

Isa. 40:21–31
Ps. 147:1–11, 20c
1 Cor. 9:16–23
Mark 1:29–39

Pray and Serve

Goal for the Session

Children will discover, in the story of Peter’s mother-in-law, the balance of Christian life in Jesus’ actions: praying to God and serving others.

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Mark 1:29–39

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Gary W. Charles

Before dawn, and presumably while the crowd is sleeping, Jesus steals out into the darkness to pray. Prayer is not as dominant a theme in Mark as in Luke, but it is an important theme. From the opening chapter of his Gospel, though, Mark introduces us to Jesus who is both a faithful Jew and a faithful Jew at prayer. Jesus is one who makes time and seeks a place to pray. For Mark, prayer is not peripheral to the identity of Jesus, and by implication, not peripheral for those who follow him.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Ofelia Ortega

The healed mother-in-law and Jesus share the same liturgy. Nobody has taught her what she has to do. She has been well aware when receiving Jesus’ help and when responding to him precisely on the Sabbath. Her diaconal work is the beginning and announcement of the gospel. Simon and the other disciples won’t understand it until Easter. They will not want to become servants of each other (9:35; 10:43). They did not perceive that the Son of God came to serve and to give his life for all (10:45). She, on the other hand, knows it. She has overcome all the selfishness and restrictive teachings and has been close to Jesus; deep down she is already Christian, *diakonisa*, a servant of the church gathered in her son-in-law’s house.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” P. C. Enniss

Gerald May, a medical doctor who practices psychotherapy in Washington, DC, writes of the importance of community in the healing process: “God’s grace through community involves something far greater than other people’s support and perspective. The power of grace is nowhere as brilliant nor as mystical as in communities of faith. Its power includes not just love that comes from people and through people but love that pours forth among people, as if through the very spaces between one person and next. Just to be in such an atmosphere is to be bathed in healing power.”

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Mike Graves

As the summary in verse 39 notes, Jesus goes forth “proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.” Preaching and healing. Healing and preaching. This represents the ministry of Jesus in a nutshell, and it represents still the ministry of those who follow him. It seems for Mark’s Gospel that the preaching of Jesus and the extinguishing of evil are two sides of the same coin. Preaching exists that evil might not.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Mark 1:29–39

YOU WILL NEED

- small table or large box
- green cloth
- battery-powered candle
- Bible
- Color Pack 19, 30, 31
- scissors
- plastic cups
- rubber bands
- string
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- crayons
- pencils
- tape
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player

For Responding

- option 1: construction paper, scissors, pencils, fine-tipped markers, tape, paper clips
- option 2: two colors/kinds of refrigerator cookie dough, cookie sheet, spatula, knife, zip-seal plastic sandwich bags
- option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2, materials listed there

Focus on Your Teaching

Children are familiar with balances in life: working and playing; school and home. It is important to introduce them to a Christian balance: prayer and service. Children may notice the serving that family members and friends do. They also need to see models of prayer and how prayer is paired with serving. Children are often more doers than sitters. There are many ways to pray beyond folding hands and sitting quietly. Encourage them to not only work and serve together, but also pray together, building a comfort level about prayer in everyday life.

Dear God, create in my heart a place for service and prayer. Surround me with the joy of love that's shared with others. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, make a worship table by arranging the green cloth on a small table or large box and placing a Bible opened to Mark 1 and the candle on it. Cut apart Color Pack 19 on the dashed lines. For each group of three learners, cut three 24" pieces of string and tie one end of each string to a rubber band, spacing them equally. If you are using option 1 in Responding, cut one 2" x 9" strip of construction paper for each learner. If you are using option 2, plan to use an oven and, if possible, ask a parent to help.

Welcome children by name. Set out one plastic cup per child on the floor around your learning area, some upside down and some right side up. Form groups of three and give each group a rubber band and string tool. Demonstrate how children will work together, each one holding a string and stretching the rubber band to grab a cup and move it to another place. The goal is for each group to use the tool to create a stack of three cups—no touching cups with hands! Children may talk to one another and swap strings as needed.

After each group has made a stack, invite learners to gather around the worship table. Light the candle. Ask what they like best about working with other people. Pray aloud:

Dear God, thank you for each person who is gathered here today: (name of each person). Be with us as we work together, serve together, and pray together. Amen.

EXPLORING

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Cue Cards), crayons, pencils, and scissors. Invite learners to cut off the strip at the top, fold along the dashed line, and color the two words. Have them tape a pencil to one edge of the folded paper. Show them how to hold the pencil and twist it to flip the sign from one word to the other. Review the meanings of the words *pray* and *serve*.

Tell learners to listen as you tell the Bible story and to show you each word as they hear it.

One day, after Jesus and his disciples had gone to the synagogue to worship and *pray*, they all walked to Simon's house. Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed. She had a high fever. Jesus took action! He took the woman by the hand and lifted her up. Suddenly her fever was gone! She got up and began to *serve* her guests.

Later that day, many people came to find Jesus. They brought their friends who were sick or who had unclean spirits. Jesus was there to *serve* them, and he cured many people.

The next morning, Jesus went off by himself to *pray* to God. Simon and the other disciples went to find him. They told Jesus, "Everyone is looking for you!" Jesus told them it was time to move on to other towns to speak God's word, to *pray*, and to *serve*.

Divide the puzzle pieces cut from Color Pack 19 among the learners. Encourage them to work together to make a picture of today's Bible story. Look at the finished picture and discuss the story:

- ✪ When did Jesus pray in this story? Who else prayed?
- ✪ When did Jesus serve? Who else served in this story?
- ✪ Why is it important for Jesus' followers to pray and to serve?
- ✪ What are some ways we serve people today?
- ✪ What are some ways we pray? (Encourage a variety of ideas, such as skipping around the yard and thanking God for creation; praying for people we see; praying for those who send e-mails or letters to our families; jogging in the neighborhood and praying for neighbors as we pass their homes; singing prayerful songs.)

You Shall Love the Lord Your God

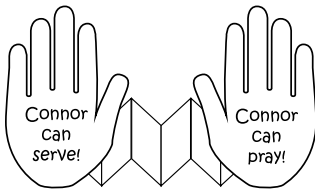
You shall love the Lord your
God, alleluia!

You shall love the Lord your
God, alleluia!

With all your heart and soul
and mind, alleluia!

With all your heart and soul
and mind, alleluia!

Invite learners to imagine praying and serving as ways of loving God with heart and soul and mind. Teach the two lines to "You Shall Love the Lord Your God" (Color Pack 31; track 22 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*) and then sing it together.



RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- Hands to Serve, Hands to Pray** A handprint project can help learners talk with their families about the balance of praying and serving. Have children use pencils to trace both hands on construction paper and cut out the handprints. Place the two handprints on the table with thumbs close together. Have children use fine-tipped markers to print “(Name) can serve!” on one handprint and “(Name) can pray!” on the other. Give each child a 2" x 9" strip of construction paper. Have them print names of people they would like to pray for on one side of the strip and people they would like to serve on the other side. Be prepared to help with spelling. Have learners accordion-fold the paper strip. Tape one end of the folded paper strip to the plain side of each handprint, connecting the two. Note how they balance as they stand on the table. Paper clip the handprints together for children to take home. Encourage them to unclip the handprints at home and tell their families about balancing serving and praying.
- Serve and Pray Cookies** Children will enjoy making a snack that reminds them that serving and praying work together for a satisfying Christian life. Ask children to think of reasons that serving and praying are both important for Jesus’ followers today. Have children wash hands. Set out two different colors/kinds of refrigerator cookie dough. Give each learner a spoonful of each dough. Invite them to twist them together to make a single cookie, but not to knead them together too much. Bake the cookies. When they are cool, say a prayer of thanks for food and for time to pray and serve. Eat the cookies, begin mindful of allergies. If there are extra cookies, put them in small plastic bags and encourage children to serve by giving a cookie to someone.
- A Surprising Mixture** Children will imagine ways to combine serving and praying and the surprising results that may come from doing so. Give a few examples of how you fit serving and praying into your life. Comment that serving and praying seem different, but they work together to do amazing things. Invite children to name ways they can combine serving and praying. Complete this activity by following the directions on Resource Sheet 2 (Surprising Paint).

Hallelujah! Praise Ye the Lord!

Hal - le - lu, hal - le - lu, hal -
 le - lu, hal - le - lu - jah!
 Praise ye the Lord!
 Hal - le - lu, hal - le - lu, hal -
 le - lu, hal - le - lu - jah!
 Praise ye the Lord!
 Praise ye the Lord!
 Hallelujah!
 Praise ye the Lord!
 Hallelujah!
 Praise ye the Lord!
 Hallelujah!
 Praise ye the Lord!
 Hallelujah!
 Praise ye the Lord!

CLOSING

Gather around the worship table. Have children repeat the two important parts of Jesus’ life: praying and serving. Invite each one to tell a way to serve or a way to pray that he or she will try this week.

Form two groups to sing “Hallelujah! Praise Ye the Lord!” (Color Pack 30; track 8 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*). Have one group raise both hands while singing “Hallelujah” and the other group raise both hands when singing “Praise Ye the Lord.”

February 7, 2021
Pray and Serve

Grades (K) 1–2
Resource Sheet 1

Cue Cards

----- cut here -----

anias

fold -----

Pray

----- cut here -----

Surprising Paint

YOU WILL NEED

- 2 packages instant pudding mix in two different flavors—the kind you do not cook (If you have more than 8 learners, use 3 packages of pudding mix and 6 cups of milk.)
- milk (check pudding package instructions for amount needed)
- 1 measuring cup
- 2 large mixing bowls
- 2 wire whisks
- 2 large spoons
- paper plates (1 per child)

Directions:

1. Have children wash hands.
2. Have children put one package of pudding mix into each mixing bowl. Show the milk. Invite learners to imagine the pudding mix is serving and the milk is praying.
3. Following package instructions, ask volunteers to measure the correct amount of milk and pour it into the mixing bowls.
4. Have the children take turns using wire whisks to mix each bowl of pudding. Invite their comments on the changes they observe.
5. Give each learner a paper plate. Place a spoonful of each pudding flavor on each plate.
6. Invite learners to use their fingers to create a picture of praying. Have them smooth the pudding and then use their fingers to create a picture of serving. Comment on how both are important, and when we pray and serve together wonderful things happen.
7. Invite learners to eat the pudding with their fingers, being mindful of allergies. And then wash hands again!

