

**OPEN THE CONVERSATION**Take some time to build relationships with the students:

* Ask for each student’s high and low from the week.
* Today’s RBQ (Relationship Building Question): **If you could transform one thing in the world that seems impossible—like turning desert sand into a forest or teaching a lion to do ballet—what would it be?**

**INTRODUCTION**What’s something you’ve worked hard at, even when it was tough, because you knew it was important? Maybe it was learning a new skill, practicing for a sport, or solving a tricky puzzle. Maybe it was finishing a big school project or practicing for a performance. Sometimes, it’s easier to quit when things don’t seem to be working out. But we’re more likely to stick with something hard when we know it’s worth it! Prayer can feel the same way—hard at times, but God tells us it’s always worth it. When answers don’t come right away or circumstances seem unchanging, it’s tempting to stop praying. But God tells us that prayer matters and that we should keep praying in all circumstances. Today, we’ll look at the life of Jonah and explore why prayer matters and how persistence in prayer can help us grow in trusting and relying on God, no matter what’s happening!

**What is the longest you have persisted in prayer about something? Why is it easier to give up praying about specific things over time?**

***READ JONAH 3:1-10***

* **How would the overwhelming nature of the city and the task to be completed require Jonah to continue to depend on God? How do overwhelming tasks or circumstances lead you to persist in prayer?**
* **How does practicing persistent prayer teach us to rely on God daily? What are some ways you could begin to persistently practice prayer throughout your day?**
* **How might doubt keep us from staying persistent in prayer? How does God’s response to the Ninevites’ prayers encourage you to keep on praying?**
* **Who do you have a hard time believing could ever become a Christian? How can you persist in prayer for that person or group of people?**

**WRAP UP**

**Put today's lesson into action: How can you apply it to your life?**
*Ask for any prayer requests, and pray for one another.*

**EXTENDED CUT**In today’s passage, we pick up in the middle of the story of Jonah. For those who might not know the full story, it can be helpful to share a quick summary of what’s happened up to this point. In chapters 1-2, Jonah runs the opposite direction from God’s original call for him to go to Nineveh and preach repentance. In his rebellion from the Lord, Jonah was swallowed by a great fish and spent three days inside its belly. Jonah cried out to God and repented of his sin. Once safely back on dry ground, Jonah heard from the Lord again and was given another opportunity to listen and obey the Lord’s instructions. The second call of God to Jonah reveals the great love God has for His people even when they fail and choose ungodliness. A theme that continues into chapter 3 with God’s gracious response to the prayers of the Ninevites.

**How would the overwhelming nature of the city and the task to be completed require Jonah to continue to depend on God? How do overwhelming tasks or circumstances lead you to persist in prayer?**

The distance across Nineveh is described as a three-day journey, which tells us that it was a pretty big city! This was more than a handful of people who were in rebellion against God. One man was being tasked with taking a stand for God in the face of widespread rebellion! It was a message that could easily get him rejected or even harmed. Which is probably part of why Jonah resisted delivering it in the first place. To accomplish this task was something that would require dependence on God in more ways than one. Jonah had to trust that God would give him the courage, strength, and the right words to say! In the same way, overwhelming tasks or circumstances in our lives can provide an opportunity for us to persist in prayer because they remind us that we can’t do everything on our own. When things feel too big or too hard, prayer helps us stay connected to God, rely on His power, and find peace in knowing He’s in control.

**How could practicing persistent prayer teach us to rely on God daily? What are some ways you could begin to persistently practice prayer throughout your day?**

Prayer is ultimately one of the best ways we can connect with God. It’s the practice of not only speaking with him but listening as well. And just like any good relationship requires conversation to grow, so does our relationship with God! In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, the apostle Paul encourages believers to “pray without ceasing.” This doesn’t mean that we’re meant to literally be praying every second of the day. But it does indicate that as we grow in our relationship with God, our conversation with him becomes a more regular and ongoing part of our day as well. Persistent prayer doesn’t happen overnight though. It takes practice! But when we’re intentional to make it a part of our daily life, we begin to develop the habit of turning to God in every situation, big or small. Consistency in prayer reminds us that we can’t do life on our own—we need God’s help, strength, and guidance. And over time, persistent prayer builds trust in God as we see the ways He answers, provides, and gives us peace, even when things don’t go as we expect.

**How might doubt keep us from staying persistent in prayer? How does God’s response to the Ninevites’ prayers encourage you to keep on praying?**

Have you ever prayed for something and not gotten the answer you hoped for? Either you have or will at some point in the future. The enemy loves to use moments like that to plant seeds of doubt in our minds about the importance of prayer and God’s willingness and ability to respond to our prayers. When it comes to prayer, doubt causes us to ask the question, “What’s the point?” If we don’t believe that God can or will do anything, we’re far less likely to keep asking Him for help. But God’s response to the Ninevites’ prayers in Jonah 3:1-10, should encourage us about the power of prayer and the importance of persisting! Imagine if, instead of persistently praying and repenting from their rebellion, the Ninevites had assumed that their prayers would be pointless and just gave up? We certainly wouldn’t have this incredible story of God’s mercy to look back on today! It’s only *because* the Ninevites persisted in their prayers, asking for God’s mercy, that we get to see the way that God so kindly relents and has compassion on them. His response in this moment, reminds us that prayer does in fact, matter. And that God is always listening. Even when we find ourselves feeling far from him! Now, that doesn’t mean that his answer will always be “yes” when we persist. Sometimes the answer to our prayers will still be “no”, or “not yet”. But when we know the character of God, that He is good and always at work for our good (Romans 8:28), we can trust in his response as we keep on praying.

**Who do you have a hard time believing could ever become a Christian? How can you persist in praying for that person or group of people?**

At first glance, Jonah’s mission might seem like an impossible one. Or at least a mission doomed to failure. What kind of impact could one messenger have on an entire nation full of people who showed no fear of the Lord? Sometimes as we look at people in our life who don’t have a relationship with Jesus, we’re tempted to have a similar outlook. Maybe it’s a parent, a friend, teammate, or teacher, who seem so far away from God that you can’t imagine them ever changing. Yet, we see in today’s story that no one is beyond God’s reach. Somehow, God was working in the heart of the King of Nineveh in ways that Jonah could never have predicted, so that he responded with humility to the call for repentance when Jonah obediently delivered it. It can be hard to believe that certain people could ever become followers of Jesus, especially if they seem completely uninterested in God or are living in a way that’s far from Him. But the story of the Ninevites shows us that God’s love and power can transform anyone, no matter how unlikely it seems to us! In 1 Corinthians 3:6, Paul reminds believers that, like Jonah, our job is to trust the Lord each step of the way and obediently plant the seeds that God will water. We are not responsible for the outcome, but simply asked to persist in praying and sharing the good news so that others might hear and receive it! Even when we don’t see immediate change and the outcome seems unlikely, persistent prayer helps us trust that God is working in ways we can’t always see.