



Y **TALKS**
DISCIPLE

Series: PRAYER
PRAY UNCEASINGLY



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STUDY OVERVIEW

Today's teens have an endless supply of options at the tips of their fingers. Everything from sports to music, fast food venues to movies, high school classes to future colleges—most teens do not lack for options in this life. With the greatest of intentions (and some parental promptings), many teens attempt to put as much on their plates as possible, filling their lives with activities, sports, school, and social engagements that will one day make their college and job applications look spectacular. But in the frenzy to do as much as possible, are they leaving out time for the one thing that really matters in this life?

God's greatest desire for us is to be in relationship with Him—it's exactly what He created us for. So it's no wonder that in the midst of our incredibly busy lives, we can feel an emptiness and wonder what is missing in a life that is seemingly so full. In this study, teens will discover that God wants us to be in constant conversation with Him—to pray unceasingly. When teens include God in every aspect of their daily lives, decisions become easier, directions become clearer, and the fruits of the Spirit are easily recognized. Prayer is the foundation of our relationship with the Father, and when we pray unceasingly, God promises to move in and through us as we grow deeper in our walk with Him.

| <i>Time</i> | <i>Section</i> | <i>Section Overview</i> |
|-------------|--|---|
| 10 minutes | Dig In  | Teens will create timelines of their day to have a visual of where God fits into their lives. |
| 5 minutes | Plant Seeds  | Read I Thessalonians 5:16-18 and open in prayer. |
| 45 minutes | Sink Roots  | Teens will watch and discuss a video. Scene 1 – Great Intentions Scene 2 – The Discipline of Consistency Scene 3 – Lots of Options |
| 15 minutes | Live It!  | Scene 4 – Freedom to Grow Teens will consider how prayer offers them freedom and help them grow. |
| 5 minutes | Take It to Prayer  | Teens will reflect on God’s most wonderful creation and their own personal relationship with Him. |
| 5 minutes | Bear Fruit  | Teens will use their timelines to figure out how to include God in every aspect of their lives. |

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

- **Bible**
- **Roll of paper (or sheets of flip chart paper)**
- **Colorful markers**
- **Computer, tablet or other screen for showing the segments**
- **A handheld mirror for each teen in your group**

PREPARE IN ADVANCE:

- Consider the activities of your day and create a timeline of your own to use an example for the Dig In activity.



DIG IN

Start this session with a project that will get teens thinking about making time for God in the course of their activity-filled days.

As teens arrive, greet them and ask them each about their day to get them thinking about what they'll be writing down for this activity.



According to research conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, today's teens spend more than 7½ hours a day consuming media—that includes watching TV, listening to music, surfing the Web, social networking, and playing video games. The majority of a teen's media consumption is done on a mobile device such as a smartphone or tablet. Interestingly, media consumption correlates to how kids do in school—47 percent of the heaviest media users (those who consumed 16 hours a day of media) had mostly C's or lower, compared to only 23 percent who consumed media three hours a day.

SAY: Welcome! We're going to start out our session today with an activity that will give you a visual picture of how you spend your days. Each of you will receive a 2-foot sheet of roll paper. You'll have five minutes to create a timeline of your day—for example, you may write down that at 6:15 a.m. you woke up, at 6:20 a.m. you took a shower, and at 6:45 a.m. you ate cereal for breakfast. Be creative! You can use words to create your timeline, or you can draw pictures to represent your day's activities. Start from when you woke up to when you arrived at small group.

Distribute 2-foot lengths of paper and markers. Allow time for teens to create their timelines. If you created a personal timeline, share it as an example.



SAY: Well, it looks like you all have very FULL days! As you look at your timeline and reflect on how you spend your time, take a few moments to think about these questions in relation to your day:

- What are things you spend most of your time doing each day? Who are the people you spend most of your time with?
- When, if at all, does time with God fit into your day?

It's easy to become so consumed with the busyness of the day that we neglect things that are important to us. Today we're going to explore what it means to "pray unceasingly." God wants to be part of every moment of our day—we're going to discover how we can be in conversation with God throughout our day, every day.

Have teens set aside their timelines for the closing activity.



PLANT SEEDS



READ: *"Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* — 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18



OPENING PRAYER

PRAY: Jesus, we want to answer Your call to pray unceasingly. Lord, help us to follow Your example of prayer—both private and public. Give us the desire to be in constant conversation and communication with You so that we may grow closer and deeper in relationship with you. In Christ's name, Amen.



SINK ROOTS

SCENE 1

This clip will last approximately 4 minutes.



The following is a summary of the video segment:

- In life, we often have great intentions, but things don't always go according to plan.
- You need to know where you want to go, your desired destination. Intentions will get you nowhere.
- To pray unceasingly simply means to have a consistent prayer life.
- Praying unceasingly means that you are in constant communication with God.



When the video pauses, have your teens take a moment to discuss these questions:

- **What are some things you intend to do in the upcoming week? Month? Year? Do you think you'll do those things? Why or why not?**
- **Who is someone that you stay in constant communication with? How do you communicate with that person?**



According to a Common Sense Media research study, 49 percent of teens said their favorite way to communicate with friends is in person because it's more fun and they can understand what people really mean better. The next favorite way to communicate is via texting; 33 percent of teens prefer this method because it's quick, easy, and gives them time to think about how to respond. They also feel it's more private.

According to research done by the Fuller Youth Institute, only about half of church-going, graduating seniors pray once a day; the other half pray on occasion or not at all.

After the discussion, start the video to begin the next scene.

SCENE 2

This clip will last approximately 6 minutes.



The following is a summary of the video segment:

- We should be in constant communication with God.
- We need to make a commitment to be in a good relationship with God.
- When we have discipline, it produces great fruit.



"We must pray without ceasing, in every occurrence and employment of our lives—that prayer which is rather a habit of lifting up the heart to God as in a constant communication with Him." —St. Elizabeth Ann Seton



When the video pauses, have your teens take a moment to discuss these questions:

- **When you're in a close relationship, why is it important to be in constant communication with that person?**
- **Why is discipline hard for us sometimes? What are the rewards of discipline?**
- **How do you think your relationship with God would change if you were in constant communication with Him rather than just occasionally praying to Him?**

After the discussion, start the video to begin the next scene.

SCENE 3

This clip will last approximately 8 minutes.



The following is a summary of the video segment:

- We live in a culture where we have tons of options; sometimes we make God one of these “options.”
- The cure for “optionitis” is God and prayer—it centers us on what’s most important in life.
- When we don’t pray, we end up in situations of doing things we shouldn’t be doing.
- We need to eliminate options that keep us from spending time with God



When the video pauses, have teens take a moment to discuss these questions, which are also found on their Teen Sheets:

- **Why do you think you risk making poor choices when you aren't praying regularly?**
- **What do your options say about what is important in your life?**
- **What options do you need to eliminate because they hinder you from spending time with God?**



Teenage peer pressure has a distinct effect on brain signals involving risk and reward, according to a study done by Temple University. When teens are in the presence of friends, their decisions are prompted by the brain's reward system to drown out warning signals about risk, tipping the balance toward reward. A relationship with Jesus—who wants to be our best friend—is so important in the teenage years. When teens are in constant contact with their eternal Best Friend, their decisions are more likely to be influenced by God's will rather than the pressure of their friends.

*"It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."
—J.K. Rowling, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

After the discussion, start the video to begin the next scene.

SCENE 4

This clip will last approximately 3 minutes.



The following is a summary of the video segment:

- Prayer fulfills our very desires and intentions.
- Prayer helps us to know God; we have total and complete access to Him at all times.
- Our desire is to know God in our hearts.
- Prayer gives us what we desire, which is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17).

- The more we pray, the more God begins to grow and move in our lives.
- When we don't pray consistently, the fruits of the Spirit begin to shut down in our lives.

Direct teens to their Teen Sheets. Give them a few minutes to answer the questions, and then encourage them to share and discuss their responses.



When the video pauses, have your teens take a moment to discuss these questions:

- **How can prayer and spending time with God give us freedom?**
- **In what ways would you like to grow in your spiritual life? How can prayer help you to grow in these areas?**
- **How will you make talking to God consistently a priority in your life?**

“Prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus.” —St. Therese of Lisieux



Encourage teens to use technology as a way to help them keep their commitment to consistent prayer. Tell teens to set different alarms on their smartphones that have memos on things to pray for throughout the day. For example, they may set an alarm at 7:30 a.m. with a memo to pray for the staff at their school; 11:00 a.m. they can give a word of thanks for a friend; 3:00 p.m. they can be reminded to ask God to help them keep their commitments to school work; at 6:00 p.m. they can pray for someone in another time zone; and at 9:00 p.m. they can be still for ten minutes to listen for God's voice before they get ready for bed. Making time with God a priority takes discipline for people at any age, so encourage your teens to be creative in remembering to take time out to talk to God.



TAKE IT TO PRAYER

Direct the teens to their Teen Sheets. Teens can do this activity in the upcoming week to incorporate what they've discussed in this session into prayer. Encourage them to take time during the week to enter into this prayer experience.



Take time before this study to try this exercise yourself. Your personal reflection will inspire the teens to experience this prayer activity on their own.

SAY: God's greatest desire is to be in relationship with us, for us to communicate and share everything with Him. God created us for this very purpose! Let's have a volunteer read Romans 8:38-39.

READ: *"For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

What a promise! There is absolutely nothing that can ever separate us from God's love for us. For our closing prayer today, we're going to have each person pray silently to begin and then I will close. I'm going to give each of you a mirror. As you look into the mirror at your reflection, meditate on the truth that you were created in God's image, that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Remember that you were created to be in relationship with God and that He wants to be your best friend. Take some time in silent prayer to thank God for His amazing creation and purpose for you.

Give each teen a handheld mirror. Allow one to two minutes for teens to pray silently. Then close the prayer time by asking teens to join you in praying the Our Father prayer.

SAY: I challenge you to use this prayer idea at home. Every time you look into the mirror, thank God for creating you and renew your commitment to growing closer in your relationship with Him.



Let teens take their handheld mirrors home, if possible. For extra impact, have teens use permanent markers to print Romans 8:38-39 on the back of their mirrors.



BEAR FRUIT

Teens will need their timelines from the Dig In activity and plenty of colorful markers.

SAY: Our study today revealed a lot about becoming so busy and having so many options in life that we can easily put Jesus on the back burner. We learned that God wants to be part of every aspect of our lives, that He wants us to be in constant communication with Him.

Take a look back at your timeline. For each event you wrote down, use a different colored marker to write a word or phrase of how you could communicate to God during that activity. It doesn't have to be all wordy or holy—think of what you'd say if you were talking to one of your friends. It could be a prayer of thanks, help, a question, or just the silence of listening for God's voice in the moment.

Allow five minutes for teens to add to their timelines. If there's time, you may choose to have teens share about what they created with the group.

SAY: I encourage you to display your timeline in your room, locker, or prayer space as a reminder to include your Best Friend in every aspect of your life!

There are additional ideas on your Teen Sheets to help you begin to strengthen your relationship with God and remind you to pray so you can tap into the greatest power on earth.



CLOSING PRAYER

SAY: Let's close our time together by once again praying the prayer that Jesus taught us, His friends, to pray:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.**

Encourage teens to use their imagination as a way to pray. Have them close their eyes and imagine a place in the world that breaks God's heart, such as a developing country or an impoverished community in your city. Then, with their eyes closed, have teens envision being a difference-maker in that place. What could they do to instill change or leverage influence? Then tell them to pray that God will use them in great ways in the place He's put on their hearts.

LEADER TIPS

*"We must pray without tiring, for the salvation of mankind does not depend upon material success...but on Jesus alone."
—St. Frances Xavier Cabrini*

Use this video clip from the movie Soul Surfer as an example to teens of how to talk to God about every aspect of their lives: wingclips.com/movie-clips/soul-surfer/why-did-this-happen. Bethany is talking and questioning her earthly father with conversation that she's also having with her heavenly Father. Remind teens that praying unceasingly is like having a conversation with your best friend about everything that happens throughout your day.



ADDITIONAL BEAR FRUIT IDEAS

Leaders, the following ideas are also on the Teen Sheets. You may want to do a couple of these on your own and share with your group the next time you get together.

- **The Examen:** This ancient form of prayer challenges you to think back over the last week or month. What were the moments that you were most grateful, and when you were most ungrateful? When did you feel you received God's love the most? The least? When were you paying attention to evidence of God's love for the world? When did you ignore it? After you take time to reflect, spend time thanking God for the gift of today and ask Him to guide you and that you will be aware of and feel His presence in your life in the days to come.
- **Pray the Arts:** If you're more of a creative soul, use your artistic side to pray. Create a prayer journal with sketches of people, things, or scenes that God has placed on your heart to pray for. If you play music, use your instruments or voice to praise Jesus. If you love to dance, use your motions to speak the words that your voice may not be able to communicate. Remember that God hears you in whatever language or method you use to speak to Him.
- **Pray from the Heart:** Watch this video clip from the movie Bruce Almighty: wingclips.com/movie-clips/bruce-almighty/thats-a-prayer. Listen to Bruce's prayer and reflect on how simple his words are, how his words come from the heart. Use this example as a reminder of how we don't need to use fancy words or phrases when we talk to God; we just need to talk to Him as a friend.