

THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 2: THE PICTURE OF A DISCIPLE
Unit 3: A Disciple Embraces Christian Community
LESSON 28: DISCIPLES PRAY AND PRAISE TOGETHER

What we want students to learn: That embracing Christian community means being a part of a group that prays and praises together.

What we want students to do with what they've learned: To commit to increasing the practices of prayer and praise with their community of fellow Christ-followers.

Scripture Focus: Ephesians 5:15-21; Acts 1:14

Supporting Scripture: Acts 2:42, 47

Overview: If you asked your students whether Christ-followers are supposed to pray and to offer praise and thanks to God, you probably wouldn't have a single person push back in any way. The overwhelming majority of Christian teenagers realize that prayer and praise are essential aspects of their faith life. But how many of them see corporate prayer and praise in the same way? Would your students say that praying with their Christian friends is important to them? How about praising God together? Most of your students probably don't see these actions as vital to their life as a Christ-follower. And yet, Scripture makes it clear that these are important. This lesson will help your students see that praying and praising with their Christian community is an essential part of being a disciple of Jesus.

TEACHER PREP VIDEO

Each **LIFE** lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your **LIFE** lesson 28 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 28, and click on the "Background" tab. You'll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.

BIBLE BACKGROUND

The *Bible Background* is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you'll be studying. The Details gives you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what's happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by "context"?** In every **YM360** Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know **who** wrote the book, **when** it was written, and **why** it was written.
- **What's the big deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

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THE DETAILS

- **Author:** The Apostle Paul wrote the letters to the Ephesians. Of course we know Paul as the one-time chief enemy of the Church. After his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul would go on to have a position of great importance in the early Church and beyond. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.
- **Time frame:** Ephesians was probably written by Paul from prison in the latter years of his life, sometime around 60 or 61 AD.
- **Purpose:** Paul had a very close relationship with the church in Ephesus. It seems as if the motivation for the letter was simply that the church would know how he was faring in his imprisonment. But, true to form, Paul couldn't help but teach. The letter covers general teaching on the work of Christ to redeem believers, unity among believers, and how believers are supposed to conduct themselves.

THE SETTING

We often come to Scripture looking through an individualistic lens. However, many of Paul's letters were written to entire church congregations to inspire them to pursue God together. Ephesians is one of those letters. The point of Ephesians was to move the entire church together toward the thoughts Paul outlines. In Ephesians 5, Paul uses the idea of our "walk" relating to the way that we are to live our Christian lives (5:1-2). In this lesson, we will look at Ephesians 5:15-21, where it becomes apparent this Christian "walk" is not solitary, but involves others. Specifically, Paul draws out the idea of worshipping together.

We'll also look at Acts 1:14. Just after Jesus had ascended to heaven, the disciples were huddled together in obedience to Jesus' command to not depart Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit. What was the first order of business for the small group of believers who would carry the name of Jesus to the ends of the earth and start a movement that would continue on 2000 years later? Prayer. Prayer together was their first priority.

THE MAIN POINT

The Christian life was never meant to be limited to a walk alone with God. It was meant to be a march alongside others as we pursue God together. From the early church in Acts, to the Ephesian church, to today, God wants us to pursue Him together with others. In this lesson, we will look at the early church in Acts and Paul's words to the Ephesians to see how pursuing God is fleshed out in praising and praying together. In Ephesians 5:15-21, we will see how praising God together is crucial if we want to gain the other benefits of Christian community. We will also look at Acts 1:14 to see the early church's example of praying together as a first priority. This lesson will show students how praising together and praying together is part of what binds together Christian community, and helps us grow as disciples of Jesus.

LESSON PLAN

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: An introductory activity called *The Lead In*; the Bible study section called *The Main Event*; and an application-focused segment called *The Last Word*.

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THE LEAD IN

- **Goal:** To help students begin to understand how praising together and praying together helps to build the kind of Christian community they need to grow as disciples.
- **Set-Up:** You'll need two packs of typical #2 wooden pencils (20-24 pencils in all), and two rubber bands

FIRST, set aside one pencil and then bind together all the other pencils using the two rubber bands. Make sure that the pencils make a cylinder with an even top and bottom. Put the pencils that have been bound together out of sight, so the group doesn't see it.

NEXT, as students enter the room, ask for two volunteers who are "feeling strong." Tell them that you are going to have a pencil-breaking contest. Give the first student a single pencil and ask the student if they can break the first pencil with just their two bare hands. The first student should be able to break the pencil with ease. Then ask the second student if they feel they can do better than the first student. Then give them the cylinder made up of 20 or more pencils. Ask the second student to break it with nothing but their two bare hands. Unless they have some kind of superhuman strength, they will not be able to do it. Thank both volunteers for participating.

THEN, explain that the strength of the pencils is not in their individual make up, but in being bound together. Likewise, much of our strength as disciples comes from being together with other disciples. We need each other. Draw one pencil out of the cylinder as a visual and explain that when we get off on our own, we are far less strong than if we remained with others. Say:

- **In addition, if enough of us disperse and don't stick together we make the entire gathering weaker. So we need to stick together. So here is the question: "What are the things that we can do with one another that bind us together as a Christian community"?**

FINALLY, explain to students that today is all about the value of praising and praying together as a Christian community. Our praise and prayers help bind us together. By praising God and praying to God together, we get close to one another so that we can enjoy all the benefits of the Christian community as we seek to grow as disciples. Say something like:

- **What binds all these pencils together? These two rubber bands. Likewise, we are going to talk about two practices that we can do together that help bind us together as a Christian community: praising together and praying together. As we looked at in Acts 2 earlier in this series of lessons, we see both of these practices on display in the earliest church.**

Read or have a student read Acts 2:41, 47. Then, say something like:

- **At the very beginning of the church and the movement of Christianity, we see these Christ-followers praying and praising God together. Nearly 2,000 years later, as we all continue on our journey to grow as disciples of Jesus, these two things are just as essential for our Christian community.**

Transition into *The Main Event* portion of your lesson.

THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students understand their role in praising and praying together to build their Christian community and grow as a disciple.

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- **Set Up:** One Hula-Hoop (that you don't mind getting a little distorted). You may benefit from a dry-erase board, but it's not critical. Make sure students have a Bible or that they are able to look along with a friend.

FIRST, read or have a student read Ephesians 5:15-17. Remember that when Paul was writing this message, it was to a church and not to an individual. So when Paul says we should "look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise" this is something that our Christian community can help us do. Ask:

- **What are some of the other things mentioned in this passage that the Christian community could help us do?**
 - **Answers: Avoid foolishness, understanding the will of the Lord, etc.**

Explain that as you have been discussing these last few weeks, our Christian community can help us in many ways to grow as a disciple. However, in order to benefit from the Christian community we must take steps to stay close to one another. Remind students that as you continue moving through this passage, you will see one of the things that keep us close and growing together.

NEXT, read or have a student read Ephesians 5:18-21. Say something like:

- **One second, Paul is talking about walking with wisdom with one another and now he is talking about getting drunk. At first glance, this seems a little odd, but can you get the point Paul is making?**
 - Answer: Paul is saying that getting drunk on wine causes issues to both the individual and to the group. But, being filled with the Spirit leads to only positive things. Being filled with the Spirit puts us and our Christian community in a place for God to work in and through us.
- **What affect does it have on us when we are in step with God, especially the Holy Spirit's leading?**
 - Answers will vary. Help students see that when the Spirit leads us, our focus becomes God and the things that honor God. So it makes sense that Paul when suggests that the Spirit will lead us to address others with "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (v. 19).
- **Paul says that the Spirit leads us to address others with "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." What does that mean exactly? Are we jumping into a weird church musical where we sing with one another instead of talking?**
 - Answer: No... Thank goodness. Paul is talking about worshipping alongside each other as Christian do in churches all across the globe when they gather. It's not a mistake or a recent invention that we sing when we are in church with each other. Our praises are an overflow of the Spirit working in each of our lives causing us to sing to God in one accord. We live with thankful hearts when praising God is our focus (v.20).
- **But why is praising and giving thanks together such a big deal?**
 - Answers will vary. Allow students to answer as they will. But then lead them to the following example.

THEN, ask for a few volunteers to surround a hula-hoop. Make sure they are where everyone else in the group can see them. Have each of them lift up the hula-hoop with one hand and stand with the hula-hoop in the middle of the volunteers. Tell them to try and walk in different directions without talking, keeping one hand on the hula-hoop. Ask them pull gently so they don't tear the hula-hoop into pieces. After a few moments, have them stop and ask them if it was easy to make progress in any one direction. Then, instruct them to follow the directions that you call out. Call out a few directions to get them around the room. Ask them if it was easier to move once they were all focused on one person's voice. Thank them for participating.

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Explain that the point you were trying to make is that when we worship together under the Spirit's leading, we are all focused on one thing: God. In this way, we drop our personal agendas and become more open to what God has for us, and more focused on living for the good of those around us. In fact, this leads us to submit to one another out of the reverence for God (v.21). Say something like:

- **When each of you had your own ideas about which way to go, you got nowhere. However, when you were focused on one voice, you began to move with a lot more ease. The same thing is true in worship. When we worship together, we become focused on God and what He desires. We are also compelled to live humbly and for the good of others in the Christian community. Praising together in Spirit and truth is one of the essential things that bind us together in Christian community. It makes us thankful together and pushes us onward. We need to praise together so that we can keep moving forward together, and help one another in this discipleship journey. But this isn't the only practice that helps bind us together.**

THEN, have your students turn over to Acts 1:14. Read or have a student read Acts 1:14. This moment from Scripture happened shortly after Jesus had ascended to heaven. Say something like:

- **What was the first step for the small group of believers who would carry the name of Jesus to the ends of the earth and start a movement that would continue on 2,000 years later? Prayer. Prayer was their first priority. But this wasn't everyone dispersing to have their own private quiet times (though time alone with God is important). They were "devoting themselves to prayer, together."**

Notice that in the first part of the verse it reads, "All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer." The original language that the Bible was written in uses a word here that means "one mind, one accord, with one passion." Their praying together contributed to them sticking together so they could launch out into the calling God had for them as disciples. Say something like:

- **We see these original disciples making it a priority to pray together. As they did so, they were united together in the cause and calling that God had placed on their lives. Prayer changes things, but it also changes us. By praying together with others, we become more focused on each other, more generous with one another, and more attuned to being used by God to help each other grow. Praying together helps us be united in mind and passion.**

FINALLY, explain to your students that this isn't something that is optional about the Christian life. There is a lot at stake for those that fail to praise together and pray together with others in a Christian community. There are many students that leave for college or a career determined to keep their faith, but only make plans to pursue their faith alone. Eventually, their lack of connection with other believers in praise and prayer catches up to them, and deeply affects their growth as a disciple. We need each other in praise and prayer so that we can grow to the potential that God has for us as disciples!

Ask if there are any questions, then transition into *The Last Word*.

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THE LAST WORD

- **Goal:** To help students take practical steps toward praising together and praying together in their discipleship journey.
- **Set-Up:** Circles of chairs.

FIRST, divide your group into smaller groups of three or four. Explain that for the next few minutes you are going to give them five different questions from today's lesson. Rather than just having one person answer each question, you are going to have them process their answers to these questions together in their smaller groups. This reinforces the idea of processing things together as a Christian community. After a minute or two, you can call upon the groups to give their responses to the questions.

NEXT, ask them the following questions:

- **While we aren't looking for perfect attendance, why is it such a big deal to come to church when we all gather together?**
 - Answers may vary, but you are looking for students to connect back to the ideas that you have been talking about over the last few weeks, especially praising together and praying together.
- **What if you are not a good singer? Does that let you off the hook for praising God together? Why or why not?**
 - The answer is no, but press students to think about why the quality of their vocal performance has nothing to do with singing heart felt praises to God. This is a big deal for some students.
- **Alright, this is going to step on a few toes, why is it important that you keep praising together even when it may not be your favorite choice of psalm, hymns, or spiritual song?**
 - Answers may vary. Help students break out beyond personal preferences to understanding how praising together is more important than getting my preference.
- **What if you feel uncomfortable praying in front of others? How can we help each other be more comfortable about praying together?**
 - Answers may vary. Help student think creatively about helping those who have fear of praying in front of others. If prayer is talking with God, then praying with each other is just talking to God together.
- **What is the next step that we need to take to make praising together and praying together a reality for our group?**
 - Answers may vary. Encourage your students to be creative with this.

FINALLY, say something like:

- **If praising together and praying together are crucial for our Christian community and our own journey to become mature disciples, then we need to be serious about committing to it as a group. We also need to be serious about encouraging this in our church worship gatherings. Often it is the students who help lead out a worshipful heart for an entire church. The results can be a revival within a local church. Let's be students that God can use to spark something special in worship and prayer in our own church!**

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As the leader, think of ways that you can help your students follow through on their ideas for praising together and praying together. To close the lesson, have each group of three or four pray together. Make sure there are no closing thoughts and then dismiss the group.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're posting them on Instagram or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.
- Use the **Social Media Guide** to stay in touch with students via text or Instagram and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.