



# COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

## Know God / Week 2

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

### BOTTOM LINE

Prayer helps us know God better.

### GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students see prayer as a conversation with a friend, not a vending machine.

## SCRIPTURE

*The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth (Psalm 145:18 NIV).*

*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped **giving thanks** for you, **remembering** you in my prayers. I keep **asking** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better (Ephesians 1:15-17 NIV, emphasis added).*

### CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE

The verse from *Psalm* reminds us that God is near to everyone who calls on him—not just good people, not just perfect people, and not just people who pray the right way. This is great news for us today, because this means that any time we talk to God, we're close to God—because He's close to us.

In the *Ephesians* passage we see Paul encouraging the church in Ephesus. For this particular message, we're less concerned with what he says and more focused on the fact that Paul used prayer three unique ways.

## TEACHING OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

What is the best vending machine snack?

There's nothing worse than holding up your end of the deal, but then not getting the thing that you expect in return.

### TENSION

Have you ever prayed and gotten nothing?

When you put yourself out there and pray about them—but the prayer isn't answered—it leaves you with a question that we've probably all asked: *Does prayer even work?*

It may seem strange to you, but I want you to imagine God as a friend.

So if none of our other friendships are like vending machines, why do we think our relationship with God should work that way?



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## TEACHING OUTLINE

What if there's more to prayer than just asking and expecting to get something?

### TRUTH

When it came to God, David *knew Him*.

David says that the Lord is near to *all who call on him*.

That means any time you talk to God, you're close to God—because He's close to you.

See, prayer draws us near to God. Which is a big deal. Because while we *do* want our prayers answered, we also want to know that God hasn't left us.

Thousands of years after David's life, we get some insight into how the apostle Paul talked to God.

Paul mentions giving thanks, remembering people he cared about, and asking for God's help.

Conversations with friends happen in a lot of different ways, depending on the circumstances. And that's how Paul prayed—in lots of different ways.

Paul knew that the best thing was to know God better so that no matter the answer to our prayers, we could believe that God had our best in mind all the time.

Prayer helps us know God better.

Whatever the outcome, developing the habit of praying will help you know God better, which will help you trust His heart more.

### APPLICATION

Taking a cue from the way Paul prayed, here are a few things we can try: 1) Say thanks 2) Be honest 3) Give praise. 4) Ask

No matter what you do, the goal should be the same: connecting with God and knowing Him better.

### LANDING

The truth is, you want more than a vending machine God. You and I need a God who's bigger than us.

## INTERACTIVE

This Interactive happens during the Introduction. As you talk about vending machines, scroll through a few photos of them. Also, as you talk about what the best vending machine snack is, allow a few students to answer. Or, if your group is

small enough, host a mini-debate, giving a few students the chance to share why the snack they've chosen is the best vending machine snack.



# TEACHING SCRIPT

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## BOTTOM LINE

PRAYER HELPS US KNOW GOD BETTER.

## INTRODUCTION

1 MINUTE

I have a very important question, and it's a big question, so I don't want you to answer too quickly.

What is the best vending machine snack?



## INTERACTIVE

The Interactive for this message happens right here in the script. Check out the Communicator Guide that precedes this script to find out what to do here.

When I was a kid, my answer was Skittles. 100%, without question. If I went to a vending machine, Skittles in my hand was the outcome. And this is probably strange, but I loved it when the vending machine started moving and I could see those Skittles in motion!

These days, vending machines aren't just for snacks. There are vending machines for things like movies, headphones, and even cupcakes. Recently at the airport, I saw a vending machine that sold acne-medicine, which seems a little weird.

But there's something I hate about vending machines. Some of you may have experienced this, too. Have you ever had that moment when you paid for something, hit the button, then your snack got stuck?

I mean, is there ANYTHING worse than seeing a fresh bag of Skittles dangling from its row, but not *actually* free-falling to the bottom tray?

The answer is NO, people! There's nothing worse than holding up your end of the deal, but then not getting the thing that you expect in return.

## TENSION

3 MINUTES

But if you think about it, there are actually a lot of situations in life that happen like this. You do your part and take the right steps, but things *don't* go the way you expect. And today we're going to talk about one area where this can happen.

### Prayer.

Have you ever prayed and gotten nothing?

Now, I'm not talking about some of our more trivial prayers—although God is totally fine with us praying those prayers, too. Things like our favorite college football team winning on Saturday. Or for people to compliment our new hairstyle. Or for a bunch of people to like our latest post. If prayers like this go unanswered, it's disappointing, but we get it.

But then there's the other stuff we pray for that feels like a bigger deal. Maybe you've prayed for . . .

- A passing grade in a class that's really hard for you, but you still didn't pass.
- A prom date. Or any date. To anything. But it still hasn't happened.
- Making the team. Varsity would've been great, but you didn't even make JV.
- A friend. Maybe you've been praying for a good, solid group of friends and it just hasn't happened.
- A sick family member to get better, but she got worse.

These are real requests that are a big deal to us. So when you put yourself out there and pray about them—but the prayer isn't answered—it leaves you with a question that we've probably all asked:

*Does prayer even work?*

This question almost always leads to more questions like:

- *Am I doing it wrong?*
- *Is God mad at me?*
- *Does God hear me at all?*
- *Does He care?*
- *What's the point of prayer?*

Last week we talked about how knowing God is about a relationship. And like any other friendship you have, knowing God is about spending time with Him and getting to know Him better.

It may seem strange to you, but I want you to imagine God as a friend. When you see Him that way, it changes the way you interact with Him, including through prayer.

Think about it. **Chances are none of your other friendships function like a vending machine.** You don't *only* talk to your friends if you want something. You don't blame your



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friends if you're struggling in a class or with a teacher. You don't abandon your friends if they don't have \$5 to lend you at Taco Bell.

**So if none of our other friendships are like vending machines, why do we think our relationship with God should work that way?**

I'm not saying you can't ask God for stuff. He's a perfect Heavenly Father—He loves hearing from you, no matter what you're talking about!

**I'm just saying this: What if there's more to prayer than just asking and expecting to get something?**

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## TRUTH

5 MINUTES

Last week, we talked about a guy named David. He was the little guy who killed a giant named Goliath and eventually became king of Israel. He made some good choices in his life, and some really bad ones, too. But when it came to God, *David knew Him*.

In fact, thousands of years later, David became known as "A man after God's own heart." And here's one thing David says about prayer:

*The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth (Psalm 145:18 NIV).*

What this verse *doesn't* say is almost as good as what it does.

Because David *doesn't* say . . .

- "The Lord is near to good people who call on him."
- Or, "The Lord is near to people who call on him with the right combination of fancy words."

No, he says that the Lord is near to *all who call on him*. Think about that for a second. That means any time you talk to God, you're close to God—because He's close to you. Any time you have a conversation with Him, you're deepening your relationship.

Which makes sense, because most of our other friendships work that way, too. The more real and honest conversations we have with our friends, the closer we get to them.

See, **prayer draws us near to God**. Which is a big deal. Because while we *do* want our prayers answered, we also want to know that God hasn't left us. Isn't the toughest part of having a prayer go unanswered wondering things like, *Can God hear me? And, Is He really out there?*

According to David, that one is a no-brainer. God hears you. Every single time. And not just that, He's close—even if you don't get what you want. It never changes how God feels about you.

# TEACHING SCRIPT



Thousands of years after David's life, we get some insight into how the apostle Paul talked to God.

*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped **giving thanks** for you, **remembering** you in my prayers. I keep **asking** that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better (Ephesians 1:15-17 NIV, emphasis added).*

Paul mentions giving thanks, remembering people he cared about, and asking for God's help. His prayers weren't all just about one thing. In fact, when you read some of Paul's other prayers, they were all over the place!

But when you think about it, that's what it's like when you talk with your friends. You do things like . . .

- Laugh.
- Ask questions.
- Tell stories.
- Reminisce on old times.
- Complain.
- Joke.
- Tell them stuff you don't tell anyone else.

Conversations with friends happen in a lot of different ways, depending on the circumstances.

And that's how Paul prayed—in lots of different ways. In this passage, he prays for his friends. But he doesn't pray that they get everything they want. He prayed that God would help them get to know Him better.

See, Paul understood that the best thing for his friends' faith wasn't to get everything they wanted. It was to get to know God better so that no matter the answer, they could believe that God had their best in mind all the time. Why? Because they *knew* Him, and they knew that He was crazy about them!

When you and I get to know God well enough to trust Him, prayer will simply remind us that He's looking out for our best interest. It doesn't mean we get what we want all the time. Sometimes God's objective is different from ours.

When we trust God, we don't fill in the gaps or silence with negative assumptions. When our prayers aren't answered, we don't assume that God has abandoned us. Why? Because we know Him. And that, quite simply, is what prayer does.

**Prayer helps us know God better.**

And here's what's cool. Sometimes, God answers our requests and graciously gives us exactly what we asked for. Sometimes it's a slow process and we don't recognize the prayer being answered because it happens in a different way than we expected.



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Sometimes, however, it feels like we got the opposite of what we asked for. And that's frustrating; I totally get it. **But whatever the outcome, developing the habit of praying will help you know God better, which will help you trust His heart more.** Which ultimately, will build your faith.

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## APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

So, taking a cue from the way Paul prayed, here are a few things we can try . . .

1. **Say thanks.** There are so many benefits for you when you express gratitude to God. This point alone could be an entire sermon! But for now, just know that it's one way you can pray.
2. **Be honest.** Sometimes when we pray, we feel like we have to have it all together or act more formal than we do in real life. We talk to God like He's our state governor. But we can be real with Him. So a great practice for you today is to be honest and real with God. Be honest about stuff you struggle with. Be real about how you're feeling about things. God won't strike you with lightning for not saying the right things. He's a good Dad who cares about you and wants you to talk about stuff that's *actually* happening in your heart.
3. **Give praise.** When we praise God for being strong, kind, or trustworthy, it's a way of complimenting Him while reminding ourselves that He is all of those things. Even when we don't feel like He is good or awesome, when we praise Him, we help our feelings align with the truth.
4. **Ask.** Asking God for something isn't wrong. In fact, the Bible teaches us to bring all of our requests to God. But maybe this week you could also try asking for someone else: Pray for your friends, siblings, parents, teachers, or enemies. Or just pick one person and pray for him or her over the next couple of weeks.

Prayer isn't a formula. Neither are conversations with your friends. You don't always connect with them the same way. This week, try mixing it up.

But no matter what you do, the goal should be the same: connecting with God and knowing Him better.

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## LANDING

1 MINUTE

The truth is, you want more than a vending machine God. You need more than a just-pray-and-you'll-get-whatever-you-want Heavenly Father. In fact, I remember times in the



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past when I asked—even begged—God for things that would’ve ultimately hurt me. But God knew what I didn’t know in that moment. And He had my best interest in mind, even though I didn’t trust Him then. He was still close by, even though I assumed that He abandoned me.

You and I need a God who’s bigger than us. A God who can see things more clearly than we can. A God who’s mysterious sometimes. Someone who loves us more than we love ourselves.

And what’s awesome is that you can have conversations with a God like that, in the very same way you can talk to a friend.



## TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS

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