

STUMMIN

SMALL GROUP
LEADER GUIDE

MIDDLE
SCHOOL
FOCUS

THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS

FEBRUARY 21, 2024

Week 1 of a 2-week series
about prayer

BOTTOM LINE

Prayer connects you to God.

SCRIPTURE

*Come near to God and he
will come near to you.*

- James 4:8a NIV

*The Lord is near to all who
call on him, to all who call
on him in truth.*

- Psalm 145:18 NIV

GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To point students toward
connecting with God in
prayer by giving them
the encouragement and
freedom to start praying
real, honest prayers

>> BEFORE GROUP

THINK ABOUT THIS: This week, be quick to affirm the comfort level your students say they're at when it comes to prayer. Keep in mind that they may be even less comfortable inwardly than they express outwardly. No matter where they are when it comes to prayer, you want your group to be a safe space to be honest about that. Because being honest about this in small group is going to help them take a step toward potentially being honest with God in prayer. If your students express doubts or questions about prayer, that's okay! Your job isn't to provide all the answers, but instead, to encourage them to keep going and giving honest, real prayer a try! Keep in mind students in your group who may have tried these real, honest prayers but haven't seen them answered the way they hoped. Allow them to be honest about that as well and encourage them to take that feeling to God in prayer, too!

>> DURING GROUP

This guide is a suggestion, not a formula. Adjust the questions and activities as needed, and don't feel like you need to do, or ask, everything you see here.

DISCUSS THIS:

- In three words or less, tell us what you think about prayer.
- In your opinion, what could be confusing about prayer?
- What's one reason someone might pray?
- Do you think there's a "right" time in your day that you're supposed to pray? Is there a "right" place?
- What are some similarities between connecting with people and connecting with God? What are some differences?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how comfortable are you praying?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how comfortable are you being really honest when you pray?

DO THIS:

Pass out a notecard and pen to each student and ask them to write down one way someone might pray. When they are done, lay all the cards in the middle of the group on the floor, facing up. Have everyone read each other's answers and then brainstorm any additional ideas together.

Ask: Of all the ways we identified, which way do you best connect with God through prayer?

Ask your group to select a way to pray from the list you generated. End your group time by praying together in the way they choose.

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THINK ABOUT THIS: At this phase, students may have a variety of comfort levels when it comes to praying out loud. Since everyone gets comfortable with prayer at a different time, never pressure a student to pray out loud in a group. Instead, lean in with empathy as they share how they feel about prayer and encourage them to take their next step, no matter what that step might be.

>> DURING GROUP

Create meaningful conversations. Adjust the questions as needed and ask thoughtful follow-up questions as the conversation unfolds. Don't feel like you need to answer every question.

DISCUSS THIS:

- What is your favorite vending machine snack? How do we sometimes treat prayer like a vending machine? What do you typically ask for in prayer?
- When you hear the word "prayer," what comes to mind? (Leader note: After students share their answers, explain that in this series we define prayer as talking to and listening to God.)
- What are some reasons people don't pray?
- How comfortable do you feel being 100% honest with God when you pray?
- Prayer is about connecting with God, not just getting something from God. Share about a time you connected with God without asking for something in return.
- Read Psalm 145:18 NIV. How does knowing this change the way you pray? How would you pray differently if you knew and believed that God truly wanted to connect with you?
- This week we talked about how you can make prayer a habit. Pick one thing you can do this week:
 - Write your honest prayers down and read them out loud to God.
 - Spend time listening for God. You might do this by sitting in silence, reading a scripture passage, listening to a worship song, etc.
 - If you never tried praying before, invite someone to pray with you until you are comfortable praying by yourself.
 - Other (share your idea with the group)

>> AFTER GROUP

Reach out to your students individually, reminding them that "God wants to connect with you today." Also remind your students that you are praying for them daily and ask how you can pray for them specifically.