



Fuller Youth Institute

— TEACHING TEENS TO — **PRAY**

**8 TIPS FOR LEADING DEEPER PRAYER
IN YOUR YOUTH GROUP**

DEAR YOUTH LEADER,

HELPING TEENS GROW IN COMPASSION MEANS HELPING THEM GROW IN PRAYER AND REFLECTION.

Spending time in reflective prayer with your group of teenagers...sounds easy, right?

Probably not! If you feel your anxiety rising at the thought of creating more space for quiet and reflection in your youth ministry program, our team of researchers, youth leaders, and parents is right there with you. We know how real that struggle is!

But we think it'll be worth the effort.

WE'VE CREATED A BRAND-NEW MINISTRY RESOURCE THAT CAN HELP.

The Fuller Youth Institute's latest research set out to learn about the most effective environments for nurturing character development in teenagers. Based on research with over 350 ministry leaders like you and field-tested by youth groups around the U.S., we crafted *Compassion from the Inside Out*: a 4-week youth ministry curriculum that's your roadmap to discipling students for a lifelong journey of faith-filled compassion.

At every point in our research, we found that that compassion and prayer go hand in hand. The process of growing in Christlike compassion is actually nurtured through reflection and listening—to the experiences of those around us, and to God's word spoken in us and through the Bible.

God created the human heart and mind to strengthen and develop just like muscles do: through steady, intentional exercise. So if you've been wanting to teach your teenagers to engage more deeply when it's time to pray, these tips are our gift to you.

We're with you as you lead your teens to nurture faith that lasts beyond youth group,

The FYI Team

8 TIPS

TO HELP YOUR TEENAGERS ENGAGE MORE DEEPLY IN PRAYER

Reflection and prayer can sometimes be confusing and uncomfortable for teenagers. So begin by thinking about what structure or guidance you can offer your students during prayer time. Does your denomination or tradition use a prayer model that can be helpful? Or have you been wanting to introduce your teens to a contemplative prayer practice? **Before you lead, do a little research, plan how you'll lead that time, and try the prayer practice for yourself!**

1

Create a comfortable and welcoming environment.

Reduce external noise, and ask your group to silence phones and put them in their pockets. You could also invite students to find a comfortable place to sit, encourage them to spread their chairs out, or take the group outside. Some groups find it helpful to choose a place outside the youth room as their designated prayer and reflection space.

2

Background music can be helpful if your teens find silence uncomfortable.

But it can also become a distraction if not chosen thoughtfully. If you think music would help your students relax into the practice, find a playlist of ambient music with few or no lyrics, and keep the volume low.

3

Help students see a bigger picture.

Every denomination approaches prayer in a different way. For some groups, reflective or contemplative prayer might be a common practice they see happening in church frequently. For others, it's done less frequently, or only in certain contexts. Take the opportunity to talk with your students about how your church traditionally approaches prayer, and identify what seems similar or different between the two.

4

Model growth.

Be open with teenagers about your own experiences and struggles with prayer. What's challenging for you? And what have you found helpful as you grow into this prayer practice?

5

Reassure your group that there's no pressure to be an "expert" at prayer and reflection.

They might not even find it easy at first! We strengthen our mind's ability to focus or concentrate just like we strengthen our biceps or quads—by starting small and increasing a little each time. So if students feel their mind wandering at first, let them know that's okay. They might want to try praying this way at home a few times, and stay with it a little longer with each try.

6

Encourage doodling or writing as a way to focus students' energy and thoughts.

Make paper and pens or pencils available, but remind your teens often that creating a pretty picture or perfectly-worded prayer is not the goal—doodling a stick figure or even symbols or words as they pray can be just as meaningful. Reassure students that they will not be asked to show their paper to others unless they want to.

7

Ask your teens to be respectful of their fellow students' desire to grow and have conversation with God during prayer time.

If, after giving it a try, some students are feeling that the reflection practice isn't for them, they can sit quietly, doodle or journal, and wait for others to finish.

8

As their leader, be sensitive and empathetic to what's happening in the room as your group prays.

If students are shifting uncomfortably or finding it difficult to settle into the exercise, give just enough time to follow your prayer prompts or guidance. If you sense the group is beginning to engage meaningfully, allow more time and watch for cues that it's time to move on. If a teen is struggling to participate and becoming a distraction to others, avoid scolding or shushing if you can; instead, gently invite them to simply have a quiet conversation with God about how prayer makes them feel, or doodle on a piece of paper quietly.

When it's time to bring your time of prayer to a close, **make meaning of the experience together with your students by discussing:**

- How did it feel to try today's reflection or prayer activity? Was it something new for you, or did it feel familiar?
- Would anyone like to share what they thought or prayed about?
- In what ways did anyone feel that God was listening or responding to their prayer?
- Think about your week ahead: is there a situation or time in which you could see this prayer exercise being helpful to try on your own at home?

TEACH YOUR TEENS

COMPASSION

FROM THE

INSIDE OUT



Compassion from the Inside Out is a 4-week high school ministry curriculum that invites your students to dig deeper and explore compassionate interaction as you look at how Jesus modeled a life lived with compassion. Together you'll share your own stories, grow closer as a prayer-filled, caring community, and equip your teens for lifelong compassion with their heads, hearts, hands, and feet.

WE'VE PACKED THIS 4-WEEK HIGH SCHOOL MINISTRY CURRICULUM WITH RESOURCES THAT HELP YOU PUT FYI'S FAITH BEYOND YOUTH GROUP CHARACTER FORMATION COMPASS INTO ACTION:

- Powerful **testimony-based discussion starters** and **video interviews** with young people mobilize your team to model growth and inspire meaningful conversations.
- Bible-based **weekly scripts and slides** equip you to teach for transformation.
- Weekly **interactive prayer and reflection activities** compel your volunteers and students to practice compassion together.
- Thought-provoking **small group discussion guides** and **student take-home sheets** help your students make meaning as they learn.
- A **comprehensive leader guide** invites you and your leaders to reflect and grow alongside your students.
- **Social media tools** keep your community practicing compassionate interaction all week long.

Find it at FullerYouthInstitute.org/curriculum