - same one who created everything you see, the same one who knows everything - that is what makes prayer powerful.

The Bible is full of powerful stories about prayer. Let's look at one about a woman named Tabitha. At the part of the story we're starting, Tabitha has become sick and just died. The disciples heard that Peter was in town, so they asked for him to come over.

Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. - Acts 9:40

Wait just a second! Tabitha was dead! It says so right there in the Bible!

So how was she able to come back to life? Was it because Peter was there? Was it because he was so holy and powerful? No! If that was the case, Peter would have just walked right into the room and told her to get up without doing anything else. But what does he do? He prays. It wasn't him that was powerful, it was the prayer that he prayed and who he prayed to.

That's kind of amazing, isn't it? So I have a question for you. If you have this power at your fingertips - the power to just sit and have a conversation with God, who is so powerful that He can raise people from the dead - why don't you use it?

Okay, do the teams from tonight still have their advantages that I gave them? Good. Go ahead and open them!

Have someone from each team open their advantage and read it out loud.

So you could have skipped the puzzle? And you could have passed over the hula-hoop portion? Wow, those are pretty powerful advantages. I think that whichever team would have used their advantage probably would have won, don't you agree?

But did those advantages help you in the game? Were they as powerful in the game as they seem now?

They weren't. Why? Because you didn't use them. You had the advantages, and they could have changed up the game, but you didn't use them, so they were worthless to you.

Prayer is extremely powerful. There are no rules to praying. You don't have to do anything specific. In fact, you can pray whenever, wherever you want. That's something pretty powerful to have on your side. So why don't you use it?

Sometimes, we don't pray because we feel like we're not close enough to God. Or maybe there are times when we don't pray because we know that there are things in our lives that shouldn't be there, and we know they're wrong, so we avoid talking to God.

I want to show you guys something. I need a volunteer.

Speaking to volunteer. Okay, so I'm going to have a leader tell you a couple of things. Then, I want you to tell them to me, okay? No matter what, your job is to make sure you tell me what they told you.

Have leader tell the volunteer a couple of sentences or silly facts. It doesn't matter what. While they are doing that, continue talking to the rest of the group.

Are you guys having a good night? This is pretty cool stuff we're talking about, isn't it?

At this point, the volunteer will be trying to talk to you.

Can you believe that prayer is powerful enough to actually - I'm sorry, (volunteer's name), I can't hear you. You're going to have to come closer.

Start moving around while you continue talking.

Anyway, can you guys believe that prayer is powerful enough to raise someone from the dead? That's crazy, right? I mean, can you even imagine?

Continue talking and moving around, but eventually stop and let the volunteer tell you what they needed to tell you.

Okay, I know that probably looked silly to all of you, but I wanted to show you something. What happened when he/she tried to tell me something? They had to get closer. Why? Well, when you're trying to talk to someone, the natural thing to do is to come close to them.

It didn't matter that I was moving around, or that I was talking, or that they had to walk in front of all of you during a message. They came close to me so they could say what they needed to say.

And that's what happens when you pray.

You see, you don't have to be close to God in order to pray. But prayer does make you closer to Him.

Just like *volunteer's name* naturally came closer to me when they were trying to talk to me, talking to God will naturally lead to being closer to Him. And that's a pretty good place to be, if I do say so myself.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. - 1 John 5:14

It's easy to read a story in the Bible about someone being raised from the dead and think, "Wow! That's powerful!" And then get to a verse like this one and not be as impressed. When compared to someone coming back to life, is there really anything powerful about this verse?

Yes. There absolutely is! Really think about this, guys. It says that we can be confident. That we can approach God, and that He hears us!

When you pray, you're not just aimlessly saying words into the air, hoping that maybe, just maybe your words will float around and eventually find their way to God, if He's not too busy. No! When you pray, you know for a fact that God hears you.

That's some powerful stuff, isn't it?

Small Group Questions

1. Before this lesson, would you say that you thought prayer was mostly about asking God for things?
2. Do you believe that prayer is powerful? Why or why not?
3. When you pray, are you usually thinking more about yourself or about God?
4. Do you ever pray just to talk to God, or do you mostly pray only when you're asking Him for something?
5. Do you think that God wants to talk to you? How does that make you feel?
6. Do you feel closer to God when you pray more? Why do you think that is?
7. Do you think that prayer is a tool that you should use more?
8. Have you prayed to accept Jesus into your life? If so, do you think that was a powerful prayer?
9. Did everything we talked about tonight change the way you look at prayer? Would you define prayer differently now?
10. How can you make the power of prayer a part of your daily life? Is that something you want to do?

Teach Closing

We've talked about several different ways that prayer is powerful. We learned that prayer can heal the sick, prayer can forgive sins, and prayer can even raise people from the grave! But it is all because of who those prayers are going to - they're going to God.

Those are all pretty powerful prayers. But the most powerful prayer that you will ever pray is the one where you pray to invite Jesus into your heart. The prayer where you give your life over to God.

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. – Romans 10:9

Jesus is Lord. Three little words. Such a simple prayer, isn't it? But I'm telling you, it is the most powerful prayer you will ever pray because what does the verse say next? It says that you will be saved.

If you've never prayed that prayer before, I would really love to talk to you about it. I would be honored to give you a chance to pray that powerful prayer, and I'd be happy to answer any questions that you have about it. Be sure to come find me after this.

If you have prayed that prayer before, and Jesus is the Lord of your life, then you know how powerful prayer really is! You know that praying is what saved your life!

So, start viewing it as the powerful tool that it is. Prayer is not just a way for you to ask God for things you want; it's a way for you to talk to Him. And that's an incredibly powerful thing to be able to do.

Prayer can raise the dead, heal the sick, and forgive sins. All because of the one you're praying to. Prayer is a powerful gift of being able to talk to the most powerful God. Use it!

Prayer

Lesson 2: Learning to Pray

Bible: Matthew 6:9-13

Description: Prayer is all about talking to God. There isn't a set of rules you have to follow. God isn't sitting up in heaven making sure you don't mess up your prayer; He just wants to hear from you! In fact, Jesus actually has already taught us how we can talk to God.

Supplies

- 2 Sets of the Jenga game
- Five candy bars

Game: Jenga Relay

Split the group into two teams. Have each team line up behind a Jenga tower already set up. When you say go, one at a time a player from each team must remove one of the Jenga pieces and place it on top of the tower before going to the back of the line.

While this is happening, go back and forth between the teams. Pick a certain player and stand very close to them while it's their turn, saying things like, "I don't think you're doing that right. Don't you think you should try it another way? BE CAREFUL! Oh wow, that was close! Don't mess up! Don't mess up! Don't drop it!" Then go and do the same to someone from the other team, and continue doing this for the remainder of the game.

The team whose tower is still standing when the other team's falls is the winner!

Teach

Today, we're going to talk about learning how to pray. Maybe you already know how to pray, or maybe you want to learn. Maybe you think you know how to pray, but you can't help but wonder if you're really doing it right.

Can I get two volunteers?

Okay, volunteer 1, I want you to tell volunteer 2 about your day. Just tell them how your day was, what you did, all of that good stuff.

Let the volunteers talk, then let them go sit down.

Do you want to know what I noticed about that conversation?

I noticed that you didn't use any fancy language; you didn't worry about using big words or sounding smart and professional. You just talked!

Do you know that prayer is just talking to God? In the same way that you didn't worry about talking to your friend in the "right" way, you don't have to worry about praying the right way.

Before we get started on talking about how to pray, I want to tell you a few things that are NOT true about how to pray.

It's not true that you have to pray for a certain amount of time every day or God gets mad at you.

It's not true that you have to use big, fancy words in order for God to listen to your prayer.

It's not true that there is a list of rules you have to follow if you want your prayers to be answered.

And it is most definitely not true that God is sitting up in heaven making sure that you don't break any of those pretend rules.

I just wanted to get all of those things out of the way in case any of you have ever been told those things about prayer.

See, the problem with believing things like that about prayer is that it makes God seem like someone who doesn't want to talk to us. There aren't a bunch of hoops you have to jump through to be able to talk to God because He's not trying to trick you. He actually wants to talk to you!

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake

instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” –Luke 11:11-12

See? God is your father in heaven who cares about you! And if you think about praying as something with a bunch of rules and requirements, are you painting a picture of the father who wants to trick their kids or the father who wants to give good gifts to their kids?

God isn't sitting up in heaven with a timer critiquing your words and making sure you reach your daily quota of prayer. He's a good father, and when you pray He actually listens!

So now that we've covered what praying isn't, it's time to learn how to pray.

Here's the deal - I could try my best to teach you guys how to pray. I could tell you about books I've read or what I've learned, but when it comes to this subject, someone else is a much, much better teacher than me.

In fact, the greatest teacher there's ever been has already taught us how to pray, and that's the one we're going to learn from tonight: Jesus! There's no better teacher to teach us how to pray than Him.

This, then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” – Matthew 6:9-13

If you've ever been worried about knowing how you should pray, this should make you feel better right away. If there's anyone who can teach you how to pray, it's Jesus. So let's walk through the things He says here.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name

Jesus could have started this lesson on how to pray many different ways. But the way He starts it out shows us a lot about prayer. He starts it off by reminding us that God is our father.

I'm not sure what kind of relationship you have with your dad. When you talk to your dad, it may be stiff and uncomfortable and you may feel unloved. Or, maybe you have a great relationship with your dad, and talking with him is like talking to someone who loves you and is looking out for you.

Whatever you think about your earthly father, God is the best dad you can imagine. Having a conversation with Him should be all of the best things. It should be comforting to know that you're talking to someone who loves you, who has a plan for you and wants the best for you, who is cheering for you to succeed.

This verse that teaches us how we should pray could have started out any number of ways, but it starts out by addressing God as our father, which really sets the tone for how you should pray. Doesn't that tell you a lot about how God wants us to pray?

So the first part of Jesus' lesson on how to pray tells us this: God is our father, and He should be honored as holy.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

This part can be difficult, but it is definitely worth it.

We're humans, and there are many times when we're convinced that we know what's best. We think that the things we want for our lives are the best things, the decisions we make are the best decisions, and the plans we make are the best plans.

Really though, we don't know what's best. Not even close.

But you know who does? God.

So when you pray, you're supposed to ask for His will instead of your own. And it can be hard! But you have to know this - God wants to best for you.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." – Jeremiah 29:11

You may have heard this verse before, but I want you to really think about it for a second. Think about what it means. God has plans to prosper you, to give you hope and a future. He doesn't have plans to harm you!

If this is really true, don't you think that God's will is going to be the best for you? It is!

So that's how you should pray—for God's will because He knows what's best, and He wants the best for you. So ask Him for it.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Forgiveness must be a pretty big deal if Jesus included it in how we should pray. Here, Jesus is talking about two things: receiving forgiveness and giving forgiveness. They're both important.

Let's just get real here: forgiving others is not an easy thing to do. It's uncomfortable. Often, we feel like if we forgive someone, it means we're saying what they did was okay.

But God forgives you, even when the things you do are not okay. Remembering that should help you forgive others.

I need a volunteer! Come stand up at the front here with me.

Okay, so I'm going to ask you to give me a candy bar.

Wait a second and allow them to react, since they don't have a candy bar.

Why can't you give me a candy bar? Because you don't have one to give!

Have a leader come and give them one candy bar. Have the leader tell them that the candy bar is theirs to keep; they don't have to do anything with it unless they want to.

Okay, what about now? If I ask you for a candy bar now, what's your reaction?

If the student does give you a candy bar, ask them if it was hard to do since they only had one. Then, have the volunteer come up and give them all five of the candy bars.

What if I ask you for one candy bar now?

See how much easier it was for you to be generous with me when someone else was being generous to you?

That's how it is with forgiveness. And that's how it should be when we pray.

When you pray, you should ask God to forgive the sins in your life. But you shouldn't stop there - you should also pray and forgive others. You know those people in your life that you feel have really hurt you? Forgive them. Forgive them because God has generously forgiven you. If God can continually forgive you and your sins, you should be able to forgive others.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Temptation is a part of life. For most of us, temptation is a daily thing. God knows that, and He wants you to talk to Him about it.

Notice that Jesus doesn't say that we should be asking God to take the temptations away but that we should ask Him to lead us away from them.

Jesus knew that we would have questions about how we should pray, so He taught us how. But He didn't do so through a bunch of rules. He simply gave us a template that teaches us a lot about prayer and opens the door for us to talk to God about a lot more than just asking Him for things.

Small Group Questions

1. Have you ever wondered if you know the right way to pray?
2. Before today, did you think there was a right way and a wrong way to pray?
3. Did it surprise you to find out there aren't a lot of rules about praying?
4. Do you think that God listens to you when you pray? Why or why not?
5. Now that you know that Jesus taught us how to pray, does that clear up the questions you had?
6. Do you sometimes feel like you need to use big words or proper language when praying? Why?
7. Have you ever thought of prayer as a conversation with God? Do you think that's what it is?
8. Previously, has prayer been something that's part of your entire day, or just part of a few minutes of your day? Is that something you want to change?
9. Did you learn anything about prayer tonight that you didn't already know? What was it?
10. Do you think that remembering that God is always with you is something that will change how often you pray throughout the day?

Teach Close

Plain and simple, prayer is just talking to God. If you don't feel like you know how to pray, then talk to God about it! And what do you know, you're praying!

During the game we played, I interjected my thoughts while some of you were playing. I watched closely and critiqued you, making sure to tell you what I thought you were doing wrong.

Did that make it harder to focus on the game when I did that? Did it make you nervous? I'm sure it did!

That's what's so cool about prayer - it's just you and God. No one is listening in; no one is interjecting their thoughts and critiquing what you're saying. There's no need to be nervous or feel uncomfortable because it's just you and Him! And He is always with you.

Prayer shouldn't be something you start and stop. Prayer should be a continual thing that lasts all throughout your day because God is always with you.

If you look at the model Jesus gave for how to pray, you'll see that it's simple to make prayer a permanent part of your life instead of just 10 quick minutes in the morning.

Remember that God is your Father.

Remember to ask for His will to be done.

Remember to ask for forgiveness and to forgive.

Remember to ask God to lead you away from temptation and evil.

Is God only your father for a quick part of your morning? No! Do you only need forgiveness during a "quiet time" of reading the Bible? No, you always need it! Do you only face temptation for ten minutes every day? Of course not.

So why would you give prayer such a tiny slot of your day when the things you need to pray about make up the rest of your day?

I hope that you feel more confident about how to pray now! Remember, if you ever are confused about how to pray, it can be summed up very simply: Just talk to God!

Prayer

Lesson 3: Unanswered Prayers

Bible: Proverbs 3:5-6

Description: It can be frustrating when we feel like our prayers are not answered the way we want them to be. However, God sees the big picture and knows what's best for us. He answers our prayers exactly the way they should be answered. Even if we don't understand it at the time, we can trust His answers because we trust Him.

Supplies

- A child's t-shirt with a cartoon character or something childish on it
- Two puzzles
- A sharpie
- A \$10 bill
- A curtain or something similar that can be used to hide the prizes
- A "prize pack" of cool things. For example: a candy bar, a gift card, a t-shirt, etc.
 - Have this "prize pack" set up behind the curtain where no one else can see it.

Game: The Big Picture

Before the game begins, pick several pieces from each puzzle and black them out with a sharpie, so that students cannot see what is on the puzzle piece.

Split the group into two teams. Give them each a set of puzzle pieces but not the box, so that they cannot see what they should be putting together.

They will have to figure out how to put the puzzle together without knowing what it is a picture of, all while working around the pieces that are unrecognizable to them.

The first team to complete the puzzle wins!

Teach

Have you ever prayed a prayer that you just knew God was going to answer? And not only that, but you just knew He was going to answer it exactly how you thought it should be answered because you knew what was best?

Now, have you ever thought that and then had it not happen? We all have.

First things first: there is no such thing as an unanswered prayer. That would mean that God didn't hear your prayer, or that He just didn't want to talk to you. Neither one of those things are true.

It's important to realize that just because God does not answer our prayers in the way that we want Him to answer them does not mean they are unanswered prayers.

If you pray for a new car, and God doesn't give you a new car, is that an unanswered prayer? No, it's not. It is just a prayer that was answered differently than you wanted it to be answered.

When prayers are answered differently than you wanted them to be, or differently than you feel like they should be, it can be frustrating. It can even feel like God is ignoring you! But I promise, that is not the case.

I love the Lord, for He heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy. Because He turned His ear to me, I will call on Him as long as I live. – Psalm 116:1-2

See? That's who you're praying to. God doesn't just sit up in heaven, dodging your prayers. He hears your prayers, and turns His ear toward you to listen!

So if you can be confident that God hears your prayers, it should be easy, right? But it's not. Because there are times when God doesn't answer your prayers like you want Him to. And when that happens, no matter how much you love Him or how much you pray, it's just hard.

So how are you supposed to deal with that?

The answer is a simple, short word: trust.

You have to trust that God will answer your prayers, and if He answers them differently than you had hoped, you have to trust it's because He knows what is best for you and He wants the best for you.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight. – Proverbs 3:5-6

This verse says that we should trust in God. Not only that, but we should also avoid leaning on our own understanding.

So what does this verse have to do with prayers that we feel are unanswered?

Everything.

If you truly trust God with all your heart, then you will trust that the way He answers your prayers are best, no matter what you think. And if you know that you should not lean on your own understanding of things, you will be able to remember that your understanding of life is short-term while God's is not.

Let me ask you guys a question. Does anyone remember what their favorite t-shirt was ten years ago? What did it look like?

Allow a few students to answer this.

I'm sure you loved your shirt. And it was probably very appropriate for the age you were at the time. I bet it looked a lot like this!

Hold up childish t-shirt.

Now, is there anything wrong with this shirt? No! It's a perfectly good shirt, and there are probably a lot of five year olds who would call something like this their favorite shirt. It's a cool shirt for a five year old, right?

But let me ask you another question: Would you wear this shirt today? Better yet: Would you call this your favorite shirt today?

Of course not! Why? Because ten years is a long time, and things change! You grow physically and mentally, your tastes change, your style changes - and this shirt doesn't fit you anymore!

But if I had asked you ten years ago if you thought that would be your favorite shirt forever, you probably would have said yes. Because we can't see ten years into the future, and we have no idea how much things are going to change.

Now, if something as simple as your favorite shirt changes, imagine how many more things change over ten years. But here's the cool part: God knows about every single one of those changes.

So the next time you pray and ask God for something and He doesn't answer you the way you wanted, I want you to think about your favorite shirt from ten years ago.

What you're asking for right now may not be what's best for you. It may not be the best thing for the next ten years of your life, which are a total mystery for you. God's looking out for you, and He wants the best for you.

Had your parents let you pre-buy your wardrobe for the next ten years, there would probably be a bunch of you walking around here in Sesame Street and super-hero t-shirts. But they didn't do that because they knew how much you would grow and change.

God knows how much growth and change will happen over the years. He knows exactly what's in store for you. And when He answers your prayers, He doesn't just want the best thing for you today. He wants the best thing for you forever.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. – Romans 8:28

Let me ask you a question. How many of you believe this verse? Now, it's in the Bible, so I know you're going to say you believe it. But how many of you really believe it? How many of you actually believe that God works for your good in all things?

It's much easier said than done. Because here's the deal...if we really believed that God worked all things together for our good, "unanswered" prayers wouldn't bother us at all because we'd know that He was working for our good and that it was the best good we could ever get.

So why is it so hard to feel that way sometimes?

Okay, I need a volunteer.

Have the volunteer come stand near the curtain that's hiding the prizes.

Alright, so if I asked you if you wanted ten dollars, what would your answer be? Of course it would be yes!

Give the student the ten-dollar bill.

Now, what if I told you that if you give that money back to me, you could have what's behind this curtain? The catch is that you don't get to look at what's behind it first. And if you don't like it, it doesn't matter. You still can't have the money back.

What would your reaction be to that?

Allow student to answer.

Who is someone here that you trust?

What if we let them look behind the curtain, and then they can tell you if they think you should trade or not?

Let another student look behind the curtain and then tell the other student they should trade. Then reveal the prizes behind the curtain to the group.

So, what just happened there?

Well, you had a choice. You could trust in what you could see and thought was good, or you could trust in what you couldn't see and what may be good. So what helped you make that decision?

Someone you trusted! You knew that they would tell you what the best option to take was, and that made it easier, right?

God cares about you more than you could ever imagine. He wants what is best for you way more than anyone you love on this earth ever could. So if He doesn't answer a prayer the way you want it to be answered, then you can be confident it's because there's something better for you!

Just like your friend could see what was behind that curtain while you couldn't, God sees what you can't. He wants the very best for you; you just have to trust Him!

In the game tonight, you had to put together a puzzle. That sounds pretty simple, right? But it wasn't because you had no idea what it was that you were putting together. And not only that, but there were blacked out pieces that you couldn't even see enough to tell where they went. So something that sounds simple was actually pretty difficult.

God sees the whole big picture. In life, we only see pieces here and there, and there are some pieces we can't see at all. We don't know what exactly we should be doing or what we need next because we don't know what the final picture of our life is going to be. But God does!

Small Group Questions:

1. Have you ever felt like God wasn't answering your prayers?
2. After this lesson, do you really think that those prayers were unanswered, or that they were just answered in a different way than you wanted them to be?
3. Is it hard for you to trust that God knows better than you do? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever prayed for something that you thought you really wanted, but then were glad that God answered your prayers differently?
5. Do you believe that God works everything together for our good? Does that make it easier to trust Him?
6. Have you ever thought that when God says no to a prayer it's because there's something better for you?
7. Do you believe that God hears you when you pray?
8. If it were up to you to choose between what you want right now or what's best in the long run, what would you choose?
9. Is it comforting to know that God sees the big picture of things?
10. Do you have a hard time praying when you don't know what God's answer is going to be?

Teach Close

Trusting in God can be difficult at times, but it is life changing. Especially when it comes to praying.

When you feel like your prayers aren't being answered the way you wanted them to be, you have two options.

One, you can react by not trusting God. You can get mad that He didn't do what you wanted, you can worry about what that means for your life, and you can feel like He's not answering your prayers at all.

Or, you can go with the second option: To trust God.

If you trust God, then a prayer that isn't answered the way you hoped isn't an unanswered prayer at all. In fact, it's a prayer that was answered better than you hoped because God sees the big picture and knows what you need.

When you trust in God, you know that prayers that seem unanswered are really just God doing something even better for you. Whether or not it feels like that in the moment, you can be sure that God hears your prayers, that He's working all things together for your good, and that He is worth trusting in far more than your own understanding.

When you trust God, there is no such thing as unanswered prayers.

Prayer

Lesson 4: Recognizing God's Voice

Bible: John 10:27

Description: We can all agree that we want to hear from God, but how exactly does that happen? It can be difficult to hear and recognize God's voice when we have so many other "voices" speaking into our lives, so it's important to make sure we put ourselves in a position to know God's voice.

Supplies

- A recording of someone's voice (someone who has nothing to do with the youth group)
- A pack of Oreos
- A prize

Game: Can You Hear Me Now?

Choose one student to be the main player in the game. Have the rest of the group gather behind him or her.

Choose one student from the group behind her and tell them the number 3. Have the rest of the group choose any number between 1-10, as long as it is not the number 3.

Have the main student stand with their back facing the group. Give them the pack of Oreos. Tell them that the group is going to start saying numbers, and they have to try to pick out the number they hear the most clearly.

That number will represent the number of Oreos that they need to lick all the frosting off before winning. If they do the correct number of Oreos, they win the prize.

Important: Make sure that the students do not yell their number—they just need to say it in a normal voice.

When you say go, have the group behind her repeat their number over and over, until the student has finished what they think is the correct amount of Oreos.

Then, tell the student you are going to give them another chance to win the prize. This time, have the student that you told the number 3 to stand closest to them, while having the rest of the group a significant amount of space away from them, so that when everyone starts saying their numbers, the number they hear the most clearly will be the number 3.

If they choose 3 Oreos, they win the prize.

Teach

Have you ever wanted to hear from God? How many of you have ever wondered if what you were hearing was actually God's voice or if it was something else?

Today, we're going to talk about hearing and knowing God's voice.

The first thing about hearing and recognizing God's voice may sound like a no-brainer, but it's the most important part: in order to hear God, you have to know Him.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. - John 10:27

If you've never read the parts of the Bible that compare God to being a good shepherd, let me take a minute to explain why the comparison makes sense.

Shepherds don't only lead their sheep, but they watch out for them, too. They make sure they don't wander away into danger, and they are constantly protecting them from dangerous predators.

In the days when the Bible was written, shepherding was not just a 9-5 job. It wasn't a job where you could clock in and clock out - being a shepherd was not just a full time job, it was a lifestyle. Shepherds were always with their sheep...they even slept in the fields with them!

Sheep recognized the shepherd's voice because they knew the shepherd. They knew him because he was always with them.

In the same way, if we have a relationship with God, we are like His sheep and He is our shepherd. And the more time we spend with Him, the more familiar His voice becomes.

Choose a volunteer to come up to the front with you.

Okay, we're going to test out a theory. You turn around and close your eyes and just listen.

Play recording of someone's voice.

Do you recognize that voice? Can you tell me for sure who it is?

Allow student to answer.

Now, let's try this again.

Have someone there who is friends with the volunteer say the exact same thing that the recording said.

Do you recognize that voice? Who do you think that is?

Okay, you can turn around now. So, was it easier to identify the first voice, or the second voice? Why do you think that is?

It's because you knew the second voice! Now, do you think you would know their voice if you had never spent any time with them? Of course not!

You cannot know someone's voice if you do not know them, and you cannot know someone without spending time with them.

If you don't spend any time with God, you won't have a good relationship with Him. And if you don't have a relationship with Him, you won't know His voice. It's as simple as that!

It's also important to remember that God's voice isn't the only one we hear. In fact, everything you allow in your life has a "voice." Friends and family have audible voices, but there are other things, too. The books you read, the movies you watch, the hobbies you have...those are all things that have a "voice" and influence your life based on the time you spend with them.

It is so important to make sure that you set your life up so that God's voice is the loudest one. If everything in your life is of equal priority, then all of those "voices" are going to be just as loud as each other.

In the game we played, we acted out two scenarios. First, we had all the voices in the same place, and then we had one voice much closer than the others.

Ask student who was the main player in the game: Was it easier to pick out the right voice when all the voices were in the same place, or when the right voice was closer to you than the rest?

It's the same way with trying to hear God's voice! The closer you are to Him, the easier it will be to recognize His voice.

If you spend hours a day playing basketball, and only five minutes a day praying or thinking about God, who do think you're going to be closer to? And who do you think is going to have a bigger influence in your life: The basketball team or God?

If you want to know God's voice, you've got to spend time with Him. He has to be your priority!

Let's look at another verse about hearing from God.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. - 2 Timothy 3:16-17

This verse tells us a few helpful things about hearing from God.

First of all—do you ever think you've heard from God but you're not sure if you actually heard from Him or if it was something else since you're not sure if you recognize His voice?

The first thing you should do is ask this question: Does what I think I heard from God agree with the Bible?

Remember, the Bible is the word of God, and He will never contradict His own word. God's voice will always speak things that line up with what is in the Bible.

Speaking of the Bible, have there been things in your life that you just really wish you could hear from God about? Maybe you want to hear about certain lifestyle choices or certain friends. Maybe you're wondering if something is right or wrong.

Well, it's quite possible that many of the things you want to hear God's voice about He has already spoken to you about.

How? In the Bible!

You've heard me say that the Bible is the word of God, right? Well, what am I using right now to form my words? My voice!

So the Bible is the word of God, and it is His voice! There's nothing in there that did not come from Him.

So while you're busy trying to recognize if you actually heard God's voice or wondering why God won't speak to you about a certain subject, open your Bible! What you're looking for could have been in there all along.

If you were wondering if reading your Bible is important or not, let me tell you - it is so important. These are God's words, His voice! I know that you all want to hear from God, and I know that you can - you just need to open your Bible and read it.

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." – Isaiah 30:21

A big part of recognizing God's voice is trusting in Him. Sometimes, we can be so focused on trying to hear an audible voice that we forget that He can talk to us through things like reading our Bible.

Having a relationship with God is all about trusting in Him. You trust Him with your heart and with your life. So why not trust that if He wants to tell you something, He will?

If you want to know God's voice, you have to do your part. First and foremost, you have to have a relationship with Him. But don't just stop at beginning a relationship - really get to know Him! That happens through praying and spending time with Him, just like you would with anyone else you wanted to have a relationship with.

Secondly, you have to read your Bible. Because God will speak to you through that - if the words in there are important enough that He spoke them, then they are important enough to listen to!

That's your part. Talking to you is up to God. He may speak to you in many different ways - sure, it may be an audible voice that you hear. But more often, it will be in small, subtle ways. Through a verse you read in the Bible or through a time when you're praying and listening.

It's your job to trust in God. Trust that He's going to tell you exactly what you need to hear, and trust that He will do that in the very best way.

We serve a big and powerful God. He is worth trusting in. Just like that verse says, God's voice will guide you.

Trust in your relationship with Him. Trust that He hears you when you pray. And trust that He will speak to you.

Small Group Questions:

1. Is God's voice something that you've wondered about before tonight?
2. Do you think that if God spoke to you, you would know it was Him?
3. Have you ever heard from God before? How?
4. Do you feel like God speaks to you when you read the Bible? What about when you pray?
5. Have you ever been asking God to speak to you about something and then found an answer on that subject in the Bible?
6. Would you say you really trust God? Is it hard for you to trust Him?
7. Do you believe that God will guide you in the way you're supposed to go?
8. Are there other "voices" in your life right now that are louder in their influence than God's is? Should you do anything about that?
9. Do you agree that you can't know someone's voice if you don't know them? What does this tell you about your relationship with God?
10. Do you think that you should be spending more time getting to know God?

Teach Close

We've talked a lot about prayer during this series, and something I want to make sure you remember is that prayer is a two-way street.

We've said before that when you pray, you aren't just aimlessly throwing words out into the air, hoping they get somewhere. You know that God is listening to you!

In the same way, you have to listen to Him. You can't expect to hear His voice - in any way - if you're not listening.

It is so important to put yourself in a position of listening for God's voice. How do you do that? By making sure you spend time with Him, by getting to know Him and His word, and by making sure there's room in your life for God's voice.

If you fill up your life with too many other voices, there will be no room for you to hear God's voice!

This week, I want you to review your priorities and the way you spend your time. Make sure that you are in a position to listen to God when He speaks to you. God's voice is the most important one of all, so make sure you are in a position to hear it!