

“PRAY WITHOUT CEASING” Session One

**Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
Written by Debra Burgan
Reworked Natalie Kapeluck Nixon**

Objective: To give the participants an understanding of:

1. The Letters of St. Paul
2. The meaning of ceaseless
3. What Prayer is not
4. Prayer is our way to communicate with God

Items Needed: Copies of worksheets, pencils, bibles.

Items in blue are notes for the Session Leader.

Related books for Session Leader’s Reference:

A Beginner’s Guide to Prayer – The Orthodox Way to Draw Closer to God
Michael Keiser. Conciliar Press. www.conciliarpress.com

Begin the Session with a prayer, possibly the Prayer before Commencement of Work.

Most gracious Lord! Send down upon us the grace of Thy Holy Spirit to grant us intelligence and strengthen the powers of our soul, that we may attend to the instruction given us, and grow up to glorify Thee, our Creator, to gladden our parents, and to serve the Church and our people.

Session for ages 9 – 18(the ages should be split with younger and older children):

Begin by breaking up the group into two teams. Explain that you are going to have a race. This is how it will work. Some of the team will be a town or group of people in trouble. A few people (or one) will be the messenger. One or two will be the Governor. Give each team a “trouble” (lying, stealing, sadness, infestation of ladybugs) and tell the townspeople to begin writing a letter to the governor with all of their problems concerning the “trouble”. The messenger will go through an obstacle course to deliver the message to the governor. The governor will then right a message to the town with advice as to how and solve the “trouble”. They must then apply the advice and await your approval that the “trouble” is taken care of. Have them act out the trouble while the message is being delivered and answer written. First team with no troubles wins. (15 minutes).

Session for ages 5 – 8

Have the children write a letter to a friend in the room. Help them compose the letter if they do not know how to write a letter. Tell them NOT to sign their name to the letter. Make sure that everyone is matched up with someone else. Have them turn in the letters. You are the Mailman and will deliver the letters. They must then guess who wrote them the letter by its content.

Following the games begin the lesson below. For younger children read for them. For older children, allow them to read aloud or to themselves.

After receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the Apostles followed Jesus Christ’s instructions to go out into the world to teach the Gospel. Much of the New Testament tells us about their work of starting Churches in cities they, especially Saint Paul, visited. Once a Church was started, Saint Paul would often send letters to remind the new Church of how Christians should live, to help them deal with problems they may be having, to help them stay strong, and to keep growing.

These letters gave such important advice, that we still read and listen to them today. When do you hear these letters read? [\(During Liturgy and other services\)](#)

Do you know another word for letters like these? [___ Epistle _____](#)

The words “pray without ceasing” are from an **epistle**, which Saint Paul wrote to the Church in the city of Thessalonica.

What does “without ceasing” mean? What are some things that are happening *ceaselessly* right now? [_____ Sun shining, earth spinning, tides/waves, etc. _____](#)

Can *you* really do anything without ceasing? Well, you already do! Your brain never stops working, sending messages to every part of your body...that’s why your heart beats and you keep breathing. What Saint Paul is really telling us is that prayer should be as much a part of our life as our own breath is.

Why breathing? We never stop breathing as long as our bodies are working. Even when we are asleep, our bodies know...without us telling it every second, to keep breathing in and out; steady and calm. Our prayer should be like breathing, our mind and heart praying – steady and calm, without being told to do so.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

First, let’s talk about two things that prayer is **NOT**!

Prayer is NOT making a wish. Lots of people – adults and children – sometimes think that praying is almost the same as closing your eyes before you blow out the candles on your birthday cake! But prayer should **never** be confused with superstition or “luck.”

[At this point you can take some time to try some bartering with those in attendance. Tell them that if they are good, you may cut the lesson or if they want their snack they must “be good”. See what their reaction is and then proceed with the lesson.](#)

Prayer is also NOT “making a deal” with God...promising to “be good” or act a certain way if our prayer is answered the way we want it to be.

Can you think of why it would be foolish to think about prayer in these ways? [___ God already knows what we need and want, prayer is much more important than superstition, “being good” is the way we should always be, not just to get something, etc.](#)

Now, let’s start to learn what prayer really is!

Prayer is the language of our Faith.

From your very first words of baby-talk, language is one of the most important things you learn. Why do you think your family was so happy at your first words? How much more useful is your language today?

You probably know someone who didn’t learn English as a child...maybe *you* spoke another language first. Depending on the age we learn a language, we may never be comfortable with it or think of it as our own, even after using it for many years. Many people continue to think and have dreams in their first language for their whole lives.

Language also grows as you do. As you've gotten older, you've gotten better at expressing yourself. If you think about prayer as a very special language used when talking to God, you can see how important it is to start learning when you are young. You must try to improve as you grow so you can express yourselves to God as the person you are. (Discuss how just as we don't continue to speak in two word sentences, we shouldn't be content to "say our prayers" like we learned when we were four or five years old) There are two ways to get better at a language: to read and listen to it as it's used by more experienced people, and to use it yourself until you become comfortable. We want to make sure we will always be comfortable with the language of prayer and that it comes naturally to us.

You know by now that language can be one of our most useful tools, but it can also hurt or punish. God Himself shows us this in Holy Scripture. What is one time that God used our human language as a punishment?

[Babel: Genesis 11: 1-9](#)

When did He use it in a most helpful way? [Pentecost: Acts 2: 1-11](#) _____

You may need to take some time to review the [Feast Day of Pentecost](#).

Prayer is the way we *communicate* with God.

Spoken or written language is just one way we have of *communicating*. What's the difference between just talking and communicating? Do you always listen to people who are talking to you? Do you always hear what they are really saying?

If communicating were just talking, it would be just about impossible to "pray without ceasing!"

"Communicate" comes from a Latin word that means "common"; that grew into other words meaning "fellowship" and "to do something together."

Can you think of any other words we use that come from the same base word? [Give some time for answers.](#)

[Community](#) _____ [Communion](#) _____

How are they all related? [They all involve us with other people.](#)

People can talk to themselves, but in order to really communicate four things are needed:

- A message
- Someone wanting to send the message
- A way to send the message
- Someone to receive the message

[Relate this to the game that they played earlier.](#)

When we pray, we want to send a message to God. As we learn more about prayer, we'll talk more about what the message might be and ways God has given us, through His Church, to send our message. The most important thing to remember right now is that GOD IS ALWAYS READY TO RECEIVE OUR MESSAGE.

We use spoken language to pray but there are other ways we send our message.

We use our bodies and faces to communicate silently every day, sometimes without thinking about it or realizing we are doing so. We call this "body language." Sometimes our body language shows the world what we really mean, even if our words say something else! ([Spend a few minutes having them demonstrate different things/expressions, guessing what they - are such as thinking, joy, anger etc.](#))

Another way we communicate is through our *attitudes* and *actions*. What if you've been asked to do chores at home but you go off with your friends instead? Or you may do the chores, just not as well as you could have, or with lots of pouty body language. What are you communicating? What if you ask

someone older to help you with a difficult math problem and they explain it to you while they sigh out loud and roll their eyeballs, how do you feel?

Remember, actions sometimes speak louder than words!

Our body language, our attitudes and our actions are very important ways we communicate. When we use them to communicate love to those around us and to do our best at all times, we show God that we are living as He wants us to and that we are thankful for all He has given us. They help us to “pray without ceasing.”

Explain that throughout the rest of your time together, you will be practicing silent communication.

During the snack and free time, have the adults present not use speech at all. They can use their hands and bodies to help convey messages but NO WORDS. At a predetermined time cease the silent communication. Discuss with the participants what they thought. Was it hard to communicate? Were they surprised? Did they find themselves beginning to become silent as well? Wrap up the discussion. Pass out the poem by Lauren Sauter for them to take home.

Complete the session with a prayer or service of the church.

God's Language

by Lauren Sauter

What strange language is this?
With its enchanting syllables,
And its exotic sounds?
Can it be, has it finally been found?
Is it – Yes! It is indeed,
The Language of God
After years of searching,
And defeat, time after time again;
The Language has been found
Indeed, it took no more searching,
Then going to Church takes trouble.
The Search was so hard,
And yet, the Heart and Soul needed only to be opened
In truth, the Search would have been simple,
Had Belief only been apart of it.
But it makes no difference now,
For the Language has been found
And guess where it was,
During all those years of searching:
It was in my Heart, with my Savior,
Inside of me, all the time.

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