



JUNIOR HIGH GROUP STUDY

PRAYER & WORSHIP

KARA POWELL
General Editor



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How to Use the *Uncommon* Junior High Group Studies

Each *Uncommon* junior high group study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 2 stand-alone units of 6 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, or to use just one unit, or to present each session separately. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) for each session's student handouts are available online at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/. The hand-outs include the "Reflect" section of each study, formatted for easy printing, in addition to any student worksheets for the session. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each individual session begins with a brief overview of the "big idea" of the lesson, the aims of the session, the primary Bible verse and additional verses that tie in to the topic being discussed. Each of the 12 sessions is geared to be 45 to 90 minutes in length and is comprised of two options that you can choose from, based on the type of group that you have. Option 1 tends to be a more active learning experience, while Option 2 tends to be a more discussion-oriented exercise.

The sections in each session are as follows:

Starter

Young people will stay in your youth group longer if they feel comfortable and make friends. This first section helps students get to know each other better and focus on the theme of the lesson in a fun and engaging way.

Message

The Message section enables students to look up to God by relating the words of Scripture to the session topic.

Dig

Unfortunately, many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students look inward and discover how God's Word connects with their own world.

Apply

Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. The apply section leads students out into their world with specific challenges to apply at school, at home and with their friends.

Reflect

This concluding section of the study allows students to reflect on the material presented in the session. You can print these pages from the PDF found at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/ and give them to your students as a handout for them to work on throughout the week.

Want More Options?

An additional option for each section, along with accompanying worksheets, is available in PDF format at www.gospellight.com/uncommon_jh_prayer_and_worship.zip.

UNIT I

Prayer

Hey, kids! Guess what our next study topic is going to be?

Demons and witchcraft?

No and no.

Famous love scenes from the Bible? (Giggle, giggle.)

Sorry.

How about hip hop! (Yeah, cool! Hip hop!)

Wrong again, music lovers. Actually, our next topic will be . . .

PRAYER!

If what you hear next is moaning and whining about how boring and irrelevant both you and your topic are, don't despair. That means your junior high ministry is ready for a study on prayer. Obviously, they have no idea what an exciting and powerful thing prayer really is—and you get to teach them all about it. Consider yourself lucky.

I know you don't feel very lucky. Prayer is, after all, a serious spiritual topic, and junior-highers are rarely serious or spiritual even on their best days. On top of that, prayer is something of a mystery—not easily explained to adults, let alone to young adolescents. But junior-highers are nevertheless ready and anxious to learn about prayer. In fact, they are at the perfect age for learning how to pray.

Why? Three reasons:

1. Junior-highers are in transition. Just as they are changing physically and intellectually from childhood to adulthood, they are also changing spiritually. They are acquiring a faith of their own that is more personal and more relationship-centered than ever before. For the first time, they are ready to experience God as a personal friend and confidant, someone they can talk with and listen to. Prayer is the language of this new relationship and junior-highers are eager to learn it.

2. Junior-highers love to be active participants in everything, and prayer is one way they can be involved in what God is doing. Prayer is not a passive religious exercise—something you say before a meal or after a sermon—but a dynamic means for invoking the power of God. Junior-highers make very effective prayer warriors because they love putting their growing relationship with Christ into action.
3. Junior-highers have a tremendous need for affirmation and respect. As they grow into adulthood, they crave people who will take time to listen to them and take their feelings and ideas seriously. Prayer, of course, is God's way of saying to a junior-higher, as well as to you and me, "Come, let's sit down and talk. I have all the time in the world. I want to listen to you."

Prayer is the lifeblood of faith. Without it, faith inevitably dies. That's why your junior-highers need to learn to pray. Don't worry if they don't understand everything about prayer. Who does? Just help them understand that God wants them to pray. Let them know that God wants to listen to them. He is interested in them and what they have to say.

The best way to teach this, of course, is to model it. If you listen to them, they just might come to believe that God will listen to them too.

Wayne Rice
Founder of Understanding Your Teenager
Author of *Junior High Ministry*



SESSION I

PRAYER IS LIKE INSTANT- MESSAGING GOD

THE BIG IDEA

Prayer is like sending a text-message to God. There's no waiting for a return message because He is unavailable or just doesn't feel like texting back. God is always available and ready to respond.

SESSION AIMS

In this session you will guide students to (1) know that God hears them when they pray; (2) discover their need to spend time communicating with God; and (3) commit to carving a few minutes out of their schedules this week to communicate with God.

THE BIGGEST VERSE

"This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalm 34:6).

OTHER IMPORTANT VERSES

Psalms 34:1-8,15-18; 91:4; 119:105; Isaiah 60:1-5

Note: Additional options and worksheets in 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 11" format for this session are available for download at www.gospellight.com/uncommon/prayer_and_worship.zip.

STARTER

Option 1: Talking with God. For this option, you need a video or digital camera and a way to play back what you have recorded. Ahead of time, have a team of several students and one adult volunteer prepare a video. During the week before the meeting, have students ask various people questions about prayer. Instruct the team to ask simple questions, such as “What do you think prayer is?” “When do you pray?” “When was the last time you prayed?” “Should you close your eyes every time you pray?”

Open the meeting by showing the video, and then ask students how they would define prayer. Explain that prayer is simply communication with God and that by the time they finish this session, they will understand better what it is.

As an option, you could also have the students conduct an impromptu interview session. For this option, find some way to record the students’ voices (have them use the record feature on their cell phones, or you can get some handheld tape recorders). You will also need notepads and pens or pencils. After greeting the students, explain that today each of them will become newspaper and TV reporters.

Divide students into teams of two or three and distribute the tape recorder(s), or make sure someone in the group has a cell phone with a recording feature. Also give them notepads and pens or pencils. Instruct students to approach several people outside the classroom and ask questions during their interview, such as “What do you think prayer is?” “When do you pray?” “When was the last time you prayed?” “Should you close your eyes every time you pray?”

After 5 to 10 minutes of information gathering, have the students return to report to the group what they discovered. See if they can make any general conclusions about people’s thoughts on prayer by discussing the following:

- Were people comfortable talking about prayer?
- How do people generally define prayer?
- How often do they pray?



Youth Leader Tip

The impromptu interview option works best if the meeting takes place where there are other people you can interview in close proximity to the meeting place (for instance, adults grabbing a bagel and coffee before their class starts).

Ask the group members how they would define prayer. Make sure they understand that prayer can be defined in three words: communication with God.

Option 2: And the Winner Is . . . For this option, you need a silly prize (for example, a trophy from a thrift store) and a watch with a seconds indicator.

Introduce this session by explaining that you're going to start with a competition to see who is the best and most creative talker in the group. Tell the students that the winners will receive an incredible prize, but don't reveal what the prize is.

Ask for two volunteers at a time to compete against each other. Each person comes to the front and is given a topic to discuss. They each have 30 seconds to talk about what they know. Explain that even if they don't know much about the topic, the key is to keep talking for the entire 30 seconds! After several contestants have talked, pick the top two for the championship.

Round One

Contestant 1: Explain the toughest things about being a junior-higher.

Contestant 2: Tell us the biggest problems with teachers today.

Round Two

Contestant 3: Describe the history of bowling in America.

Contestant 4: Explain step by step how cars are made.

Round Three

Contestant 5: Tell us what visitors should expect to find when visiting the country of China.

Contestant 6: Explain why dogs like to ride with their heads sticking out of car windows.

Now choose the two best contestants to go against each other in the final championship round.

Championship Round Four

Contestant 1: Tell us everything you know about prayer.

Contestant 2: Describe some of the different methods that people use to talk to God.

Have students vote for the champion talker. Give the champ the incredible prize, and then explain that the key definition for prayer can be summarized in three words: *communication with God*. For the next few minutes they are going to learn even more about what prayer and talking to God are all about.

MESSAGE

Option 1: Can You Hear Me Now? For this option, you need several Bibles, a watch with a seconds indicator, several copies of “Lack of Listening” (found on the next page) copied on one color of paper, and several copies of “Lots of Listening” (found on page 16) copied on *another* color of paper. Ahead of time, cut the two sets of copies into separate cards.

Distribute the cards to students, making sure that there is an even number of each color distributed. Ask students not to show anyone what their card says. If anyone asks why there are different colors, reply with something vague, such as, “You’ll see.” Instruct students to find someone who has a different color card from theirs and pair up. Once students have paired up, give them 20 seconds to do whatever their card tells them to. After 20 seconds, ask students to switch cards with someone else who has their same color, then find a new partner who has the opposite color card. Allow 20 seconds again for the students to do whatever the cards tell them to do. Repeat one or two more times, then ask students to return to their seats.

Debrief the experience by asking students to share what happened to them. Ask students if anyone figured out the difference between the two colors of cards. Because junior-highers often feel like they’re not being heard, ask them how it feels to not have their partner listen to them. You may want to share a story from your own life, especially one from when you were in junior high and you felt that someone was not listening to you. Tell the students how frustrating it was to you.

Explain that there is only one Person who will listen to them all the time and that this whole series is about having a conversation with that Person. Ask volunteers to read Psalm 34:1-8.¹ Continue by explaining that verses 1 to 3 represent the commitment of the writer (possibly David) to praise God continually. More than that, in verse 3, the author encourages other people to join with him in celebrating God.

The reason for the praise is explained in verses 4 to 8. Read these verses aloud again, asking students to listen to all the words that the writer uses to describe God. Ask students what phrases stand out in these verses. Make sure to



Lack of Listening



You see something in the room that you find fascinating and you can't stop talking about it.

You walk off and leave while your partner is talking to you.

You close your eyes, cross your arms and act bored.

You constantly interrupt as your partner is trying to talk to you.

You sing as your partner is talking to you.

No matter what your partner talks to you about, you talk about something totally different that has absolutely no connection with what he or she is saying.



lots of listening



Share a story about something that scared you.

Tell your partner about the best thing that happened to you this week.

Tell your partner what you would buy if you were given a million dollars.

Tell your partner about your school, your teachers and your classes.

Share about your favorite foods with your partner.

Tell your partner about your favorite things to do after school.

draw attention to verse 6, “This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.” Continue explaining that in this verse, as in many of the psalms, “poor” doesn’t mean not having money; it means knowing that what you have can’t really save you—only God can.

Now read Psalm 34:15-18, asking students to listen for the connection between these verses and the idea of being “poor” in verse 6. Allow them to comment, and then explain that while God hears everyone who prays to Him, these verses teach us that He is especially close to those who are right (or righteous) before Him and those who know they need Him. This would be a good time to explain what it means to be “righteous before Him”—we have asked Jesus to forgive our sin and take over our lives.

Option 2: Straight A for God. For this option, you need several Bibles, copies of “Give a Grade” (found on the following page), and pens or pencils.

Explain that as junior-highers, they’re used to being graded at school, but they hardly ever get to give out any grades themselves. That will all change today. Distribute copies of “Give a Grade” and pens or pencils to students and allow three minutes to give a listening grade to the people mentioned on the report card. They get to grade both on how available the people are and how well they listen when the students actually talk to them. After three minutes, ask the following questions:

- Who got the highest grade for availability?
- How about for listening well?
- Who got the lowest grade for availability?
- What about the lowest grade for listening well?
- How do you feel when no one listens to you?

Explain that today they’re going to learn about someone who would get an A+ both in being available *and* in being a good listener. That person is God. But first, they need to listen carefully to some words about Him. Read Psalm 34:1-8 and 15-18, and then ask the group the following:

- What does “radiant” mean? Why are some people “radiant”? (*Because they have the kind of joy that comes from God and changes how they feel about life, the kind of joy also mentioned in Isaiah 60:1-5.*)
- Does verse 6 mean that God cares only about people who don’t have much money? (*No, it means that God cares about people who are “poor”*

GIVE A GRADE

Here's your big chance to give a grade to some people you know. Think about how available the following people are to listen to you, and then give them a grade based on how well they listen once you actually talk with them. You can give them an *A*, *B*, *C*, *D* or *F*. For instance, your dad might be really busy and hardly ever available to talk to, in which case you might give him a *C* for availability; but when you do get the chance to talk to him, he listens really well, in which case he'd get an *A* for listening well.

Your name: _____

NAME	HOW AVAILABLE ARE THEY?	HOW WELL DO THEY LISTEN?
Mom or stepmom		
Dad or stepdad		
Brother or sister		
Grandma or Grandpa		
Favorite teacher		
Less-favorite teacher		
Closest friend		
Adults at Church		

in their attitude toward Him, meaning they know how much they need Him, and that whatever they themselves have or can do won't save them.)

- Why would the writer, who is possibly David, say, "Taste and see that the Lord is good"? We can't actually taste God, can we? (*No, it's a metaphor to describe what it means to really get to know and experience God.*)
- If a test said, "God has favorites: true or false," what would you answer? (*Tough question, especially when you read Psalm 34:15-18. God does love everyone, but He does seem to be especially close to those who are righteous and "crushed in spirit."*)
- What does it mean to be righteous and crushed in spirit? (*Being righteous means you are in right standing with God, which can happen only if you've asked His Son, Jesus, to come into your life and forgive your sin. Being crushed in spirit is like being "poor," meaning that you know how much you need God, and that you can't do much without Him.*)

DIG

Option 1: What a Friend! For this option, you need several Bibles, copies of "What's in a Friend?" (found on the next page) and pens or pencils.

Give each student a copy of "What's in a Friend?" and a pen or pencil. Ask them to take three minutes and write a description of their best friend. When they're done, have several students read their descriptions to the group, and then instruct everyone to turn their papers over and take another three minutes to write a description of God. When done, ask everyone to share a statement or two with the whole group. Ask the following:

- What is God like?
- What is He like to you?
- Was it harder to write about God than your friend? Why or why not?
- Why do you know your friend so well?

Explain that students probably know their friend well because they spend a lot of time together. That's how we get to know God as well—we spend time with Him. No doubt the writer of Psalm 34 had spent a lot of time with God, allowing him to experience God's goodness. Ask for volunteers to share about

a time when they felt that they really spent a great time with God. How did that happen? What happened during this special time with God?

Continue by explaining that because God thinks so much of us, He wants to spend time with us. A natural response from us would be to want to spend time with Him. We do that through prayer. Prayer is nothing more than spending time with God, both talking *and* listening. Of course, in addition to prayer, we already have something that helps us listen to God: the Bible. The Bible contains God's Word to us over several thousands of years, and yet it still speaks to us today. We learn in Psalm 119:105 that His Word is like a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. Reading it allows us to hear from God any time we want. We don't have to wait for a huge booming voice from heaven; we can hear from God by opening the Book that He has given to us.

Option 2: What Do You Know About God? For this option, you need only these questions! Print out the following questions on a whiteboard, chalkboard or an overhead transparency, or make a handout of the questions for small-group discussions.

- Is it dangerous to be too friendly with God by being too buddy-buddy with Him instead of respecting His awesomeness? (*No, God is big enough to be both our awesome creator as well as our best personal friend.*)
- Do you ever feel as if God really doesn't care about who you are? If so, why? (*Lots of people feel this way sometimes, but the truth is that He always cares.*)
- Do you think people in the Bible had a closer relationship with God than we can have today? Why? (*One of the reasons there are stories in the Bible of people talking with God is precisely because they were unique. In*



Youth Leader Tip

When asking tough questions, try not to be too defensive or argumentative. Let students talk and tell you how they feel. If you become too defensive, they'll be reluctant to question or challenge anything you say.

Moses' day, most people didn't talk to God like Moses did. Most people in history talked to God just like we do today—in prayer.)

- Does God ever talk in an audible voice to people? Have you ever known anyone who experienced this? If not in an audible voice, how does He speak? *(Yes, He still speaks every once in a while through a voice you can actually hear. He also speaks through a ton of other ways, like through Scripture passages, other people, our feelings or our circumstances.)*

APPLY

Option 1: Here's the Key. For this option, you need key chains or rings with one blank or old key on each to remind students to think about God and talk to Him.

Tell the students you're going to give them a little gift (and they say you never do anything for them!). After you pass out the key chains, tell them to put theirs in a place where they'll discover it periodically during the week, such as their backpack, lunch box or pocket. Explain that every time they come across the key chain, you want them to stop for a brief moment, think about God and tell Him something about their day—just as they would to a friend. Bits of time with a friend—it's the key to knowing God!

Option 2: Prayer Buddies. For this option, you need friendship bracelets. (These can be purchased at various craft stores or made with simple leather strips or yarn and beads. Your students could even make and exchange them with each other.)

Hand out the bracelets and have students put them on. Explain that these are a reminder to call a friend and remind her to pray. Have each of them choose a prayer buddy and challenge them to call their prayer buddies after school every day for the next week to remind them to spend a moment praying to God. They can even choose to pray together on the phone.

REFLECT

The following short devotions are for the students to reflect on and answer during the week. You can make a copy of these pages and distribute to your class or print out from the PDF available online at www.gospellight.com/uncommon_jh_prayer_and_worship.zip.

1—JUST ASK

Dive into Jeremiah 29:11-13 to learn more about what it means to have a two-way conversation with God through prayer.

You're trying to explain your great plan for Friday night to your friend Peter, and you're starting to get a little frustrated. You tell him about the cool overnighter you've planned, complete with ice cream sundaes and the new computer game you just got from your parents, but all Peter is doing is listening to his iPod and ignoring you. What might be going through your mind at this moment?

- Peter must not like me, otherwise he would be listening to me when I'm trying to talk to him.
- Peter is inconsiderate. I'm better off without friends like him.
- Peter is really into that music on his iPod. It's nothing personal.
- Perhaps Peter doesn't like ice cream and computer games.

The fact is that lots of times when God is trying to tell us His great plans, we follow Peter's example and ignore Him. Look again at Jeremiah 29:11-13. What does the Bible say God will do for you?

In the same passage, God also asks you to do something. What is it?

Because God's plan is the best plan for you, why not take five minutes each day and ask God with your whole heart what that plan might be? Begin by writing a short prayer to Him in the space below.

2—HOW DO YOU BUILD A FRIENDSHIP?

To find out more about how prayer builds your friendship with God, check out Jeremiah 33:2-3.

In the same way that God promised Jeremiah that He would show him great things, He will also reveal some wonderful things to you. So, what are some of those great and mighty things that God might tell you as you pray?

- The number of skateboards that would need to be stacked on top of one another to reach the moon
- The cure for bad-hair days
- The recipe for M&Ms
- All of the above
- None of the above

In Jeremiah 33:2-3, what does God promise He'll do for us if we call to Him?

God could tell us anything, but usually He tells us exciting things about Himself. What do you think God is telling you about Himself today?

3—NEVER ALONE

Don't wait another second before you turn to Psalm 27:10.

Alone. That's the only word to describe how you feel. Your dad divorced your mom two years ago, and now he lives clear across the country. Your mom is out on a date with her new boyfriend. Your older sister is in her bedroom, but she seems to care more about talking on the phone to her friends than talking to you. Sitting on your bed in your room, you feel like you have no one to talk to.

The good news is that you're really never alone. God is always waiting to have a conversation with you, even when no one else is. You can talk to Him at any time and in any place. You can talk to Him out loud, in a whisper or in your thoughts. You can tell Him exactly how you feel.

What is your biggest problem in life?

Who causes you the most trouble in your life?

When you think about the future, what causes you to worry the most?

Today, remember that God is always with you and that He can help you with any problem you have. He cares about your relationships and wants to help. And He has all the answers about your future as to what you should do and where you should go.

4—TALKING TO A FRIEND

Turn to the end of your Bible to see what James 2:23 has to say to you today.

Several people in the Bible had really close friendships with God. Adam and Eve walked with Him in the Garden of Eden, and they talked with Him. (Maybe they even played games together.) David got to know God as a friend when he was watching his sheep. He made up songs about his relationship with God. And Abraham was called the “friend of God.”

How do you think Abraham’s friendship with God is similar to your friendship with your closest friend?

- Abraham and God play basketball together, although God always seems to win.
- Abraham and God spend time talking.
- Abraham and God watch TV together.
- Abraham and God skateboard to school together.

Imagine what it would be like if you had that kind of relationship with God. Write down some of the things you would do with God or what you might ask Him.

Who is your closest friend in the world? How have you gotten to know this friend better this last month? Try to think of at least four things you’ve learned about your friend.

What is one way you can develop your friendship with God today?
