

UNLEASHED

*A Missionary Discipleship Group on **Personal Prayer***



UNLEASHED

UNLEASHED: PERSONAL PRAYER

WELCOME

IMPORTANT DETAILS ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

(Pg. 4)

PREPARE

BACKGROUND RESOURCES

(Pg. 7)

VITAL

THE VITAL BATTLE OF PRAYER

(Pg. 18)

ATTENTIVE

ACTS PRAYER

(Pg. 26)

HEART TO HEART

LECTIO DIVINA

(Pg. 34)

RHYTHM

THE ROSARY

(Pg. 42)

UNCEASING

THE JESUS PRAYER

(Pg. 50)

REFLECT

THE IGNATIAN EXAMEN

(Pg. 60)

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture passages have been taken from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic edition. Copyright ©1946, 1952, 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Quotes are taken from the English translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church for the United States of America (indicated as CCC), 2nd ed. Copyright ©1997 by United States Catholic Conference – Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Author: Chris Epplert, Aimee St. Germain, Lily Hannan, Joel Stepanek

Design: Casey Olson

Copy Edit: Lily Hannan, Caroline MacFarland

©2016 Life Teen, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this book, including interior design, cover design, and/or icons, may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, by any means (electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without prior written permission from the publisher. The information contained herein is published and produced by Life Teen, Inc. The resources and practices are in full accordance with the Roman Catholic Church. The Life Teen® name and associated logos are trademarks registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Use of the Life Teen® trademarks without prior permission is forbidden. Permission may be requested by contacting Life Teen, Inc. at 480-820-7001.

Welcome to Unleashed

Welcome to Life Teen's newest resource for high school teenagers, *Unleashed*. This missionary discipleship small group resource is designed to help teenagers grow as disciples and missionaries. Each guide will focus on a different apologetic topic in a unique way.

Unlike our *Life Night* resources and *Summit* guide, every *Unleashed* will look slightly different. Some will be book studies, while others will be apologetic training. A few will be rooted deeply in prayer and contemplation. **Every *Unleashed* is designed for small groups of six to eight teenagers that are ready to dive deep into their faith.**

Setting Up Unleashed Small Groups

The discussions and activities found in *Unleashed* are written for small groups. Each small group should have two adult facilitators to lead assigned groups and not change throughout the course of the year or, ideally, the life of the *Unleashed* Group.

Place six to eight teenagers in each small group. Since *Unleashed* small groups are more advanced, it is highly recommended that teenagers either request to be involved or are invited to be involved. Utilizing *Unleashed* for teenagers that are not yet evangelized will render the resource ineffective.

Unleashed works best in conjunction with a weekly large group gathering like Life Teen's Life Nights as well as Life Teen's *Summit* lectionary-based discipleship group. The large group gathering allows teenagers a safe place to meet other teens and adults prior to getting involved with an *Unleashed* Group.

Meeting in Unleashed Groups

Unleashed Groups allow flexibility to meet in a variety of places that may be more comfortable for teenagers, in addition to your parish youth room. *Unleashed* Groups can meet at coffee shops, at restaurants during lunch

hours, or even at a high school (if your school will permit the group to meet and adults from the parish to be present). Gather teenagers at parks or other public spaces, or even meet at your parish office. *We do not recommend meeting at the homes of Core Members or host families as it presents challenges for maintaining a safe environment and may violate child safety guidelines in many dioceses.*

Forming Teen Disciples

The goal of *Unleashed*, as is the goal of every Life Teen resource, is to help form teenagers as disciples of Christ. This is done primarily through intentional, Christ-centered relationships. *Unleashed* provides a context for evangelization and catechesis while growing in relationship with a teenager's peers and adult mentors.

It is important that Core Members invest in the lives of young people outside of *Unleashed* Groups by attending sporting events, musicals, extra-curricular activities, and by meeting parents and praying for teenagers whenever possible. Not only does this promote healthy relationships and a safe environment, but allows Core Members to form friendships with each other.

How Unleashed: Personal Prayer Works

Every *Unleashed* guide is different. This section will help you understand the unique methodology and content contained in the guide you are holding.

Unleashed: Personal Prayer explores different methods and offers different experiences of prayer.

Unleashed: Personal Prayer utilizes seven sections for each session: Welcome, Activity, Discuss, Discover, Explore, Fruits, and Challenge.

Welcome

The *Welcome* provides ideas on how to create a welcoming environment that will make the teens feel comfortable and

will help facilitate growing in relationship with each other and with God.

Activity

The *Activity* introduces the principles behind the prayer in an interactive and creative way.

Discussion

The activity is followed by a *Discussion* on specific prayer methods. Bullet points and discussion questions are found in the outline. Be sure to read over and understand the teaching before leading the small group discussion.

Discover

In the *Discover*, the teens learn about the origins and method of the prayer. Every *Discover* has an instructional handout that serves as a guide for the specific method of prayer. These handouts are found on the *May 2016 Life Teen USB* and online at www.lifeteen.com under Life Support: *May 2016*.

Explore

In the *Explore*, the teens get to try out the prayer method they just discussed.

Fruits

In the *Fruits* section, the teens come together to process the fruit of the prayer they just experienced through a small group discussion.

Challenge

The session ends with a *Challenge* for the upcoming week that pertains to the prayer method the teens explored.

Know that we are praying for you and your efforts as a Life Teen staff. Please don't hesitate to call us to share glory stories, ideas, or simply to pray. May God bless your group as you lead teenagers closer to Christ!

PREPARE

WHY PRAYER? THE TRUTH ABOUT PRAYER

By Fr. Mike Schmitz
Adapted from lifeteen.com

Does prayer really do anything?

If God cared about us, why would He need us to ask for anything before He gave it to us?

The only thing prayer does is make you feel good about yourself.

Do you ever find yourself thinking this way about prayer? Or have you heard others question prayer in this way? That's totally normal . . . you are not a freak or a "terrible Christian." It shows that you are taking prayer seriously and not just kind of "going through the motions." If prayer is going to "mean something," then it should "do something."

WHY PRAY IF GOD IS GOOD?

Hold up! If God is good, wouldn't He already be planning on doing that thing in the first place?

This question is so deep that it goes all the way to the very identity of God and the nature of the universe. We can sometimes fall into the mistaken notion that God is in control of everything. And I acknowledge that, in a general sense, that is kind of true. Everything that exists either comes directly or indirectly from God. We readily acknowledge that God is the "ground of Being"; without Him nothing at all would exist. But that is not the same thing as saying that God is "in control" of everything or that everything that happens is a "part of his plan."

In choosing to create a universe that operates according to certain "rules," God has willed to abdicate his power to a certain extent.

A FREE WORLD

In the Christian perspective, God is all-powerful, but God is also Reason. Reason is part of the very nature of who God is. Therefore, when God willed to create the universe, He was free to create it to operate somewhat "independently" of Himself. God is certainly still the Primary Cause, but He has created a universe that has both "laws of nature" and is also filled with free beings.

Because of the laws of nature, there are things like physics through which we can deduce that "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." Unless there is a suspension of this law, it will happen every time—both when a baseball player hits the ball to deep center field as well as when a stray ball hits a child in the temple. God is not the "cause" of either occasion except for the fact that He created a world based on physical laws. God created chemistry, but He does not "control" a campfire or "cause" a wildfire; the fire burns because of the "secondary cause" of reason or science (the laws of nature).

And God has also created a universe with free beings. These beings are truly free, therefore they are free to act as "secondary causes." Human beings are part of this kind of causality.

This is why we have thieves, liars, and kidnappers. But it is also why we can have doctors, nurses, judges, and teachers. Human beings are free to choose to act or not to act. And in choosing, we become causes ourselves.

GOD CARES. BUT...

When it comes to prayer (and how prayer works), it might be helpful to consider this reality. Christians believe that God exists and that God cares and acts in this world. But we also know that there are an abundance of secondary causes at work.

For example, it would be a little crazy for someone to say, “I don’t have to go to work in order to have money for food; if God wants me to have food, he will give it to me.” Absolutely not! We may be completely convinced that God loves us and still know we have to work for our daily bread.

C.S. Lewis gives the example of asking whether any of us would leave the house in a rainstorm without an umbrella under the idea that “If God doesn’t want me to get wet, he won’t let the rain fall where I am.” All Christians go through their day counting on God’s care while simultaneously making choices that make a difference. We are accustomed to being secondary causes!

In the Bible, God has revealed that He wants prayer to operate in a similar way. **There are many times when the Bible teaches us that prayer makes a difference.** In fact, it is one of the ways in which we cooperate with God’s will. In the same way your choice to give to a person in need is one way you can cooperate with God’s will to care for the poor, your decision to pray for a person is another.

Now, this doesn’t mean that everything you pray for is a part of God’s will. Sometimes what we want (even if it is a good thing) is not simply “given” because we asked for it. Sometimes God’s answer is “no”... sometimes God’s answer is “wait.” And even if we are asking for a good thing... or an end to a bad thing (like war or cancer)... sometimes we do not “get what we ask for.” Remember that this is a world where things go wrong and where people are free to choose violence rather than peace.

LET’S WORK TOGETHER

When you care for a sick person, are you changing God’s will? No. Are you making a real difference? Yes. What you are doing is *fulfilling* God’s will. You are doing your part in God’s will to make this world more and more the way He wants it to be.

Along these same lines, when you pray for another person, are you changing God’s mind? No. But your prayers make a difference because they are fulfilling what is needed for God’s will to be done. When you pray, you have become a “cause.”

In fact, that is something that has been taught for a long time. Blaise Pascal once declared, “In calling us to pray for one another, God has extended to us the dignity of becoming causes.” This reveals a great deal about the nature and identity of God. It reveals that God is the opposite of a tyrant. In Christianity, God is not a dictator, but a father who wants to work with us.

Consider the parent who makes their child do chores at home and help out around the house. At first glance, you might be tempted to think that this was because the mom or dad wanted to “lord it over” their children. But on further reflection, you would realize that it would be a lot easier for mom to just clean the room herself or for dad to take out the trash himself than trying to teach the kids how to do it.

However, a good parent will bring their children in on the chores of the household because this is one way children become full-grown. A parent who never makes their children contribute is more likely to see their children stunted in their development. That parent is “soft,” but they are a soft tyrant, because they have kept all of the strength for themselves.

God shares his strength with us. God shares his power with us. When he calls us to pray (and that prayer actually makes a difference), God makes us into something even more than children, he allows us to be co-workers with him.

And when we pray... when we work with God, we are drawn into even more intimate relationship with Him.

And that kind of prayer and relationship definitely changes something else... it changes us.

LETTERS TO GOD: 5 REASONS TO KEEP A JOURNAL

By Jurell Sison

Adapted from lifeteen.com

My first writing professor was a short stocky man who didn't like religion and wore a Harley Davidson leather jacket to class. Even more so, he was bald with a white goatee and his signature move was honesty. He didn't believe in sugar-coating life. Honesty was the only thing that made for good writing—even if the truth hurt. Despite all these eccentric quirks, his teachings changed not only my writing, but my life.

One day my professor pulled out a small book from his bag. It had a black cover and the pages looked yellow and worn out. "So... does anyone in here use a journal?" He asked. Not waiting long for our class' response he mumbled, "Hmm... that's too bad."

He continued to explain that his journal was his sanctuary, the place where he found safety and calm. He wrote down all the experiences that inspired him, all his thoughts, and most importantly his struggles. It was the place where he processed the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of life.

"Don't be fooled." He warned us, "This isn't a diary. It's a secret weapon, a tool for your success... for your happiness."

Immediately after class I drove to the bookstore and bought my first journal. Ten years and five journals later, you'll find my own worn-out journal in my backpack. So what's the big hype about journaling? What can it do for you? Here are five reasons why you should start a journal today.

KEEP YOUR BRAIN HEALTHY

It's one thing to want to pray more. It's another thing to actually sit down and do it. And even when you do, there are an endless number of obstacles and distractions.

So often I walk into the chapel and sit there with my brain scrambled. When there are 10,000 things going on at the same time it's easy to get overwhelmed in prayer but if I write my prayer—things are different.

Writing down my thoughts and prayers force me to focus on one thing at a time. My brain automatically tries to process a bagillion things at a time but working through my thoughts slowly on paper puts my soul at rest.

FIND PEACE & CLARITY

Journaling might be weird and even painful at first but the fruit of that struggle is peace and clarity. Writing my thoughts slow me down enough to remember that God is with me through it all. Moreover, it reminds me that God's plan is bigger than the one I've drawn up in my head.

Journaling always seems like a burden but every time I begin my prayer this way, **I find myself more peaceful** with a greater sense of clarity and direction.

CREATE EVIDENCE OF GOD'S PLAN

I've been journaling for almost ten years and every now and again I find myself randomly reading my old entries. I'll open it, turn to a random page, look at the date, and it's as if I am reading my own biography. There was a time I spent two hours reading the whole journal because I was in awe of the ways that God worked with me through my doubts, pain, and fears. Some pages even had teardrops that bled into the ink.

My journals are evidence that I have been through some tough times in my life but even more so, it's proof that God has a plan for us and that our suffering is only temporary. **My prayers and my letters to God are all hard evidence that things get better.** In fact, they get more than better.

Document your current prayers and your struggles and be amazed at the ways God works in your life over the years. Write it down so that you can be living proof of someone who has died and risen with Christ.

ALLOW GOD TO BECOME A REAL FRIEND

Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to chat with a stranger? Even when you have good intentions and genuinely want to start a conversation, sometimes there is a natural awkwardness that comes with the task.

Every now and then, I experience this in my prayer. When I pray, I go through the usual and polite routines (sign of the cross, thank you for..., protect this person, etc...) but then I find myself at a loss for anything meaningful to say. There are times when I go so long without praying that God becomes a stranger to me.

Over the years, I've discovered that keeping a consistent journal creates a history of your relationship. Think about this. The best conversations I have are with my best friends and it's because we have a history of things to chat about. When I see them I can't help but ask them how their week was, how their job interview went or how their vacation was. There is a certain ease to the friendship because of the countless memories we share together. My best friendships require a continual act of checking up on each other.

During difficult times, I never demand that my friends fix my problems. I simply appreciate they are with me because their presence can ease the pain. The same goes with God. Spiritual journaling is yet another tool that creates relationship history. It draws us deeper and deeper into friendship with an infinite God who thirsts for our attention.

Almost all of my entries begin with "Dear Lord" and conclude with "Until next time..." You, of course, can and should find your own way to speak to God but these entries give us opportunities to continue the conversation with ease rather than being at a loss for words like we so often are.

The intimacy level of your entries is all up to you but I would encourage you to **write as if you are on a mission to fall in love.**

WRITE FOR YOUR GRANDKIDS

I have a distinct memory of being at my grandfather's funeral. We were surrounded by loved ones, picture boards, slideshows, and even poetry about the generous life that he lived. But even after all the the stories, I wish I could have heard about his life first hand. I wish I could know the young disciple that he was.

It sounds silly but another reason I journal is for my future grandkids. I want them to know that I, like them, was a real person, with real struggles, challenges, and sometimes hopeless situations. But through it all, it was Christ who transformed my life into something worth living.

Spiritual journaling leaves a trace of our struggle to be holy. If we seek Christ worthily, our lives can blaze a pathway to Him and our written prayers can be a way for us to share in each other's journeys.

IT'S NOT MAGIC—IT'S JUST JOURNALING

When I was nineteen and at the beginning of my spiritual journey, I found myself with no where to go on Valentine's Day. In my loneliness, I drove to an adoration chapel. I knew of a church that had perpetual adoration and it calmed my soul to know that I could spend Valentine's day feeling wanted, accepted, and deeply loved. That day I spent over two hours writing, praying, listening to music, talking... hanging out.

Looking back at my entry, I didn't receive any quick fixes. I was still single after walking out of the chapel, the drama didn't disappear but I left hopeful that God had a much bigger plan for me.

Journaling isn't a magic trick. It's a style of prayer that brings us closer to an intimate friendship with the divine. It's a powerful tool that leads us to surrender to His mysterious plan rather than frantically praying for a quick fix to our unending, litany of struggles.

UNLEASHED

VITAL

CATECHISM:

CCC 2565 - 2567
CCC 2726 - 2734
CCC 2743 - 2744

SCRIPTURE:

Genesis 3:8
Matthew 6:6
John 15:7

ENGAGE



WELCOME

Create a welcoming space. Consider providing drinks and snacks. Play songs in the background that have to do with relationships: think Taylor Swift. Set up chairs in a circle to better facilitate the discussion.

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Welcome all of the teens to the group and then instruct them to take a seat. Then say nothing. Simply sit there in silence. If someone starts to speak, tell them to please be quiet. The group leader keeps the group sitting in awkward silence for at least five minutes. Then he or she asks the following questions:

- Why is silence difficult for us?
- What did you do (e.g. use phone, try to talk, think about something else) to fill time in the silence?
- When do you experience silence in your life? Is there a place where you can be “silent”?
- When you pray, what kind of environment do you pray in? Is it quiet? Loud? Free from distraction?

DISCUSSION

Prayer is conversation with God and a vital part of our relationship with God. Prayer is a back and forth exchange of love between us and God.

CCC 2565, 2744

Prayer is possible only through God's initiative through the Holy Spirit. This means that when we pray, we are responding to God reaching out to us. That is pretty amazing—God loves us so much that He thinks of us, reaches out to us, and calls us to respond and communicate with Him.

CCC 2567

Discuss:

- In what ways is prayer a relationship?
- What role do we have in our relationship with God?
- How often do we talk with our friends? How often do you think we should talk with God?
- What do we talk about with our friends about? Do you think God wants to talk about the same stuff with us??

Prayer is sometimes a public action that we participate in with a community. Mass is a great example of this kind of prayer. Other times, prayer is something that is personal and between ourselves and God. This “interior prayer” is what our *Unleashed* series is going to focus on because Jesus asks us to cultivate this interior relationship of prayer.

Matthew 6:6

Communicating with God interiorly through prayer may look different than communicating with our friends. We can't message God and receive a direct response. Sometimes we may not feel like God responds to our prayer. Remember prayer isn't about giving God a list of demands or hoping for direct responses; it is about building a relationship. Think about prayer as a way of abiding with God. Imagine two old friends sitting together on a porch. They may not say anything at all, but being with each other is life-giving.

CCC 2734, John 15:7

Without a strong interior life, we cannot have a strong exterior life. Just like a building needs a strong foundation to stand during storms or earthquakes, our lives need a strong foundation. Think about the consequences of not having a strong interior life.

Discuss:

- What are some ways you've heard prayer described? Can you think of any descriptions of prayer that have come across as inaccurate or misleading?
- What does it mean for you to "abide" with God in prayer? Do you find yourself doing more talking or listening when you pray?
- How is the way God responds to us in prayer different than the kinds of conversation we are used to? How is it similar?

As we dive into interior prayer, we have to keep in mind some important truths about what prayer is not. Prayer is not an internal dialogue or personal psychological analysis. To think of prayer as psychology, more or less, makes it inward focused and not God-focused. Yes, prayer helps us learn about ourselves, but only because it is a two-way love exchange with God. Prayer may show us something about ourselves, but it doesn't come from ourselves. If prayer were merely psychological, it wouldn't mean much. Rather, we let the Holy Spirit freely tell us about who we are and who God is as part of a loving relationship.

CCC 2726

Prayer for a Christian is also not a "mental void." In some Eastern religions, the goal of prayer or meditation is to completely clear the mind of any thought. To think of prayer as a mental void is dangerous. We need to think about God when we pray. Our goal is to free our minds of distraction, but our goal is not to enter into nothingness. Our goal, again, is a love exchange. The intimacy offered in prayer is unmatched by any other intimacy we can know.

CCC 2726

Lastly, "unproductive" prayer is not useless. We aren't always going to "feel something" when we pray. We may not always feel like our prayer is answered. We must remember that all prayers are heard by God. Every moment of prayer impacts and changes us, even if we don't recognize the ways in which we are changed. Saint Josemaria said, "Persevere in prayer. Persevere, even when your efforts seem barren. Prayer is always fruitful."

The Way 101

Discuss:

- Did you ever hold any misconceptions we talked about? Which one? Did this ever make prayer a struggle for you? How?
- Why do you think it is important that we keep our mind focused on God during prayer?
- Have you ever had a prayer answered? Describe the situation. What about the opposite—have you ever had a prayer you didn't feel was answered, but later on you realized that God just responded in a different way?

Beyond those three misconceptions about prayer, there are three facts about prayer that we need to know. First, we can't develop a rich interior prayer life without the Eucharist. Our personal prayer needs to flow from our reception of the Eucharist at Mass each Sunday.

Second, it is always possible to pray: alone, in a car, on a plane, on a school bus, in a crowded lunchroom, at the mall, in a coffee shop, when you're shopping, while you shower.

CCC 2743

Finally, prayer is vitally necessary. We become slaves to sin if we do not engage the freedom and grace from prayer. God can't live in our hearts without prayer.

CCC 2744

Discuss:

- Where are places where you can pray? (Brainstorm several of these with the group. If possible, write them down on notecards then pass them out to the teens before they leave.)
- Do you pray at Sunday Mass or just go through the motions? How might this impact the rest of your prayer life?
- What is the biggest challenge you personally face in prayer?
- How might your prayer life be connected to sin?

The prayers we will learn over the next few weeks may seem easy, but if we really enter into them and are bravely authentic we may find ourselves struggling. That is normal. Prayer can be a battle—just like it was hard to sit in silence in the beginning of this session. One aspect of that silence that probably made the struggle even more difficult is that you didn't know why you were being silent. We know the intent of our prayer. So when we face the struggles in prayer, we remember why we pray and will have greater confidence to push through them.

Prayer takes work, but God has already done the heavy lifting by reaching out to us. We just need to respond.

REFLECT



DISCOVER **Origin**

Prayer requires effort. It's a battle against ourselves and Satan and has been ever since original sin. In the beginning of created history, God and humanity lived in complete harmony—the lines of communication between God and man were clear. Then, Adam and Eve severed those lines by sinning and stopped communicating with God, going so far

as to hide from Him. Ever since communicating with God has been difficult. Sin muddles the relationship. We lack faith, get distracted, or don't make prayer a priority.

Genesis 3:8, CCC 2729 - 2733

Method

The group leader uses *The Vital Battle of Prayer Handout* found on the *May 2016 Life Teen USB* and online at www.lifeteen.com under Life Support: *May 2016* to guide the teens through the process of establishing a life of prayer and eliminating distractions.

EXPLORE

Create a prayerful environment. Dim the lights, light candles, have a period of silence and ask the teens to respect the silence. Have pillows and blankets available so the teens can spread out and get comfortable. Also have Bibles, pens and paper, and the *The Vital Battle of Prayer Handout* available to the teens. Set the tone by opening the time of prayer with the following prayer from St. John Vianney.

"I love you, O my God, and my only desire is to love you until the last breath of my life. I love you, O my infinitely lovable God, and I would rather die loving you, than live without loving you. I love you, Lord, and the only grace I ask is to love you eternally. . . . My God, if my tongue cannot say in every moment that I love you, I want my heart to repeat it to you as often as I draw breath."

RESPOND



FRUITS

The group leader facilitates a discussion using the following questions:

- Which of the three distractions from the handout are most difficult for you in prayer?

- What was your experience of talking to God as if He were a friend?
- How do you think adding prayer to your daily routine may affect your life?

CHALLENGE

To conclude, the group leader challenges the teens to pray for 15 minutes each day in a chapel or quiet space by simply talking to God as you would a friend. In addition, he or she encourages them to pray one Holy Hour in the coming week before the exposed Blessed Sacrament.

Planning Notes: _____

ATTENTIVE

CATECHISM:

CCC 2623 - 2629

CCC 2631 - 2639

CCC 2735 - 2737

SCRIPTURE:

John 14:26

ENGAGE



WELCOME

Create a welcoming space. Consider providing drinks and snacks. Play music in the background; consider playing All Sons and Daughters, Gungor, or United Pursuit. Set up chairs in a circle to better facilitate the discussion.

As teens arrive, engage them by asking about their day. Here are some example questions to help get started. Don't rush through these. Listen to their answers and ask follow up questions.

- What have been your high and low points of this week so far?
- What was your experience of praying to God as you would friend?
- If you had the whole day free tomorrow, how would you spend it?

DOUBLE TALK

The goal of the activity is to have two teens successfully tell two different stories simultaneously.

Set up two chairs facing each other. Select two teens and have them sit in the chairs. Inform the teens of their prompt. When the Core Member says, "go," the teens begin explaining their assigned prompt simultaneously. The first teen to laugh or lose their train of thought is out.

Some examples of prompts are:

- I ended up fighting a moose because...
- My family was on vacation in Hawaii when...
- This is how you ride a roller coaster...
- My favorite part of summer time is...
- I no longer like the color pink because...
- This is how you survive an avalanche...

The game continues with a different pair of teens and different prompts. The activity works best if every teen gets a chance to be one of the storytellers.

Next, the group leader asks the group:

- How difficult was it to stay focused when you were trying to tell your story?
- What are some sources of noise in your life?
- Do you ever feel like you are distracted by "noise" in your prayer life?

DISCUSSION

Have you ever seen an old wooden door with an old-fashioned keyhole? Saint John Vianney says that in prayer we need to "behave as someone who has an irresistible curiosity and who listens at keyholes. You must listen to everything God says through the keyhole of your heart."

Share a picture of an old fashioned keyhole. Search Google images, "old keyhole," to find one. Better yet, find an old keyhole at an antique store and bring it in so the teens can see and touch it.

However, in prayer, we often find ourselves distracted and doing the opposite of listening attentively at keyholes. How are we supposed to listen attentively to God if our minds constantly wander? How difficult was it to stay focused on your own story when someone else was talking?

Thankfully, we have an acronym that helps guide our prayer. It's "ACTS" and stands for Adoration, Contrition, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. It serves as a model of prayer for us, allowing us to focus our hearts and minds on God.

Discuss:

- What is prayer for you? How do you pray?
- Do you feel like you know how to pray?
- Do you think it would be helpful to have a method to follow? Why? Why not?

A stands for Adoration. Adoration involves recognizing who God is, who we are before Him, and adoring Him. Adoration acknowledges that man is a creature before His Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us and the almighty power of the Savior who set us free from evil. Some examples of how to pray a prayer of adoration are: "I adore You, God. I praise You for who You are. You are God. You are my Creator and Savior."

CCC 2626, 2628, 2639

Creator and Savior, as well as Emmanuel, Almighty, and Alpha and Omega are titles for God. There are over 900 different titles for God in Scripture. You can make a prayer of adoration by using both phrases of adoration and titles for God while journaling or speaking your prayer out loud.

CCC 2628

Discuss:

- What are some of your favorite titles for God?

- Why do you think it's important to pray a prayer of adoration?
- Can you give me some examples of a prayer of adoration?

C stands for Contrition. Contrition means being sorry for our sins. Once we've spent time adoring God and recognizing who He is, we see more clearly our imperfections and need for His mercy.

CCC 2631

Recognizing our sinfulness and asking for forgiveness is essential to any prayer. In order to enter deeper into our relationship with God, we must first evaluate where we have fallen short and return to Him.

Some examples of a prayer of contrition are making a short Examination of Conscience or saying the Act of Contrition.

Discuss:

- What is the hardest part about making an Examination of Conscience? Why?
- Do you ever find yourself feeling distant from God in prayer? How do you think a prayer of contrition could help?

T stands for Thanksgiving. Once we've recognized who Jesus Christ is (adoration) and our need for His mercy (contrition), we can't help but thank Him for what He has done for us (thanksgiving). Not only has He paid our debt with His Passion and Death, but also He has given us new life and identities as sons and daughters of a heavenly Father.

We can thank the Lord for everything! For providing for our needs, for our families, for the activities we like to do, for our friends, and even what we had for breakfast. Nothing is too big or too small to be an object of our thanksgiving.

CCC 2637 - 2638

Imagine how thankful you would be if someone gave you a free trip to your dream destination or a new car. How would you respond? You would probably be overwhelmed with gratitude. It is with this same vigor that we are to thank God. This vigor is not to be forced. By thanking Him we learn to see everything as a gift from Him and begin to appreciate His gifts more and more until we truly have vigorous gratitude.

While prayers of thanksgiving and adoration may seem similar, the biggest difference between the two is that adoration is about who God is and thanksgiving is about what God has done for us.

Discuss:

- Do you find yourself thanking God regularly? Does it come naturally to you or do you find it awkward? Explain.
- What do you thank God for?
- What can you thank God for?

Finally, **S stands for Supplication.** Supplication means to ask for something. We can ask for ourselves (petition) and for others (intercession). Just like thanksgiving, nothing is too big or too small to ask of the Lord. Saint Teresa of Avila says, *“You pay God a compliment by asking great things of Him.”*

CCC 2629, 2634

Our Father knows what we need before we ask, but He awaits our supplication because our dignity lies in our freedom. Therefore, we must ask.

CCC 2736

We often complain about feeling like our prayers are not being heard or that they are going unanswered. We must challenge our own image of God. Do we see Him as an instrument to be used or a loving Father?

CCC 2735

God may not answer our prayers because our prayers may not be in align with our well-being and He wants what is best for us. Evagrius Ponticus, a theologian and monk, puts it well, “Do not be troubled if you do not immediately receive from God what you ask Him; for He desires to do something even greater for you, while you cling to Him in prayer.”

CCC 2737

Discuss:

- How much of your prayer life is supplication?
- Do you find it easy or difficult to turn to God with your needs and the needs of others? Why? Why not?
- Does God answer your prayers? How do you handle it when it seems like He doesn't?
- Of prayer of adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication, which form of prayer do you use the most? Which form do you use the least?

REFLECT



DISCOVER Origin

These forms of prayer come from the Tradition of the Church and from Scripture. The early Church was rooted in faith, sustained by the Eucharist, and devoted to the Scriptures. From that life, the early Church developed a deep understanding of prayer and its many forms that is passed onto us through the Holy Spirit.

CCC 2623 - 2625, John 14:26

These forms of prayer are not only present in our personal prayer life, but also in the Mass, the highest form of prayer. At the beginning of the Mass, we recognize that we are in great need of the Lord's mercy when we pray the Penitential Rite. Throughout the Mass, we say prayers

of adoration, particularly when we sing the *Glory to God* and then again when we sing the *Holy, Holy, Holy*.

Prayers of thanksgiving are at the heart of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The word Eucharist comes from the Greek words *eucharistein* and *eulogein*, which mean thanksgiving. The Prayers of the Faithful, when we pray for the Church and for ourselves, are prayers of supplication.

Method

The group leader uses the *ACTS Prayer Handout* found on the *May 2016 Life Teen USB* and online at lifeteen.com under Life Support: *May 2016* to guide the teens through ACTS Prayer.

EXPLORE

Create a prayerful environment. Dim the lights, light candles, and put on prayerful music. Also pass out the *ACTS Prayer Handout*.

The group leader explains that we are to pray ACTS Prayer as a group. Then he or she leads the teens through the handout, explaining the step and then encouraging the teens to take turns praying the step together out loud.

RESPOND



FRUITS

The group leader facilitates a discussion using the following questions:

- What did you like about ACTS Prayer?
- What was something specific you prayed about during your time of adoration? Your time of contrition? Your time of thanksgiving? Your time of supplication?
- Which step was the most challenging? Which was the simplest?

- How do you think this type of prayer could improve your relationship with God?

CHALLENGE

To conclude, the group leader offers two challenges for the week. He or she challenges the teens to spend 15 to 20 minutes every day praying and journaling with ACTS Prayer. The teens can use the *ACTS Prayer Handout* as a guide. He or she also encourages the teens to listen closely during the next Mass they attend for the parts that pertain to prayers of adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication.

Planning Notes:

HEART TO HEART

CATECHISM:
CCC 2712 - 2719

SCRIPTURE:
Hebrews 4:12

ENGAGE



WELCOME

Create a welcoming space. Consider providing drinks and snacks. Play music in the background; consider playing Audrey Assad, Matt Maher, Bethel, Hillsong Chapel, or Passion. Set up chairs in a circle to better facilitate the discussion.

As teens arrive, engage them by asking about their day. Here are some example questions to help get started. Don't rush through these. Listen to their answers and ask follow up questions.

- What was the best and worst part of your day?
- What is stressing you out?
- What are you looking forward to?

FINISH THE LYRIC

Teens take turns finishing the lyrics to popular songs. The group leader plays the chorus of a popular song and then stops it. The teen whose turn it is has to finish the lyric. Have enough songs so that each teen can go once.

Then, the group leader asks the group:

- Who do we listen to? Who do we hear the most from? Music artists? Reality TV stars? The media? Radio or podcast personalities?
- Who are the voices of authority in our lives? Mom and Dad? Teachers? Friends?
- Is the Word of God a voice in our lives?

DISCUSSION

Usually, when we read or hear a passage of Scripture we often “know” what we are supposed to get out of it. For example, when we hear the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* (Luke 15:11-32) we “know” the lesson is we will be forgiven of wrongdoing; we only need to ask for it.

Ask the teens and have a discussion about the lessons we receive from the following Scripture passages:

- *The Parable of The Sower* (Luke 8: 9-15)
- *The Adulterous Woman* (John 8:2-11)
- *Jesus Calms the Storm at Sea* (Luke 8:22-25)

While these lessons are true and good, there is more to Scripture than reading and learning lessons from it. It is the Word of God—God speaking to us today. There are universal lessons we can take from the Word and also personal conversations we can have with God through the Word.

For example, the *Parable of the Prodigal Son* can speak to each one of us differently. One person may be struck by, “the father saw him and had compassion,” while another is impacted by, “bring quickly the best robe,” while another, “Son, you are always with me.”

We then take these words that the Lord is speaking to us and press into them through a prayer method called *lectio divina*.

This leads to us not only hearing the Word of God with our ears and minds, but also in our hearts. It is a very powerful form of prayer. “Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12

Saint Ignatius of Loyola also attests to power of the Word of God, “It’s true that the voice of God, having once fully penetrated the heart, becomes strong as the tempest and loud as the thunder, but before reaching the heart it is as weak as a light breath which scarcely agitates the air.”

Spiritual Exercises, Week 1

Discuss:

- What’s your reaction when you hear, “God speaks to us personally through His Word”? Do you agree? Do you disagree? Have you ever experienced this? Do you wish it to be true?
- What’s the difference between hearing the Word with your ears and mind and allowing the Word to penetrate your heart?
- What do you think St. Ignatius of Loyola means when he says the Word “becomes strong as the tempest and loud as thunder...”?

Lectio divina means divine reading in Latin. In *lectio divina* we read and re-read a Scripture passage slowly and prayerfully as a means of hearing God speak to us through His Word. There are both active and passive steps in *lectio divina*.

The first step is called *lectio*. In Latin, it means to read. During *lectio*, we read the Scripture passage slowly in order to gather an understanding of who, what, when, where, and why. Then, we read the passage again, listening for and choosing a word or phrase that stands out. This is an active step. We are actively engaging the Word of God.

The second step is called *meditatio*. In Latin, it means to meditate. During *meditatio*, we turn the word or phrase over in our mind, reflecting on it, and letting thoughts come and go. We need to recognize distractions, but not let ourselves be taken by them. We then return to our phrase rather than letting our mind wander. Psalm 119:97 challenges us to ruminate, or to chew the word as a cow chews cud. This involves chewing, swallowing, throwing it up, chewing again, swallowing, and repeating this process until the food is digested. This is a passive step.

The third step is called *oratio*. In Latin, it means to pray. During this step, we engage with the Divine and have a conversation with God. This is an active step.

We begin by asking ourselves questions like:

- *What were those distractions that came and went? What might God be trying to tell me?*
- *What memory does this word or phrase bring to mind?*
- *What does this word or phrase make me desire or dream about?*
- *How have I seen this word or phrase act in my life?*

Then, welcome Jesus into your conversation. Speak to Jesus and ask...

- *Why does this strike me?*
- *What are you trying to teach me?*
- *What are you saying to me?*

The fourth step is called *contemplatio*. In Latin, it means to contemplate. This step is God’s response to us; so it is totally beyond our control. Contemplation is a divine gift that the Lord in His goodness gives. In contemplation, we are totally passive, held by the mystery of God. It is resting quietly in God’s arms. No words are necessary at this point. Saint Teresa of Avila says, “Contemplative prayer is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.”

CCC 2712 - 2719

Discuss:

- Have you ever prayed *lectio divina* before? If so, how did it go?
- After hearing about how to pray *lectio divina*, what are your thoughts on it? Does it sound easy? Difficult?
- How do you think *lectio divina* might help you pray?

REFLECT



DISCOVER

Origin

The concept of Scripture being something to absorb, take in, and digest slowly has its origins in the 3rd century. Origen Adamantius, an early Christian theologian, began to explore the idea of there being a larger wisdom behind the Word of God than can be immediately read. He asserted that there was a way to understand this higher meaning by letting the words “touch” the listener.

In the 6th century, *lectio divina* became an essential part of monastic life and prayer. St. Benedict incorporated it in the *Rule of St. Benedict*, his spiritual and organizational guide to monastic life. It is still a fundamental part of Benedictine life to this day.

Method

The group leader uses the *Lectio Divina Handout* found on the *May 2016 Life Teen USB* and online at lifeteen.com under Life Support: *May 2016* to guide the teens through the process of *lectio divina*.

EXPLORE

Create a prayerful environment. Dim the lights, light candles, put on prayerful instrumental music like Gregorian chant or “Bethel: Without Words” or have a period of silence. Have pillows and blankets available so the teens can spread out

and get comfortable. Also have Bibles, pens and paper, and the *Lectio Divina Handout* available to the teens.

The group leader instructs the teens to gather what they need for prayer and to find a prayer spot. Once everyone is settled, he or she explains that we are going to spend 30 minutes praying and working through the *Lectio Divina Handout* as a group.

The group leader then slowly reads the Gospel of the day to the teens three times. It is during these readings that the teens choose and write down the one word or phrase that stands out to them.

Then, the group leader sets a five-minute timer that everyone can see, allowing the teens to meditate in silence. Next, the group leader asks the teens to share the one word or phrase that stood out to them.

Then, the group leader instructs the group to use the questions found in the *oratio* step to journal their prayer to God.

When it seems as though most teens have finished journaling, the group leader sets a five-minute timer, allowing the teens to contemplate in silence.

After five minutes, slowly gather the teens together so they can process their prayer experience in a small group discussion.

RESPOND



FRUITS

The group leader facilitates a discussion using the following questions:

- What was your experience of *lectio divina*?

- As you pressed into *lectio divina*, what did you hear the Lord saying to you?
- Are there any changes you want to make? For example, I want to be better at trusting in God or I need to be more forgiving.
- What was your experience of *contemplatio*?
- How do you think this type of prayer could improve your relationship with God?

CHALLENGE

To conclude, the group leader challenges the teens to pray *lectio divina* every day this week with the daily Gospel reading which can be found at www.usccb.com or on various free apps like Laudate, the Catholic Church App, and iBreviary. The teens can use the *Lectio Divina Handout* as a guide. After praying, encourage the teens to connect with a friend to share what the Lord said in prayer.

Planning Notes: _____

RHYTHM

CATECHISM:
CCC 2708

SCRIPTURE:
Luke 11
Luke 1:28
Luke 1:42



ENGAGE

WELCOME

Create a welcoming space. Consider providing snacks and drinks. As the teens arrive, play music in the background that has a strong beat or rhythm—think African drums, djembe, or a drum line. This is easier to find than it sounds. Simply search “African drums,” “djembe” or “drum line” on youtube. Set up chairs in a circle to better facilitate discussion.

As teens arrive, engage them by asking about their day. Here are some example questions to help get started. Don’t rush through these. Listen to their answers and ask follow up questions.

- What seems on rhythm this week? What seems off rhythm?
- What makes it difficult to focus when things seem off/unbalanced?
- Is anything in particular causing you stress or anxiety, especially a due date or life event that is coming up soon?

COUNTING ON YOU

Break the teens into pairs. Tell each pair they are to choose one person to be “A” and another to be “B.” After they choose, inform them that “A” is the “counter” and “B” is the “distractor.” The group leader then leads a series of tests in which “A” must count and “B” must distract. The distractor can get creative. They can yell, ask questions, tell a story, share a secret, etc.

Tests:

- Reading a poem: The group leader reads a poem. “A” must count the words that rhyme. Suggestions: “The Ballad of the White Horse” by G.K. Chesterton, “The Bells” by Edgar Allen Poe, or “Ash Wednesday” by T.S. Elliot.
- Pop song: The group leader plays a clip from a popular (appropriate) song and “A” counts the number of times a specific word is said.
- Counting coins: The group leader gives “A” a bag of coins and a minute to count them.

In advance, the group leader figures out the answers to each test. After all three tests are completed, the group leader shares the correct answers.

Then, the group leader asks the group:

- “A’s,” what made this activity difficult?
- “B’s,” what methods did you use to distract your partner and how successful were you?
- “A’s,” what methods did you develop to stay on track?

DISCUSSION

Discuss:

- What is the rosary?
- How do we pray it? What prayers are involved?
- Do you like praying the rosary? Why? Why not?
- Some people may consider the Rosary “boring.” Do you agree? Disagree? What are your thoughts on one

of the most renowned prayers of our Church being called “boring?”

Throughout church history, many popes and saints have urged us to pray the rosary. Saint Josemaria Escriva said, “The holy rosary is a powerful weapon. Use it with confidence and you’ll be amazed at the results.” Saint Pope Pius IX said, “Give me an army saying the rosary and I will conquer the world.” Sister Lucia of Fatima said, “There is no problem, I tell you, no matter how difficult it is, that we cannot solve by the power of the holy rosary.”

This prayer certainly does not sound boring. But, let’s be honest, our experience with it may be boring.

The rosary is not meant to be rushed through. We are not meant to finish it as quickly as possible or say as many Hail Marys as quickly as we can. The purpose of the rosary is to entrust Heaven with our petitions and to meditate on the mysteries of Christ. We accomplish this, not through rushing, but through finding our rhythm.

The repetition of the prayers of the rosary is both a means to an end and an end itself. It is an end itself in that we are asking for intercession of Mary and praying to our Heavenly Father. It is a means to an end in that the repetition creates a rhythm of prayer that aids us in meditating on the mysteries of Christ.

The rhythm of the prayers of the rosary helps eliminate distractions by creating a pace to the prayer. It’s like running or swimming, eventually we stop thinking of the exercise and are in “the zone.”

Discuss:

- Have you ever found yourself in “the zone”? What were you doing? What was it like?
- Does anyone here play an instrument? How does rhythm help you play? How might that pertain to the rosary?

The rhythm of the prayers of the rosary aid us in meditating on the mysteries of Christ. Meditation is a process by which we use our faculties (thoughts, imagination, emotions, desires) to engage in thinking on the mysteries of Christ. Meditation deepens our convictions of faith, conversion of heart, and strengthens our will to follow Christ because the mysteries of Christ become more than stories we passively hear, but truths we actively engage in.

CCC 2708

Consider passing out rosaries so the teens can be tactile and feel the beads.

The rosary encompasses both vocal and mental prayer, both head and heart, both body and soul. As we count the prayers by the physical use of beads, the soul is freed and able to focus on meditation. Meditation can be considered the “soul” of the rosary while the use of beads and vocal prayers the “body.” How beautiful a prayer to compliment our nature as body and soul.

Discuss:

- Does it sound easy or hard to use thought, imagination, emotions, and desires to meditate? Why?
- Now that meditation is defined as using thought, imagination, emotions, and desires do you think the rosary is a “boring” prayer? Why? Why not?
- What is your reaction to the rosary being a prayer that engages both body and soul?

The rosary begins by reciting the Apostle’s Creed, an Our Father, three Hail Marys, and a Glory Be. Then, there are five decades which each begin and end with an Our Father and Glory Be and have ten Hail Marys in between.

While saying the Hail Marys, we meditate on the mysteries of Christ. There are four different sets of mysteries: the Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious mysteries. Each mystery explores various events in Christ’s life, which may

elicit certain emotions. For example, all the Joyful Mysteries recall joyful moments for Jesus.

The Joyful Mysteries, prayed on Mondays and Saturdays, are: The Annunciation, The Visitation, The Birth of Christ, The Presentation, and The Finding in the Temple.

The Sorrowful Mysteries, prayed on Tuesdays and Fridays, are: The Agony in the Garden, The Scourging at the Pillar, The Crowning with Thorns, The Carrying of the Cross, and The Crucifixion.

The Glorious Mysteries, prayed on Wednesdays and Sundays, are: The Resurrection, The Ascension, The Descent of the Holy Spirit, The Assumption, and The Coronation of Mary.

The Luminous Mysteries, prayed on Thursdays are: The Baptism in the Jordan, The Proclamation of the Kingdom, The Wedding at Cana, The Transfiguration, and The Institution of the Eucharist.

The rosary is a scriptural prayer. Pope Paul VI refers to it as “the compendium of the entire Gospel.” Compendium means a summary or concise retelling. Think about it. It starts at the beginning of the New Testament with the Annunciation and recalls our Lord’s infancy, public ministry, passion, and redemptive victory, ending with its glorious effects for the Mother of Christ.

Not only are the mysteries of the rosary scriptural, but so are the prayers of the rosary. The Our Father was revealed by Christ to His disciples in Luke 11 and Matthew 6. The first portion of the Hail Mary comes from the angels greeting in Luke 1:28, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” and Elizabeth’s greeting in Luke 1:42, “blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” The second portion reflects the humble prayer of sinners asking for their heavenly Mother’s intercession, “pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.”

Discuss:

- Which mystery of the rosary are you most familiar with? Why?
- Which mystery do you want to pray the most? The least? Why?
- What are your thoughts on the rosary now that you know it is scriptural?

With familiarity and practice, the rosary is a peaceful prayer with a steady rhythm that both entrusts our petitions to God and aids us in deepening our understanding of the mysteries of Christ. When first learning to pray the rosary, doing both at the same time may prove challenging. That’s okay. Pope Francis in an Angelus address said, “The rosary is a school of prayer. The rosary is a school of faith.”

REFLECT



DISCOVER

Origin

According to tradition, the rosary became popular when St. Dominic urged people to pray it to combat the Albighensian heresy that was rampant in the 12th century. This heresy asserted that there are two creators—an evil creator of the material world and a good creator of the spiritual world. Among the issues with this heresy is a total misunderstanding and rejection of the material world that misses one of the purposes of the Incarnation, which is to redeem the material world.

Tradition says Mary visited St. Dominic and instructed him to give the rosary to the people as an aid for overcoming sin and heresy.

Mary has appeared in many apparitions holding a rosary and asking that we continue to pray this prayer.

The most well-known is Fatima when Mary appeared to three children six times between May and October of 1917. Mary called herself “Our Lady of the Rosary,” telling the children to pray—especially the rosary—and perform acts of penance for the conversion of sinners.

Method

The group leader uses the *The Rosary Handout* found on the *May 2016 Life Teen USB* and online at www.lifeteen.com under Life Support: *May 2016* to guide the teens through praying the rosary.

EXPLORE

Create a prayerful environment in a church or chapel. Dim the lights and light candles around a Crucifix or statue of Mary. Pass out *The Rosary Handout*. Gather the teens in the pews and instruct them to kneel.

The group leader or a teen who is familiar with the rosary leads the teens in praying the rosary together reminding them not to rush and to meditate on the mysteries of Christ.

RESPOND



FRUITS

The group leader facilitates a discussion using the following questions:

- How was your experience of praying the rosary?
- Was it difficult to meditate on the mysteries of Christ? How so? How not so? Do you think it will get easier with practice?
- Can you share any insights from your meditation?
- How do you think this type of prayer could improve your relationship with God?
- Do you see yourself praying the rosary in the future?

CHALLENGE

To conclude, the group leader challenges the teens to pray all four Mysteries of the Rosary (Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious) on the correct day this week. That's a total of four rosaries in one week. However, each rosary they pray must be accompanied by a different physical activity. For example, pray the Joyful Mysteries while walking or pray the Sorrowful Mysteries while hiking. Challenge the teens to get creative.

Planning Notes: _____

UNCEASING

CATECHISM:

CCC 2559
CCC 2670

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 10:17
Acts 4:12
1 Thessalonians 5:16-17
Philippians 2:11



ENGAGE

WELCOME

Create a welcoming space. Consider providing drinks and snacks. Play music in the background; consider playing music from the Byzantine liturgical rite as teens enter. This is easier to find than it sounds. Simply search “Byzantine music” on YouTube. Set up chairs in a circle to better facilitate discussion.

As teens arrive, engage them by asking about their day. Here are some example questions to help get started. Don’t rush through these. Listen to their answers and ask follow up questions.

- What was the most boring thing you did this week?
- What was the most repetitive thing you did this week? How often or long did you need to do it?
- What was the most exciting thing from your week?
- Do you feel at peace right now? Why or why not?

WITHOUT CEASING

Challenge the group to a game where they must continuously perform an action without stopping or breaking the action. A few simple examples are:

- Keeping a balloon afloat in the air as a group
- Passing a small tennis ball around the group as quickly as possible
- Saying only one word at a time creating a story that never ends
- Any kind of physical exercise or movement (running in place, push-ups, etc.)

Challenge the teens to perform the action for as long as possible without stopping. This provides a unique visual and starting point for the prayer reflection in the session. Then the group leader asks the following questions:

- Was it easy or difficult to perform the repeated action? Did it get easier or more difficult as time went on?
- What were some of the specific challenges that made it difficult? When did the challenge become easier?

DISCUSSION

Our actions, if we do them often enough, form routines. Routines form habits and once we have a habit it can be very hard to break. Sometimes our routines and habits are good things—it is good to make a habit of brushing your teeth at night and doing your homework on time. Other habits, like staying up too late or eating unhealthy foods, are not so good.

We form many habits without realizing it. If we want to form a good habit, we need to be intentional about it. One of the most important habits to form centers around prayer. Saint Paul challenges us to form this habit in his first letter to the Thessalonians:

“Rejoice always, Pray constantly,”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-17

That second instruction is worth hearing again, “Pray constantly.” If we struggle to pray even five minutes each day, what St. Paul is asking might seem impossible. How do we pray constantly?

Discuss:

- How does a person “pray constantly”?
- Do you think St. Paul is drawing a connection between constant prayer and the ability to “rejoice always”? What is the connection?

There are several ways we may seek to “pray constantly,” but one particular prayer stands out as perhaps the most accessible for us. It comes in the form of an ancient prayer. For centuries, many people have made this prayer so habitual that it simply becomes a part of who they are. They pray constantly.

The prayer is simple:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

The prayer comes from a parable that Jesus tells about a Pharisee and tax collector.

Read Luke 18:9-14.

The beauty of this simple prayer is that it does three things with only a few words. First, it addresses Jesus Christ as Lord, which is a powerful statement. Throughout Sacred Scripture, the name of God is understood to carry immense power. To take the sacred name in vain directly broke one of the Ten Commandments. Demons know Jesus’ name and fear it. Saint Peter tells us that there is no other name by which we are saved. This prayer rightfully centers around that sacred name.

Philippians 2:11, Luke 10:17, Acts 4:12

Second, it acknowledges our sinfulness and encourages humility before God, just like the tax collector. Any prayer must begin with this admission: God is God; we are not. Without humility, we cannot come before God honestly. In fact, we cannot even pray unless God moves us and allows us to pray. We are imperfect, but God meets us in that brokenness when we pray.

CCC 2559, 2670

Finally, the prayer asks Jesus for mercy. After we recognize that we are a sinner, we petition God for mercy and forgiveness. We have confidence in Christ’s mercy and forgiveness because it was won for us on the cross. We don’t need to doubt that God gives us mercy when we ask for it, but like any gift we can reject it. We must ask for mercy, not to beg God for it, but to show humility so we can truly receive it.

Such a simple prayer is packed with a lot of powerful statements.

The prayer is so simple, in fact, that it can be spoken with two breaths. Try it with me: inhale and pray, “Lord Jesus Christ,” then exhale and pray, “Son of God,” and inhale praying, “have mercy on me,” and exhale, “a sinner.” Now, quietly, do that a few times on your own.

What did you notice about your breathing as you prayed? It probably became more rhythmic and calm. If you did this for a longer period of time, your heart rate would drop. The prayer would begin to have a physical impact on your body, but a bigger impact on your soul.

Here is the challenge – could you pray it with every breath? As we just practiced, the prayer is as simple as breathing. Like any habit, this prayer can quickly become second nature. How would your day change if every moment the name of Jesus was on your heart?

Discuss:

- Do you think praying the Jesus Prayer continuously all day would be difficult? Why?
- Why do you think there is so much power in the name of Jesus? Why do you think there is so much power in the Jesus Prayer?

Like any spiritual habit or practice, choosing to meditate on the Jesus Prayer continuously throughout the day takes time. Begin by reciting it when you have nothing else to do.

If you are an athlete, pray it while you run or train with each breath. On your way to class, make the prayer as you walk through the halls. If you are reading a book, pray the prayer every few pages. As you study, take a break every 30 minutes and pray the Jesus Prayer for two minutes. Set aside five or ten minutes each morning or evening to simply pray this simple prayer in a quiet, still environment. You won't be perfect at it right away and that's okay.

Eventually the prayer will become more automatic. You will find yourself praying it when you are driving in your car. You will be praying it quietly as you walk to class. You will pray it when you have moments you are just mindful of your breath.

If we do it enough, we will find ourselves praying continuously, without even realizing it. Monastics that practice the prayer find themselves subconsciously praying it even in the midst of activity and distraction—as they do work, read, talk, or when they are just still. The prayer can be so internalized that it is on our hearts always. It allows us to retain an inner peace and focus on God, even when our entire world may seem chaotic.

If this seems unreasonable, think about what you do now when you are bored. It is highly likely that you pick up your phone. You may even do this without realizing it—you've trained your body and mind to pick up your phone when you get bored, and now it happens subconsciously. You can break that habit (which probably isn't getting you closer to Jesus) and replace it with a habit of prayer.

This was the goal for many in the monastic life around the fourth century. This meditative prayer was and still is repeated hundreds of thousands of times in a day; the name of Christ is never far from the lips of these monks. The goal, of course, is to be continuously mindful of our need for God's mercy. It also allows us to respond to St. Paul's call to continuous prayer.

Discuss:

- Do you think most teenagers feel at peace? Why or why not?
- How can the Jesus Prayer help a person stay peaceful, even in the face of adversity?
- Do you feel at peace? Why or why not? What would help you be more at peace?

REFLECT



DISCOVER Origin

The origin of the Jesus Prayer comes through the prayer of the tax collector in Luke 18. It became a popular religious practice in many Eastern Orthodox Churches and remains one today. You may be wondering what we mean by “Eastern Orthodox Church.”

Near the end of the 11th century, the Church experienced an event called the “Great Schism.” The Western Church, centered in Rome, and the Eastern Church, centered in Constantinople, disagreed on a few important matters of doctrine and split. Since then, there have been numerous attempts at reconciling the two Churches.

We often refer to ourselves as “Roman Catholics,” but a more accurate title may be the “Latin West” Catholics. The “Latin” refers to the liturgical rite that we utilize. This is the way that we celebrate Mass. Think about how we gather, prayer, the postures we use, and the way that Mass flows. This is all part of the liturgical rite. The “west” refers to the part of the great schism where we split.

The pope has the title “Bishop of Rome,” and leads the Latin Church. Because he is directly in the line of St. Peter, whom Christ gave authority over the whole Church, the pope is also a leader over other churches that practice different liturgical rites.

To date, there are 24 non-Latin rites that are in communion with Rome. These churches retain their unique prayer and liturgy, but honor the pope’s authority. They are theologically in line with the Catholic Church, and so we say that they are “in communion” with us. Their sacraments are valid and they share the fullness of our faith. For these churches, the Jesus Prayer is an important part of their spiritual practice.

Method

The group leader uses the *Jesus Prayer Handout* found on the *May 2016 Life Teen USB* and online at lifeteen.com under Life Support: *May 2016* to guide the teens through the process of the Jesus Prayer.

EXPLORE

Create a silent environment free from distraction. Set a timer for ten minutes. Place it somewhere you can see it, but the teens cannot. Invite the teens to take ten minutes to be silent and only pray the Jesus Prayer. Encourage them to continue the prayer, even if they get distracted. Just like the opening activity, the prayer may become exhausting or repetitive, but they must continue to push through it.

After ten minutes, transition into a time of discussion regarding the prayer experience.

RESPOND



FRUITS

The group leader facilitates a discussion using the following questions:

- What images, thoughts, or distractions came to mind as you prayed?
- Did you find that it got easier or more difficult to pray as time went on? Why?
- Did you feel relaxed or anxious during the prayer? Why?
- How did this prayer impact you physically? Emotionally? Mentally?
- After the silence and prayer, how do you feel now?
- How would you feel if you integrated this kind of prayer and silence into your daily routine?

CHALLENGE

To conclude, the group leader challenges the teens to pray the Jesus Prayer daily and as constantly as they can. To aid this practice, challenge them to begin their day with five to ten minutes of silence where they simply pray the Jesus Prayer with each breath. Encourage them to pray in their car, during practice, or any place where it is easy to be mindful of their breathing.

Challenge them to journal about their experience each day. Use the following questions as a starting point:

- Am I at peace today?
- Do I feel more grateful to God because of His mercy toward me?
- Did I catch myself praying the Jesus Prayer without realizing it?
- Did any images, insights, or graces occur to me during my silent prayer time? What were they?

Planning Notes: _____

REFLECT

ENGAGE



WELCOME

Create a welcoming space. Consider providing drinks and snacks. Play music in the background; consider playing Stefani Gretzinger or John Mark McMillan. Set up chairs in a circle to better facilitate the discussion.

As teens arrive, engage them by asking about their day. Here are some example questions to help get started. Don't rush through these. Listen to their answers and ask follow up questions.

- What is something you are proud you did and what is something you regret you did today?
- What inspired you to do the thing you are proud of?
- What did you learn from doing the thing you regret?

CATCH PHRASE

Catch Phrase plays a lot like Charades. The goal of the game is get your teammates to correctly guess a word by providing clues.

Give the teens four small pieces of paper and instruct them to write down a noun (person, place, or thing) on each piece. Put the pieces of paper in a hat or bowl and then divide the group into two teams.

Pick a player to go first. That player grabs a piece of paper from the bowl and then gives clues that allow their team to guess the word. The player can give verbal clues and physical gestures, but they cannot say the word.

The player has one minute to get through as many words as possible and the team receives a point for every word correctly guessed.

Then, the group leader asks the group:

- What kind of details did you find yourself using to describe these words?
- Did you think back to previous experiences to help describe these words?
- How much time do you spend reflecting on your day?

REFLECT



DISCUSSION

At Mass one of the first prayers the congregation prays is the *Confiteor*. Here we are called to reflect on our need for God's grace and mercy. We then confess our need for grace and mercy to God, our brothers and sisters, and ourselves. In this prayer, we implore the assistance of Mary, the angels and saints, and our Lord as we strive to live a life totally for Jesus.

"I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God."

Most people pray this once a week at Mass on Sunday, but as we grow in our faith and prayer life we can seek out new forms of prayer and reflection. One of the ways we do this is through the *Ignatian Examen*.

The *Ignatian Examen* is normally prayed at night before going to bed. It is an amazing tool because it teaches us how to reflect on our day while it is still fresh. When praying it, we come to

face to face with memories of our day, both good and bad, and are given an opportunity to reflect and learn from them.

We remember moments of virtue and grace—not being a grump in the morning, having patience with a chatty friend, focusing on schoolwork. We remember when and how we felt promptings from God—“I should invite her to eat lunch with us,” “I should say something to stop this gossiping,” “I should help Dad with the trash.” It’s fruitful to reflect on these moments because as we do we get better at recognizing God’s promptings throughout the day and who doesn’t want to hear more from God? The *Ignatian Examen* is a solution to a problem we complain about all the time. “I just want to know God’s will. I just want to hear Him speak to me.” He is speaking. We need to be better at recognizing His voice and we do that through daily reflection.

We also remember moments of shortcomings, mistakes, and regrets—moments when we didn’t hear God’s promptings or heard them and failed to respond well. This gives us the opportunity to learn the sound of His voice and reflect on how to better follow His promptings.

Discuss:

- Are you fully participating in the Confiteor? Why? Why not? How can you?
- How might adding a brief examination of conscience bear fruit in your life?
- Do a quick reflection on your day so far. Any moments of virtue and grace? Any regrets or moments of mistakes?

So, how do we pray it?

The first step in the *Ignatian Examen* is to ask for grace. We ask for grace from God to reflect back on our day well. For example, “Jesus, I ask for the grace to reflect back on my day with eyes of honesty and a heart without shame. May I come to know your presence in my life.”

The second step is to give thanks. We thank God for everything we have experienced that day because it is all a gift from Him and He is present to us through all of it. For example, “Jesus, I am grateful for the good conversation I had with a friend, a good latte, the ease at which my essay came, and the prayer time we had together. Thank you.”

The third step is to review. Here we reflect back on our thoughts, words, and actions throughout the day, from the moment we woke up to this present moment. How did we respond to God’s invitation to know Him, love Him, serve Him? Did we hear His promptings? Did we follow His promptings? How well did we follow His promptings? For example, “I hit snooze three times this morning. I could be better at self-mastery. I was patient with my younger brother while he was putting his shoes on. There was grace there, thank you Jesus. I gossiped about a classmate during lunch. I feel bad about that. I am sorry for that. I should refrain from doing that in the future. Jesus, help me remember not to do that.”

It’s okay to make mistakes. We don’t do the *Ignatian Examen* to make ourselves feel even worse; we do it so we can learn from our mistakes and become a better version of ourselves.

The fourth step is to ask for pardon. This is our opportunity to look at our shortcomings with a repentant heart. Simply say sorry to Jesus for your mistakes and regrets of the day. Consider using the Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

The fifth step is to make a resolution. We began to cover this in the review step. However, it is always good to make concrete resolutions. Write down one or two resolutions for tomorrow. For example, “I will not gossip and I will intervene if my friends begin to gossip.” “I will turn off the radio and drive to school in silence so I can be more aware of God’s presence with me throughout the day.”

Discuss:

- What is the purpose of the *Ignatian Examen*? How is it different than an examination of conscience? How is it similar?
- How do you feel about trying out the *Ignatian Examen*?
- Does it sound easy or hard?

DISCOVER

Origin

The *Ignatian Examen* is attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola who was born in 1491 to a noble family in Spain. As a teen, he was arrogant, unchaste, and had an insatiable desire for fame. Seeking vainglory, he grew up to be a soldier and was seriously injured in a battle. While he was healing, he experienced a tremendous conversion through reading about the life of Jesus and the lives of the saints.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola authored *The Spiritual Exercises*, a compilation of meditations, prayers, and contemplative practices, which helps people deepen their relationship with God. The *Ignatian Examen* is one of these practices.

Method

The group leader uses the *Ignatian Examen Handout* found on the *May 2016 Life Teen USB* and online at www.lifeteen.com under Life Support: *May 2016* to guide the teens through the *Ignatian Examen*.

EXPLORE

Create a prayerful environment. Dim the lights, light candles, have a period of silence and ask the teens to respect the silence. Have pillows and blankets available so the teens can spread out and get comfortable. Also have pens, paper, and the Ignatian Examen available to the teens.

After ten minutes, transition into a time of discussion regarding the prayer experience.

RESPOND



FRUITS

The group leader facilitates a discussion with the following questions:

- What was your experience with the *Ignatian Examen*? Was there anything confusing about it? Which step was your favorite? Which step was the most challenging?
- Why do you think St. Ignatius prayed the *Ignatian Examen* many times a day?
- How could praying the *Ignatian Examen* on a regular basis impact your life?

CHALLENGE

To conclude, the group leader challenges the teens to take 15 minutes to pray the *Ignatian Examen* before going to bed each night.

Planning Notes: _____



LIFE TEEN

Leading Teens Closer to Christ

www.LifeTeen.com