

Youth Group Devotional and Discussion

The following outline is intended to help facilitate a youth group devotional and discussion about praying for Christian captives, and about the persecuted church in general.

It is designed to include other One With Them resources, such as the postcard prayers for Christian Captives, but the devotional can also be used on its own.

Suggested Setup

Many Christians around the world are forced to conduct worship services in secret. To make the realities of persecution feel more tangible, you can dim the lights in the room or close the blinds.

Introductory Activity

Many persecuted Christians have to avoid saying words like “God” or “Jesus”. For the duration of the evening, you can have your students use the following code words:

- a. “The Father” for “God”
- b. “The Son” for “Jesus”
- c. “The Book” for “Bible”
- d. “The Family” for “Church” or “Christians”
- e. “Talk to the Father” for “Pray”

Ask volunteers to recite any Bible verse and see if they remember to include the code words. Do this as many times as you wish.

Devotional Outline

Using Acts 12, the story of Peter in Prison, consider the importance of praying for Christian prisoners.

Read Acts 12:1-18

Key verse: Acts 12:5 “Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”

Three Points to Consider when praying for our persecuted family

I. We pray despite all odds

Reread v. 6-11

Consider the odds stacked against Peter and the church – the prison setup, the number of guards, the locked doors. How might Peter, and those praying for him, have felt considering all those obstacles?

Has there ever been a time when you’ve faced overwhelming obstacles towards something you’re praying for? How does it feel to pray despite those odds? Is it easy?

II. We pray with full confidence in what God can do

Reread v. 12-17

The church was earnestly praying for Peter (see v. 5) but when their prayers were answered, they couldn’t believe it. They weren’t actually expecting Peter to be released. How easy is it to fall into the trap of praying for something we don’t actually expect God to do? How can we change our mindset?

III. We pray even when our prayers aren’t answered the way we hope

Reread v. 1-3

We can be inspired by the story of Peter, but quickly skim over the fact that James died in similar conditions. Presumably, the church was “earnestly praying to God” for James too, yet God didn’t answer those prayers in the way they were hoping. Nevertheless, that did not stop them from praying Peter.

We all know what it’s like to pray for something and not have it answered, at least not in the way we were hoping for. That’s a difficult reality to work through. How do we balance praying with full confidence in God with being willing to accept the results either way?

Takeaway: When we pray for Christian captives, we should pray despite all the odds, we should pray with full confidence in God, and we should pray even when our prayers aren’t answered.

Prayer and Challenge

The One With Them toolkit includes postcards with snippets of information about different Christian prisoners around the world. Spend some time reading about these brothers and sisters, and praying for them.

Alternatively, you can visit onewiththem.ca/blog for more stories about the realities of captivity and imprisonment for persecuted Christians. Choose one of these stories beforehand to read and pray through as a group.

To conclude, provide each participant with the One With Them Challenge. This can be done by printing it out from the toolkit and giving out paper copies, or by visiting onewiththem.ca/challenge.

Encourage the participants to go through the challenge, while remembering the principles from the story of Peter.