

WHY DO WE PRAY?
Part 1: Getting closer to God
Youth Group Session Two

Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry – Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA
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Objective: To give the participants an understanding of:

1. Two-way open communication
2. Ways in which to address and pray to God – Praise, Thanksgiving, Forgiveness, Intercession

Time: 2-3 Hours (if done in entirety)

Items Needed: Copies of worksheets, pencils or pens, bibles, poster board, markers (red, blue, green), copies of prayers to be used.

Items in blue are notes for the Session Leader.

Related books and music 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

The Orthodox Church A – Z

Fr. George Grube Light and Life Publishing www.light-n-life.com

Fruits of the Spirit – CD

Gigi Shadid. – St Romanos Records www.saintromanosrecords.com

Pre-session Preparation:

Lord's Prayer – Take the poster board and write on it the Lord Prayer. Ensure that there is at least an inch separating the lines so that things may be written in-between.

Service – Discuss with your Spiritual Father if you could end the session by celebrating either the Akathist for Creation or the Akathist Glory to God for All Things. (You can contact the Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry for copies of the services).

Begin the session with the Lord's Prayer.

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

Prior to the start of the session, ask several of the participants, in private, to ignore every one in the group except for the other people you have chosen. They should not acknowledge the other people in any way. Ask the remaining members to go and gather everyone to begin. Let this go for a few minutes. If you see frustration mounting bring the exercise to an end. Explain what you asked the others to do. Discuss how everyone felt while it was happening. How hard do we have to try to ignore someone, once we know they're there? How does it feel to be ignored?

Session for ages 5 – 8

Have the children choose a partner. Have one child try to make the other child laugh. The other child must do their best to ignore their friend at all costs. They can move around the room to avoid them. Tell them that they **cannot laugh** or they will loose the game. Once someone laughs, have the children switch places. Discuss with them how hard it was not to laugh and ignore someone. Ask them how hard it was to be ignored. How did they feel?

Following the exercise, begin the lesson below. For younger children read for them – you may want to paraphrase and ask questions or use the suggested music often to keep their interest. For older children, allow them to read aloud or to themselves.

We pray to get closer to God. God is everywhere around us at all times, but most of the time, sadly, we ignore Him. We act as if He is a stranger at a bus stop or in the waiting room at the dentist's office: someone who just happens to be at the same place we are. We don't talk to Him, we just go about our business, and every now and then, out of curiosity, we take a peek to see if He's still there. [\(Does God make His presence known to us? How does this relate to the exercise we just did?\)](#)

But God **isn't** a stranger to us; He knows us better than anyone else ever can. He created us and knows each and every one of us from before the time we are born, and will be with us "even to the end of the world." He knows our thoughts, no matter how secret. He knows all of our joys, our sorrows, our strengths, and our weaknesses...and He loves us anyway. So it only makes sense that we should get to know Him better and better everyday of our lives. The best way to get to know someone is through honest communication with Him.

Of course, our communication with God is different than what it would be with just anyone we want to get to know. [\(What classes do you take? Got any hobbies?\)](#) There are certain special messages that we should send to God as we learn to pray without ceasing. We should pray:

- **To praise and glorify Him**
- **To thank Him**
- **To ask His forgiveness for the sins we've committed.**

Only then can we ask Him for His continued blessings and for special needs.

To Praise and Glorify

To praise and glorify means to show that we think highly of someone or something. There is no one or no thing that we should ever think more highly of than God!

The word "praise" is used often today: to praise someone for singing beautifully, or for being smart, or for doing anything well...even when an animal learns a trick! And we enjoy being praised when we do a good job; this is natural and fine. The thing to remember, though, is that all of our talents and abilities come from God, so the praise is actually due to Him. When someone compliments you, you should say thank you, of course, but also a small prayer: "Glory to God."

[\(Discuss that God is due praise for much more than our talents...we can't comprehend His greatness, etc.\)](#)

Read Psalm 66. There are many beautiful songs of praise in the book of Psalms.

To Thank

"Thanking prayers" are usually the first prayers we learn when we are young. We thank God for our food, our families, and other blessings that we see around us. We must never take any of these things for granted and should continue to thank Him for them. To pray without ceasing, we show our thanks not only in words, but also by treating these blessings well.

As we get older, we must learn to also thank God for the things we can't see or understand. Our lives, even when we are having problems, are part of God's plan for mankind. As we learn to trust Him, we can give thanks to just be a part of this marvelous plan. [\(Excerpts from the *Akathyst for Creation or Glory to God for All Things are a great illustration of this.*\)](#)

To Ask Forgiveness

When we pray we must honestly look at ourselves and ask God's forgiveness for what we've done wrong. When we ask Him to "forgive us our trespasses," we should take a few moments to think about what those trespasses are. Yes, God already knows what we've done. That is why we ask Him to forgive us for the things we've done "voluntarily and involuntarily...in knowledge or in ignorance." We can tell God

anything, even the things that we are too embarrassed to tell anyone one else. It's important for us to think about the sins we know we have committed. Then we can honestly apologize and work to do better.

Each time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we ask God to forgive us in the same way "as we forgive those who trespass against us." These are strong words! Unless we sincerely forgive the people who hurt us, we are saying that we don't need God to forgive us! Of course this isn't true...we need Him to forgive us and help us in our dealings with others. Forgiving someone, right away, is another way to pray without ceasing. (Take the time to have a short discussion on true meaning of forgiveness. This is a whole lesson in and of itself, but take the time to hit a few major points.)

Jesus Christ taught us the Lord's Prayer. How are praise, thanksgiving, and forgiveness included? (At this point, take out or indicate the Lord's Prayer on the poster board. Have the participants take turns going to the prayer and using the different colored markers, indicate what parts of the prayer are praise(blue), thanksgiving(green), and forgiveness(red).

Now that we've praised and thanked God and asked Him for forgiveness, we can ask Him for the things we *think* we need. Some people believe that if they ask God for something and then don't get it, He's not listening to their prayers. They forget that God knows best and that the things we ask for may not be what's best for us. God **always** hears your prayer, and **always** answers it. But sometimes the answer is "no" or "not right now." (Discuss times when this has happened with their parents or other authority figures.) He tells us to ask for things (Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you), but to trust and respect His answer. Read 1 John 5:14 -15.

"Now this is the confidence we have in Him, that if we ask anything _____according to His will _____, He hears us"

Praying for Others

Prayer is a sign of love: our love for God and our love for other people. We pray for the people that we know and love, for strangers in the world, for our enemies, and for the departed. These prayers for others are called "intercessions." To *intercede* means to act for someone else.

Knowing that everyone in the world needs God's help, we add our prayers to theirs. If God hears each one of us, imagine how He hears a whole group of us praying for the same person! We also pray for others because they may not be able to pray for themselves. We pray for the departed, asking God to give them good rest and forgiveness. We pray for our enemies because only God knows what is in their hearts and we don't want their hatred of us to bring them to further sin.

When we pray for others who we know, we should pray for them by name. Remember, God knows each of them, too.

Our prayer books have *petitions* that include the people for whom we should intercede. There is a simple way to remember everyone you pray for when you don't have a prayer book.

Look at your hand. It is a gift from God that helps you almost every minute of the day. You cannot forget your hand! You can also use your hand to remember what we have learned today. (At this point have them trace their hand on a blank piece of paper. Then begin the next section.)

Next to or inside your thumb write – Those who are closest to me. In this way you can begin praying for those easiest for you to remember.

Next to or inside your index finger write - Teach, Instruct, Heal. Your pointer finger “points” the way and gives direction. People who teach, instruct and heal such as clergy, teachers, doctors and missionaries need wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to “point” those they are with in the right direction.

Next to or inside you middle finger write – Leaders. Your middle finger is the tallest finger. Leaders such as Bishops, government officials, administrators and leaders in business need God's guidance to make good

decisions. They make decisions that are for and affect all of us on a daily basis. Their leadership influences one to millions of people.

Next to or inside your ring finger write – Those in trouble, pain or departed. The ringer finger is the weakest of all fingers. It is the only finger that does not have an independent tendon to make it work. This will help to remind you to pray for those who are weakened by pain, sorrow, stress, troubles or have left his life. These people are in constant need of prayer.

Next to or inside your pinkie finger write – Me. Your pinkie finger is the smallest. This will help you to remember that your relationship in respect to God and all the other people you have prayer for. Once you have prayed for others, you should have a better understanding and perspective of your own blessings, needs, and troubles.

AT THIS POINT HAVE A BREAK FOR RESTROOM AND SOME SNACKS OR A MEAL. FOR SMALLER CHILDREN – GIVE THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO RUN AND PLAY SOME GAMES.

WHY DO WE PRAY? Part 2: The Holy Spirit lives in us

Do you remember what happened as soon Jesus came out of the Jordan after He was baptized?

_____the Holy Spirit came down on Him_____

The same thing happened to you when you were baptized! When you came out of the baptismal water, you were anointed with oil as the seal of the Holy Spirit, the sign that God has adopted you as one of His children and sent His Spirit to live in you, making you a temple of God. This Mystery is called Chrismation, because the oil used by the priest is called Holy Chrism. (If you have time, you can discuss the Mystery in more detail: where on their body they were anointed and why, where the Chrism comes from, what is the difference between Christ and Holy Oil etc. You may also discuss other times that anointing takes place such as Holy Unction, Great and Holy Wednesday, Feast Days, etc.)

As a child of God, it's only natural that you should communicate with your Father often. The life of the Holy Spirit within you gives you another important reason to pray. Just as you need to exercise your muscles to keep them strong and growing, prayer is the "work out" for the holy part of you...and that part is just as real as your heart and other muscles. Prayer is part of your "total fitness program!"

But the wonderful thing about the Holy Spirit is that He actually gives us the power to pray. Read John 14: 16-18. What does Jesus call the Holy Spirit?

_____helper_____ _____Spirit of Truth_____

With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can honestly bring our prayers to God. The more we do, the stronger the Holy Spirit grows in us. The Holy Spirit will even do the work for us when we honestly can't:: Romans 8:26.

(Maybe the Holy Spirit is groaning because we're making Him do all the work!)

With the gift of the Holy Spirit comes responsibility. We are to "bear fruits" in our life. (Discuss the vine/branches, what happens to branches w/o fruit, etc) What are the fruits of the Holy Spirit? Galatians 5:22-23 (discuss each of the fruits)

_____love_____ _____joy_____

_____peace_____ _____Long-suffering (patience) _____

_____kindness_____ _____goodness_____

_____faithfulness_____ _____gentleness_____

_____self-control_____

Prayer will help us bear these fruits and show the world around us the wonderful gift that is a life with God.

End the session with the Prayer for our enemies. Lord Jesus Christ, in Your great mercy You prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified You, and You taught us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. Lord, I pray that You forgive those who treat me unjustly and speak out against me, and that You bless them and guide them according to Your will. Take away any bitterness I may have in my heart against them. Lord, may Your forgiveness, goodness and love be revealed in all of us, to Your praise and glory. Amen

Final Thought from the Church Fathers: Prayer is a conversation directly with God, being always with God, having one's soul united with Him and one's mind inseparable. A person becomes one with the angels and unites with them in perpetual praise and longing for God.
-St. Symeon of Thessaloniki

Supplemental Materials:

The Prologue of Ochrid

A true friend prays to God for his friend. A true friend cares about the salvation of his friend's soul. To draw a friend back from false ways and set him on the true path - that is a precious friendship. The saints of God are a man's greatest friends.

The two young men, Barnabas and Saul, were friends and went together to Gamaliel's school. When Barnabas became a Christian, he persistently and with tears prayed to God that He would enlighten Saul's understanding and turn his heart, that he too might become a Christian. Barnabas often spoke to Saul about Christ the Lord, but Saul mocked him and thought him misguided.

But the gracious Lord did not leave Barnabas's prayer unfruitful. He appeared to Saul, turned him from the false way and set him on the way of truth. The converted Saul fell at the feet of his friend and cried: "O Barnabas, teacher of the truth, now I am convinced of the truth of what you said to me about Christ!"

Barnabas wept for joy and embraced his friend. The friend saved his friend's soul by his fervent prayer. If Barnabas had succeeded in making Paul Emperor of Rome, he would have done less than he in fact did by bringing him to the truth by his prayers.

Song *Fruit of the Spirit* by Khouriya Gigi Shadid can be used for younger children.

You could purchase online at StRomanosRecords.com or download an order form at gsquareproductions.com.