

MIDWEEK EVENT

This week's main point is: Prayer helps us face what seems impossible and devastating.

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 22:11-31; 145:18; Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 11:28-30; Philippians 4:5b-7; James 4:8

THEOLOGY CONNECTION | PRAYER AND PROVIDENCE

If God is in control and already knows the future, why pray? The Bible teaches that although God has a plan for this world that He promises to fulfill, prayer is often the means God uses to accomplish His divine purpose. Even though God knows the end result, the means that lead to that end result will be accomplished through prayer. In this sense, it is true that “prayer changes things,” and it is also true that God uses prayer to change our hearts so that our will comes into conformity with His.

CHRIST CONNECTION

We are powerless in the war against sin and death. Just as Gideon needed help to defeat the five kings, we rely on Jesus to defeat all sin. He was the only One able to atone for our sin because He lived a sinless life and fulfilled the law (Rom. 8:3-4).

1 PSALM 145:18; JEREMIAH 29:13; JAMES 4:8

PRAYER BRINGS US CLOSE TO GOD.

Prayer doesn't always change our circumstances, but it always changes something—including us. Yes, God is in control of all things and already knows how all things will turn out. Yes, sometimes God uses our prayer to accomplish His plan; He wants us to ask for His help and seek His will. But no matter what we face, as we seek answers, peace, guidance, hope, or help, we're ultimately seeking God—the One who holds all of those things in abundance. Think about it: Our faith revolves around having a relationship with God. When you're in a relationship with someone, you typically want to grow closer to that person. And if you want to grow closer to people, you have to talk to and listen to them. Prayer is the way we talk to God, and He promises that when we do that, when we seek Him, we will find Him (Deut. 4:29). We may not find the answers we'd hoped for; we might not find immediate relief from our struggles; and we might not find any greater understanding of what's going on in our lives or why. But we will always receive something more precious than answers, relief, or understanding: the gift of His closeness.

- › **WHEN HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED PRAYER BRINGING YOU CLOSER TO GOD? WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN YOUR LIFE?**
- › **HOW CAN YOU KEEP YOUR FOCUS ON WHO GOD IS AND DRAWING CLOSER TO HIM WHEN YOU PRAY—EVEN IT FEELS LIKE YOUR LIFE IS A MESS?**
- › **WHO CAN YOU ASK TO SEEK GOD WITH YOU? WHY DO YOU THINK IT'S SOMETIMES INTIMIDATING TO ASK OTHERS TO PRAY WITH US OR FOR US?**
- › **WHAT DO YOU NEED TO SEEK GOD FOR RIGHT NOW? HOW WILL YOU DO THAT?**
- › **WHAT KEEPS YOU FROM SEEKING GOD WHEN YOU'RE STRUGGLING?**

MIDWEEK EVENT

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PSALM 22:11-31; MATTHEW 11:28-30; PHILIPPIANS 4:5b-7

PRAYER BRINGS US COMFORT AND COURAGE.

Prayer doesn't just bring us comfort because it helps us draw closer to God; prayer brings us comfort and courage because it reminds us of who God is. People who are verbal processors can probably relate to David's writing in Psalm 22: He started out by asking God where He was, then moved to talking about how those who trusted God in the past had never been let down, then how he felt like maybe he was being let down, then his assurance that God was for him, a request for God's presence, how God's supposed distance affected him, a plea for rescue, then praise because God answered. In some ways, it almost feels like David is going back and forth in this prayer: Is God good or isn't He? Is God faithful or isn't He? Is God with me? Will God rescue me? David was processing his thoughts, his fears, and his certainties about God as he prayed. As he kept praying, His comfort and courage seem to grow. The place between the ache and the answered prayer is a gift to us as we wrestle with what we're experiencing versus the God we know.

While Jesus promised suffering would be part of our lives if we followed Him, He aches when we hurt. He longs to comfort us. He calls us, saying, "Come to Me. Find rest for your worn-out soul and your broken heart. I will carry you" (Matt. 11:28-30, author's paraphrase). He is always near His people, ready to offer comfort and courage like only He can. This is why Paul reminds us, "The Lord is near. Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:5b-7).

- › **WHEN HAS PRAYER REMINDED YOU OF WHO GOD IS?**
- › **HOW HAS PRAYER BROUGHT YOU COMFORT AND COURAGE DURING A DIFFICULT TIME?**
- › **PRAYER REMINDS US THAT WE WERE NEVER MEANT TO WALK THROUGH THE HARD DAYS ALONE. WHO ELSE CAN YOU INVITE INTO YOUR SORROWS AND STRUGGLES TO ENCOURAGE AND PRAY WITH YOU ALONG THE WAY?**
- › **WHY DO WE NEED TO WORK THROUGH THE DISCOMFORT THAT SOMETIMES COMES WHEN WE THINK OF BEING OUR AUTHENTIC, HONEST SELVES WHEN WE COME BEFORE GOD IN PRAYER?**
- › **WHAT ARE SOME WAYS THE PLACE BETWEEN THE ACHE AND THE ANSWERED PRAYER HAS AFFECTED YOU?**

WRAP UP

God has promised to never leave us or forsake us; He has given us proof of this promise in sending Jesus to die for us and the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. We are loved abundantly. Invite students to share the ways they've experienced God's closeness in prayer or how they've gotten to know Him better through prayer. Close by praying over students, asking God to help them remember He is always near to bring comfort and courage, even when they don't feel like He is.