



The Life of Prayer: Creative Prayer

Focus: This week is focused on creative, artistic forms of prayer – using imagination, colors, and images to center our minds and hearts on God.

Scripture:

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Supplies:

- Bibles
- Small object, snack, or candy
- Blank paper, assorted colors
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers
- Copies of “mandala” sheet (found at the end of the lesson)
- Small notebooks or doodle pads – one for each student
- Small pack of crayons or colored pencils – one for each student
- Twine or string and clothes pins, or adhesive/mounting putty for walls.
- Note: if your meeting space doesn’t usually have tables or other hard, flat surfaces, consider bringing in a few.

Background on scripture and topic:

In this lesson, we will be focusing on two creative prayer methods: mandalas and praying in color. “Mandala” comes from the Sanskrit word for “circle,” and they are used in some eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism that originate in India. A mandala is an artistic way to center yourself for prayer, which can be especially helpful for someone who has trouble sitting quietly for prayer or concentrating on reading. Similarly, praying in color (as described by Sybil MacBeth in her book *Praying in Color*) is a “doodle prayer” that keeps one focused during their prayer time. Both of these methods are great for artistic students, or visual or kinesthetic learners.

The chosen Scripture verse (1Thes 5:16-18) will appear in all of the lessons as the starting point, but it will be discussed in depth only in this first lesson.

Parent email prompt:

Before beginning the series, email parents to share the detail of this study with them. Because some students may not connect with some prayer methods, it's a good idea to give parents a heads up about what the students will be doing for the upcoming four weeks.

Text Prompt the night before:

Are you a doodler? Do you draw on the margins of your math book or color code your history notes? Then join us this week and try Creative Prayer!

Game/Activity/Video:

“Scribblenauts” is a video game where imagination is key. The goal in each level is to get your character to collect an object in the most creative way possible – the more creative your method, the more points you get.

Open the lesson by having the students play a real-life version of “Scribblenauts.” Place an object (or a candy, or snack) at the far end of the room. Maybe on top of a high shelf, or suspended from the ceiling to make things more interesting. Have the students break up into pairs or small groups and draw a creative method for getting to the object/snack/candy. Maybe they shoot it down with an arrow, or have a giraffe reach up and get it for them. Creativity is the point! Let other adult volunteers be the judges, and whoever is voted the most creative gets the prize.

Scripture Reading:

Have a student read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Be sure to have copies of the New International Version available, even if you want to use other translations, too.

Large Group discussion questions:

Verse 16:

- How hard is it to rejoice always?
- What keeps us from rejoicing?
- How can we put this verse into practice?

Verse 17:

- What is prayer?
- What does it mean to “pray continually?” (as phrased in the NIV)

- Can we actually do that? Wouldn't bowing our heads and closing our eyes (most common prayer stance) keep us from doing other important things (like driving)?
- What keeps you from praying continually?
- How can we put this verse into practice?

Verse 18:

- Are there circumstances we aren't thankful for? What are some examples?
- Is it hard for you to talk to God when you aren't feeling joyful or thankful? Why or why not?
- How do we put this verse into practice?

Transition Statement:

"Paul encourages the Thessalonians – and us – to pray continually, without ceasing, no matter what our circumstances are. Prayer is simply having a conversation with God, and we can do that anywhere and at any time. Prayer doesn't always have to involve sitting quietly with your head bowed, hands folded, eyes closed. Prayer can be creative and imaginative, and we're going to see what that might look like for us."

Game/Video/Activity:

If you are able, visit <https://prayingincolor.com/examples> and show a few examples of Praying in Color to the students. Use the "Mandala" sheet provided at the end of this lesson for an example, too.

SAY: "All of these are prayers, even though they may not use words. In these prayer methods, we use our imaginations to talk to God – which is really helpful when we are having a hard time finding words to tell God how we feel. "

ASK:

"If you were feeling angry, what colors would you use to describe that feeling? What objects or pictures?" (You can replace "angry" with:joyful, sad, frustrated, content, etc, and continue to ask this question.)

Prayer Time:

SAY: "Now we're going to practice praying creatively. The best part about any prayer is that it is meant to express your thoughts, your feelings, and your conversation with God – no one else's. So there's no right or wrong way to pray,

and there's no right or wrong way to use creative prayer. You can begin with a phrase or a single word, and then add shapes and colors to express your feelings to God as we saw with Praying in Color. Or you can try Mandalas to relax and clear your mind while you pray. This time is for you and God."

DO: Pass out the "Mandala" sheets, blank paper, and crayons, pencils, or markers for the students to use. If you like, play some soft worship music in the background. Give them about 10-15 minutes to pray and create.

Small group questions:

Have the students form small groups in whatever way your group is accustomed to – by age, gender, grade, blended. If possible, have an adult volunteer join each group to help them stay on task.

Note: Encourage students to share, even if they didn't find this particular method helpful. Knowing what works or *doesn't* work for them is a part of developing their own prayer life.

- If anyone is willing, share your work and how it reflects your prayer (symbols, colors, etc).
- Was this a helpful way for you to pray? Why?
- Was this prayer exercise unhelpful? Why?
- How can you use creative prayer methods to practice praying continually?
- Is this something you would try again on your own? If not, what do you think might work better for you?

Small group activity:

Each group should hang their prayers in designated places around the room, and then say a short prayer together. (Ideas: To hang, string twine along a wall with clothes pins to hold the papers, or use adhesive/mounting putty to hold them up without making a mess).

Remind Youth:

Praying continually doesn't mean we can't also be engaged in our daily lives, and using creative methods like these can help use take little moments to pray throughout our day.

Tangible Item they leave with:

Give each student a small notebook or doodle pad, and a pack of crayons or colored pencils to take with them so that they can continue to practice creative prayers at home.

Mandalas

“Mandala” comes from the Sanskrit word for “circle.” Mandalas are used in religions like Hinduism and Buddhism that originate in India. A mandala is an artistic way to center yourself for prayer, which can be especially helpful for

someone who has trouble sitting quietly for prayer or concentrating on reading.

Begin with a circle in the center of the page, and then draw whatever you feel or whatever comes to mind around that circle. The only rule is this – whatever you draw has to be symmetrical around the center circle.

As you draw, talk to God about what's going on in your heart. Are you angry? Frustrated? Joyful? Talk to God about what's bothering you, or what excites you. Choose colors and shapes that reflect your mood and your thoughts.

