

Prayers for youth

by Stormy Campbell

Note: The following prayer stations have been designed to guide youth into an understanding of the world around them, to encounter the suffering in the world, and to think about how God is calling them to interact with the "least of these" in their communities of schools, churches, and families. You can set up the stations before youth arrive and begin with the opening activity.

Opening Activity

Items Needed: compass (optional)

Instructions: Research issues currently going on in the world that cause people to need aid. Think about issues such as hunger, poverty, oppressive economic systems, famine, natural disasters, diseases and political terror. Think of specific issues



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currently facing people in each direction of the globe. Write down specific events happening toward the North, South, East and West. Split the youth into four separate groups divided by North, South, East and West. Give each group the list of issues you found about their particular direction. Ask them to talk about the issues, then pray for that corner of the globe. Using a compass, direct each group towards the direction on the globe they are praying for. When each group is done, gather all of the youth together and pray for the world as a whole.

Station 1: The World

Items Needed: world map, rocks, current news articles

Instructions: Lay the map out along with the rocks and news articles. Place a sheet of paper by the station with the following instructions: Take some time to reflect on the needs of the world. Use the newspapers for information about current events. Try to identify one situation that catches your eye. Think about what it would be like for you to live in that situation. When you're done, take one or more stones and place them on the locations on the map that have been present in your prayer today.

Station 2: The Outcast

Items Needed: Poster (pictures, glue or tape) pebbles, bowl of water

Instructions: Before setting up this station, create a poster with images of people that would typically be outcasts in your society. Include pictures that cross the religious, economic, social and racial boundaries of your community. If you know the community of the youth well, place pictures of the types of people that would be "uncool" for the youth to spend

time with. At the top of the poster, write the question, "Would you accept a dinner invitation from . . ." Set out the following instructions for your youth: Spend time looking at the poster, thinking about what the stories behind each of the people on the poster may be. Prayerfully consider the question that is on the poster. Why would you have a difficult time accepting an invitation from that person? Now, think of someone you personally know, with whom you wouldn't want to spend time. It may be someone in a class, on a team with you or even part of your church group. When you know who this person is, take a pebble to represent him or her. While holding the stone, ask God to show you how God is involved with people who are outside of your own boundaries and social group. Pray that you would see that person in the same way that God sees him or her. Then place the stones in the water to remember that God loves and calls everyone.

Station 3: Suffering

Items needed: Pictures, information about local organizations

Instructions: Find pictures that depict suffering, both physical and emotional. Examples include a photograph taken after a natural disaster, a portrait of a homeless person or a picture of someone sick in a hospital bed. Lay the pictures out where people can easily see them. Gather brochures and information about various local community groups that help care for others, such as hospice, homeless shelters, justice groups, etc. Lay these near where the pictures are. Set a sheet of paper with the following

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instructions near the station: The things that break Jesus' heart should be the things that break our hearts. Look around at the various pictures of suffering. What emotion do you think they evoke in Jesus? What emotions do they evoke in you? Honestly pray about your emotions. Read Matthew 25: 31-46. Look at the pictures again. How do you think Jesus would respond to these people?

After looking at the pictures of the suffering, look at the different local organizations that serve the suffering. Read the brochures carefully, considering the work that each one of these organizations may do on a day-to-day basis. Choose at least one organization to pray for. Take a brochure or contact card as a visual reminder to continue to pray for the organization.

Station 4: Poverty

Items Needed: Tables, table cloths, lamps / candles, facts about hunger, any visual aids you choose to use

Instructions: Set up a long row of tables with nice clothes and lamps. Every few feet put a fact about poverty and hunger. You can use the facts found on page 19 of the 2012 Hunger Emphasis packet. For each fact you lay out, put a corresponding visual next to it. Prompt each participant to pray a short prayer as he or she reads each fact. Some examples of visuals include:

Fact: One in seven people will go hungry tonight.

Visual: Place an image of a hungry person by the fact.

Fact: In developing countries, a child dies from hunger every 8 to 12 seconds.

Visual: Place a stopwatch. Start it at the beginning of the station and leave it running until everyone has gone through it.

Fact: 1.2 billion people live on 23 cents a day.

Visual: Set out twenty-three pennies.

Fact: 39 percent of all households served by Feeding America have had to choose between paying for food and paying for medical care.

Visual: Place a package of cheap food, such as rice, and an empty medicine bottle side-by-side.

At the end of the station, set out sheets of paper and pencils. Ask the youth to write down one fact they remember from walking through the station, and to write down a prayer about an issue presented in the fact. The youth can then either take their written prayers with them or leave them at the station for someone else to add their own prayer about the same issue.

Station 5: The Good Samaritan

Items Needed: Paper, pens

Instructions: Place the following scenarios (or create your own) around the room. Give instructions to the youth to carefully consider each situation. Stress that there is no "right" answer, but that the point of the exercise is to determine our response and how we think God might want us to respond. You can set out pen and paper to allow the youth to write down their answers, or just have them think silently about each situation. You can also use this station as a group closing activity.

Scenario 1:

While walking downtown, you stop to look in a window, which is near a black man standing by his car. As you turn, a white man walks past you and you hear him say to the black man: "You are in the way, boy." Do you say something? To which person? How do you respond, if at all, to this? What do you think is the Christ-like thing to do?

Scenario 2:

In the middle of winter, in the car on the way to church, you see a homeless man standing with a sign. As you come to a stop, you can read the sign: "Homeless: need shoes." You're already five minutes late, and your tardiness will be noticed. How do you feel in this situation? Take a moment to process all the emotions that might arise in this scenario. What actions, if any, do you take?

Scenario 3:

You're walking home from school one day by yourself when you see an Arab woman and her daughter, both dressed in

traditional Muslim clothes, walking by. You notice them for a moment and then are about to move on, when you realize there's a group of teenagers around your age following the two, making disrespectful jokes about Muslims and terrorists. On a closer look, you realize you recognize the teenagers from school, though you don't know them. What would you do, if anything? What does Jesus teach us to do for others, especially those who are treated with hatred?

Stations 1,2,5 were adapted from prayer stations found at creativeprayers.com.

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"Stranger" by Sallylynn Askins