

## Prayer – Eighth Grade

*In his book Celebration of Discipline, upon which this curriculum is loosely based, Richard Foster says of prayer, “prayer catapults us onto the frontier of the spiritual life.” For many of us, prayer is a familiar practice, and a wholly unfamiliar one all at the same time. We know to pray over meals and during church services, we know to pray for exams or when something terrible has happened, but we don’t know much of the kind of prayer that joins our breath in sustaining us throughout the day. The goal of this session is to help students unpack their presumptions and experiences around prayer, to turn to Scripture to be reminded and encouraged by God’s own words about prayer, and then, to give students space and time to practice the discipline of prayer themselves.*

### Introducing the Subject

*For most of our students, prayer is something familiar to them. However, we often find it difficult to articulate what we believe about things that seem very familiar. We want to give students time at the beginning of this session to share what they have already learned about prayer and experienced of it. We want to take some time to assess what they already think and believe about the practice.*

-Do you pray?

- If yes, when? What prompts you to pray when you do?
- What do you pray about the most often?
- Have you ever seen an answer to prayers?
- Is there anything you’ve prayed for that you feel like God never answered?

-Do you enjoy praying? What has made prayer enjoyable for you? What has made it unenjoyable?

-What do you think the point of praying is?

-Do you think prayer makes God change things?

### Scripture Study

*As you transition to the Scripture Study portion of this session, remind students that Scripture is where we turn for truth. We want to continually reiterate that we study Scripture not just for the “Christian take” on a matter, but God’s revealed word, given to us out of love for our good.*

-Today, we’re going to look at Scripture to see WHY we pray. For many of us, it’s hard to do something when we don’t know why we’re doing it. Prayer isn’t just to make us feel good- there is power in prayer.

-Turn to Exodus 32:7-14. Read it together as a group, and then discuss the following questions.

-In your own words, explain what happened in this story.

-Why did God change His mind?

-Why does this matter? Why does it matter that God changed what He was going to do?

-Prayer doesn't just change God's heart. It changes ours. In fact, it changes us first and foremost. Richard Foster said, "To pray is to change." Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives. The closer we come to the heartbeat of God the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ." Let's read more about the role prayer plays in changing us.

-Read Psalm 145: 18, Philippians 4:6-7, and Hebrews 4:16 together and ask your group these questions:

-What does this verse say happens when we pray?

-Do you see any recurring themes or imagery in these verses? *Repeated in these verses, is the idea that prayer is a coming before God, or that in response to our prayers, God draws near to us. Prayer brings intimacy between us and God!*

-What happens because of drawing near to God in these verses?

### Practical Application

*In this portion of the session, we want to take what we've learned about WHY we pray and look at what in our lives and in our own hearts we think needs to change. Prayer is the first, foundational, and most critical step in changing anything. We want to give our students space and time to plan to pray!*

-Ask students, "What are things around you that you feel need to change?" *Ex: parents fighting, a friend struggling with a health crisis, or maybe something they've seen on the news.* As they share, remind them that we are all very limited in our ability to control the world around us, and we can often feel frustrated at our own inability to change things. But we know the One who has the power to do anything.

-Encourage students to write down what they want God to do in regard to those things they feel need to change. Once they've written a few things down, give them space to share if they want. *There are no bad prayers. But we do want to encourage students to pray bold prayers. If their prayers are vague, or for things that God already promises to do (ex: wanting God to love someone or be there for them, He's already doing that!) Celebrate their vulnerability in sharing, and the heart of their prayer, but encourage them to pray for something more tangible!* Then, take some time as a group to spread out and pray, and ask God to step into those situations.

-Ask students to think of some things that have been going on in their own lives, things that have been on their minds a lot. Encourage them to write all of those things down as well.

-Encourage students to share if they're willing. Then encourage them to take time to tell God what's been weighing on them. Not because He doesn't know, but because information isn't intimacy, and God's heart is for us to know Him intimately.

-Encourage students to make at least one request of God for themselves. Something specific. Something that is more that God has already promised and sworn by Himself to do for them.

-Pray over your students! Use your priesthood, if you feel it would benefit your group, have them pray over each other! Be sure to make note of prayer requests that were made, and follow up next week on how God has been answering them!