

Prayer: a Conversation with God

Core help

Goals: To see prayer as a dynamic, 2-way conversation with God. How are we invited to express ourselves to God? How do we listen? This help would also get students to think about practical ways they can enter into conversation with God.

Openers:

1. How honest are you with God, compared to how honest you are with those closest to you?
2. How conversational or a two-sided is the way you communicate with God compared to the way you communicate with people close to you?

Scripture:

Jonah 1:1-2; 2:1-2, 7-10; 4:1-4 (NIV) → *read entire book if members aren't familiar with it*

^{1:1} The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: ² "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

-Jonah tries to flee to Tarshish but gets swallowed up in a fish along the way-

^{2:1} From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. ² He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry..."

⁷ "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, LORD, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple. ⁸ "Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. ⁹ But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the LORD.'"

¹⁰ And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

-Jonah goes to Nineveh and speaks as the LORD commanded him and the city repents-

^{4:1} But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

⁴ But the LORD replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

Digging Deeper:

Observations

1. What range of emotions does God allow Jonah to express himself with?
 - a. How does Jonah listen (or not listen) to the LORD?

2. Based off of Jonah's transparency of anger what is God's response to him?

Interpretations

1. How does God selectively answer prayers? Why can that be such a good thing? (*give a good amount of time for this question*)

Applications

1. We can see that God doesn't ignore Jonah's emotions, but he listens to them. How do you think God would respond if you shared how you really were feeling in different situations? Why?
2. In what ways do you think you can more fully converse with God and listen more carefully to Him?
 - (i.e. expressing more honest emotions, sharing confusion and frustration, recognizing God's kindness and praising Him for it, calling out for help, listening for understanding, etc)
4. Why is it important as Christians to have a dynamic relationship with God that includes conversations with Him? Brainstorm together ways to develop this kind of relationship in prayer.
 - (i.e. talk to God through our honest emotions, read a psalm to him, use Scripture as a springboard for our prayers, listening to God through reading scripture, meditative prayer, practicing silence, asking God to reveal Himself through others' words, etc)

Closing Activity:

- End the time by praying simple prayers aloud in small groups of 3 to practice conversing with God. Utilize these simple steps and encourage others to respond at the end if led by the Spirit or from His Word to one another:

note: the italics are suggested prompts meant to give direction not to be followed rigidly or formulaically

- **Acknowledge** the Lord's Presence: *"Hi Lord, I know you are here. I adore you..."*
 - **Complement** the Lord: *"Thank you Lord for all that you've done. You're awesome..."*
 - **Affirm** God's power: *"You are able to do more than I could ever ask or imagine..."*
 - **Intercede:** *"Lord, I don't know what to do with... Would you please bless ____..."*
 - **Listen:** *"Okay Lord, I am listening. What may you say to me?"*
 - **Respond:** *"Thanks Lord!... I don't quite understand... Okay, I will do that..."*
- Share resources and have members commit to gather and do one together in smaller groups over the next week, or at next Core.

Resources:

1) Lectio Divina: Practicing 'Divine Reading' as a Group

- Pick a facilitator to lead the process (reading text & prompting questions)
- Pick a text for facilitator to read 3 times

- **First Reading** - *read the text aloud twice slowly.*
 - listeners hear the text and listen for a word, phrase or idea that captures their attention. Focus attention on that by repeating it in your head.
- **Second Reading** - *read the text once again.*
 - listeners focus attention on how the word, phrase or idea speaks to their life that day.
 - What does it mean for you today?
 - How is Christ, the Word, speaking to you about your life through this word, phrase or idea?
 - What is Christ, the Word, speaking to you about your life through this word, phrase, or idea?
 - *allow a brief period of silence and afterwards invite group members to share briefly what they have heard.*
- **Third Reading** - *read the text once again.*
 - listeners are focus on what God is calling them to do or to become. Experiencing God's presence changes us. It calls us to something.
 - what is God calling you to do or to be as a result of this experience?
 - *allow a period of silence and afterwards invite group members to share what they are being called to do or to be.*
- *Finish the exercise by having each one pray for the person on his or her right*

2) Listening to God in Revelation

Start each period by a few moments of silence followed by sharing as a group. After the third movement members listen in silence for encouragement/Scripture/words from the Spirit for one another then share them. Encourage members to write these things down. Close by praying for one another.

- Listen for God's affirmation
 - What has God been doing in your life?
 - Recognize the love and provision of God experienced in your life
- Listen for God's correction
 - What sin, inaction, or indifference may be blocking us from fully experiencing God's grace in our lives and revealing Him to others?
 - Allow God to instruct and disciple us knowing He only disciplines those He loves.
- Listen for God's promise
 - What promises of faithfulness, love, healing, & freedom does Christ offer in this?
 - What reward or consequences does the Lord have in store for us in response?