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Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

Scripture: Matthew 26:36-56

Theme: Jesus obeyed the Father even when it was hard

4th-6th Grade (Ages 9-11)

Free curriculum for small and rural churches

Lesson Overview

Lesson Overview: "Jesus Prays in Gethsemane" (Matthew 26:36, 56) Theme: Even when the night was heavy and the path uncertain, Jesus trusted God's will, and so can we! --- Introduction (Engage & Connect) Start with a simple story or question: "Have you ever prayed to God about something really hard, like a big test, a tough decision, or feeling scared?" Let kids share a time when they felt afraid but trusted God anyway. Point to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, where He prayed three times, asking God to take away the pain of His upcoming suffering. "What do you think He was praying for?" (Hint: It wasn't just His own comfort, it was to do God's will perfectly, even if it hurt.) --- Key Passage (Explore the Bible) Read Matthew 26:36, 56 aloud, pausing after verses like 39 ("Father, if You're willing, take this cup away from Me!") to ask: "How do you think Jesus felt here? Sad? Angry? Overwhelmed?" Point out that after praying, He fell asleep, but then He woke up, asked God again, and obeyed anyway. Even when He knew it would cost Him His life, He said, "Your will, not mine." Remind kids that Jesus didn't just pray for Himself; He prayed for all of us, so that we could trust God even when life gets dark. --- Big Idea (Apply & Reflect) "Obedience isn't always easy... but Jesus did it anyway!" Share that God doesn't call us to only the fun or easy choices, He calls us to trust Him through all of life, including the hard moments. Use an analogy: "Imagine you're playing a game where you have to take a big step forward, but the path is dark and full of obstacles. Would you still choose to go? That's what Jesus did!" Challenge kids: Where have you felt like you had to trust God when it was hard? How can you pray like Jesus today? --- Challenge & Encouragement (Personal Application) End with a prayerful moment: - Option 1: "Let's pray together for someone who is afraid right now!" Write their names on slips of paper (or say them aloud) and pray for courage to trust God. - Option 2: Give each child a simple "obedience promise" to make (e.g., "Today, I'll choose to pray one big question to God, even if it feels scary."). Remind them: "Jesus didn't make it easy for Himself, He made it possible by trusting God. No matter what's ahead for you, God's will is always better than ours!" --- Closing (Leave Them Inspired) End with a story or song (e.g., "Jesus Loves the Little Children" or a prayer like "This Little Light of Mine" adapted for trust). Ask: "Who can tell me one way you've seen God answer a prayer this week?" Celebrate their answers and leave them with the hope that, like Jesus, they can pray even when the night feels heavy. --- Teacher

Tips: - Use a garden scene or candlelight for atmosphere. - Let kids act out the scene (e.g., praying in a "dark room," falling asleep, waking up). - For deeper discussion, ask: "What would you do if God asked you to do something hard? How can you pray like Jesus?" Optional reflection: children can draw a picture of Jesus helping their friends, then share one way they can help someone else this week. This extra activity supports the lesson's theme and gives teachers a simple, lowprep option for extending the discussion.

Bible Story

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

One evening, after Jesus had eaten the Passover meal with his disciples, he and his friends walked to a quiet place called Gethsemane. The disciples were worried about what was about to happen, they didn't understand that Jesus was soon going to be taken away, betrayed, and killed. But Jesus knew this was part of God's plan to save the world. He took his three closest friends, Peter, James, and John, and told them, "My soul is deeply troubled. Stay here and keep watch." (Matthew 26:36, NLT) Even though he was worried, Jesus didn't tell his friends to stay with him forever. Instead, he wanted them to be there if he needed help.

Jesus went a little farther into the garden, where he knelt down with his face pressed into the dirt. He prayed hard to his Father, saying, "If it's possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. But I want to do your will, not mine." (Matthew 26:39, NLT) He didn't want to die, that was the hardest part. But he trusted God fully and said, "Not my will, but yours be done." (Matthew 26:36) Even when Jesus felt afraid, he didn't give up. He trusted God would help him, just like God had helped him before.

Peter, James, and John fell asleep because they were so tired. Jesus went back to pray again and this time asked them to stay awake with him. But they kept falling asleep, too. One of them even slept through the second prayer! (Matthew 26:43) Jesus looked at his friends and said, "Couldn't you keep watch with me for even one hour?" (Matthew 26:44) He knew they weren't strong enough yet to handle what was coming.

After Jesus finished praying the third time, he got up and went back to his disciples. He told them, "Sleep now and rest. The time has come for the Son of Man to be betrayed." (Matthew 26:45) Then, he walked away alone to face what was coming. While Jesus was gone, Judas, one of his disciples, came with soldiers and leaders to arrest him. Though Jesus knew this was coming, he didn't fight. Instead, he allowed himself to be captured, knowing that God's plan was about to unfold perfectly.

Questions for Discussion: 1. Why do you think Jesus asked his disciples to stay awake with him? 2. How did Jesus show trust in God even when he was afraid? 3. What does it mean to say, "Not my will, but yours be done"? How can we do this in our own lives?

Personal Application: Jesus faced his greatest fear, not for himself, but for us. He trusted God completely, even when it was hard. When we feel scared or unsure about what God wants us to do, can we ask Him to help us, just like Jesus did? Who can we pray for today to remember to trust God, even in hard times?

--- Why This Story Matters: Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane shows us how much he loved us. He didn't just endure suffering, he offered it to God so we could be forgiven and free. His trust in God reminds us that we can face our own fears with faith, knowing that God is with us. Just as Jesus didn't fight his destiny, we can choose to trust God's plan for our lives, even when it's scary.

Key Verse

Matthew 26:39b , 'My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may Your will be done.'

Understanding Jesus' Prayer (Matthew 26:39b) Jesus was in a big hurry to do what his Father in heaven wanted, even if it was hard. In this prayer, he asked, "If it's not too much trouble, just let this big, scary thing happen to me. But whatever God really wants, I'll do it." His words show that even when things feel tough, Jesus trusted God

fully, even when he didn't know what would happen next. What was Jesus talking about? Remember how the Bible says Jesus was about to go to the cross to save us? That's where he would face suffering, maybe even die, but he knew God loved him and had a bigger plan. Instead of panicking, Jesus prayed, "Let God's plan be my plan, even if it's not easy." His example reminds us that when we face hard choices, we can trust God, just like Jesus did. Why does this matter for us? Imagine you're playing a game that's super unfair, like a race where you know you'll lose. What do you do? Do you give up? Do you try to cheat? Or do you trust that the game's rules are fair in the big picture? Jesus chose to trust God even though he knew what was coming. That's like saying, "I'll do my best, even if it hurts, because I know You're in control." What can we learn from Jesus' example? Here's a question for you: When have you faced something scary or unfair? Maybe it was a test you didn't do well on, or a friend hurt you, or you felt like God wasn't listening. Jesus didn't shy away from hard things, he trusted God anyway. Can you imagine asking God the same way? "If it's not easy, but I know You're in charge, then I'll do what's right, even if it's hard." Personal Challenge: Try Jesus' Prayer Next time you feel worried or unsure, try praying like Jesus: "Father, if this feels hard, just let it happen. But whatever You want, I'll do it." It's not magic, it's about believing God can take care of you, even when life gets tough. Can you think of one small thing today where you'd like to trust God more? Bonus Thought: Jesus didn't want to suffer, he just knew God's plan was better. Maybe there's something in your life you don't want to deal with either. What if God's plan is bigger than your feelings? That's the mystery, and the beauty, of trusting him!

Activities

Activity 1:

Using a flashlight and hands, students act out Jesus' prayer scene with shadow puppets while praying aloud for their own "Gethsemane moments."

1. Set the Scene (2 min): Read Matthew 26:36, 46 in a way that highlights Jesus' struggle ("If it's possible, let this cup pass from me"). Ask: What emotions do you think Jesus felt?
2. Draw Emotions (5 min): Give each student a smooth stone or paper "stone." Have them draw one emotion they associate with Gethsemane (e.g., a scared face, a shield for courage, a cloud for fear) on the front. For the back, they'll write a prayer for their own "cup of trouble."
3. Share & Reflect (5 min): In pairs, students swap stones to share their drawings and prayers. Ask: How is your prayer like Jesus'? What's one way you can pray through fear this week?
4. Optional Extension: Collect stones to display as a class reminder.
2. "Prayer Walk & Shadow Puppets"
6. Read & Connect (3 min): Read Matthew 26:36, 46, then ask: Where do you feel like you're carrying a heavy burden? How can Jesus' prayer help you?
7. Make Shadow Puppets (5 min): Fold paper plates in half. Students decorate the "top" (Jesus) and "bottom" (Gethsemane's garden) with crayons, e.g., a crown of thorns, a garden path, or clouds. Label the scene: 'Jesus in the Garden'.
8. Prayer Walk (5 min): With flashlight in hand, students hold their puppet up to a dark wall/sheet. They walk slowly, acting out Jesus' struggle (e.g., "This cup is heavy"). As they "pray," they whisper: "Lord, help me trust You like You did."
9. Reflect Together: Ask: What's one time you've trusted God like Jesus did? How can you pray more like He prayed this week?
10. Why These Work:
11. Both activities use low-cost, hands-on materials and adapt well to small groups (3, 10 students).
12. They tie scripture to real-life prayer with open-ended questions (e.g., "How is your prayer like Jesus'?").
13. Emphasize personal application by linking Jesus' prayer to their own struggles.
14. Would you like variations for visual learners or those who prefer movement-based activities?

Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions for upper elementary students (ages 9, 11) based on Jesus Praying in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36, 56). Each question invites reflection, deeper thinking, and personal application while connecting the story to their own lives:
 - 1. Prayer in Hard Times
 - Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, asking God for strength to face the pain and suffering ahead. What do you think made Jesus pray so deeply? Was it fear, worry, or trust? How can praying like Jesus help us when we feel afraid, anxious, or unsure about something important in our own lives? Think about a time you felt scared or nervous, what would you pray for, and how might praying like Jesus change things?
 - (This question encourages students to explore emotions and connect prayer to real-life struggles.)
 - 2. What Would You Ask God?
 - In Gethsemane, Jesus asked God, “If your will is to be done, let this cup pass from me.” But later, he said, “Not my will, but yours be done.” If you were there with Jesus, what would you pray for? Maybe you’d ask for courage, wisdom, or help to stay kind even when others are mean. How can we learn to trust God’s plan, even when it feels hard or confusing, like Jesus did? What’s something in your own life that you’re struggling to trust God with?
 - (This prompts students to think about personal struggles and how faith grows through surrender.)
 - 3. Strength in the Darkest Moments
 - Jesus felt such heavy weight in Gethsemane that his sweat was like drops of blood. What do you think made him feel that way? Was it knowing what would happen next, or because he loved us so much that he wanted to protect us? How can we show love like Jesus when we’re facing tough situations, whether for friends, family, or even ourselves? Think about a time someone helped you through a hard moment. How did that help you grow?
 - (This invites reflection on sacrifice, empathy, and how love shows up in suffering.)
 - 4. A Lesson for Us: How to Endure
 - After Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, he found Peter, James, and John sleeping. He told them, “Stay here and keep watch.” Do you think they understood what Jesus was going through? If you were one of those disciples, how would you feel? What can we learn from them, or from Jesus’ example, about staying strong and praying when life feels overwhelming? How can we encourage each other to keep trusting God, even when things get hard?
 - (This connects the story to friendship, perseverance, and community support.)
 - Each question invites deeper conversation by asking students to share personal thoughts, relate to Jesus’ emotions, and reflect on how their own faith can grow. Would you like any of these adjusted for a specific group or focus?

Prayer Focus

Here’s a heartfelt and age-appropriate prayer focus for your upper elementary lesson on Jesus in Gethsemane, designed to connect with young learners while inviting deeper reflection: --- “Lord Jesus, You carried so much weight on Your heart, knowing the pain of Your upcoming suffering, the fear of what others might do, and the weight of saving everyone who would ever love You. You didn’t hide Your feelings; You told Your friends, ‘My soul is heavy,’ and You asked them to pray with You. Help me, like You, to pray with honesty. When I’m scared or tired, remind me that You understand my fears, and let me trust You, just as You trusted Your Father. Teach me to pray like You did, with all my heart, not just my words. Amen.” --- Deeper Questions for Reflection: 1. What did you notice about Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane? (Hint: He shared his fears, asked for help, and trusted God.) 2. How can you pray with honesty today, like Jesus did? (Example: When you’re nervous about a test, write down your fears and pray, “God, help me trust You.”) 3. Why do you think Jesus asked His friends to pray with Him? (Hint: Maybe He needed their strength or wanted to share His burden.) 4. What’s one way you can pray for others this week, just like Jesus prayed for His disciples? --- Personal Application: Jesus didn’t just pray for Himself, He

prayed for us. His prayer shows us how to: - Share our worries (even if we're afraid). - Ask for help (like He did to God). - Trust God even when things feel heavy (just as He did). Challenge: Next time you pray, try writing down one fear you have and saying, "God, help me trust You like Jesus did." --- Teacher's Group Prayer (for the class to pray together): "Heavenly Father, thank You for Jesus, who walked this earth, prayed with us, and carried more than we'll ever know. When we feel scared or alone, help us pray like He did: with honesty, trust, and love. Let us remember that even in His darkest hour, He found strength in You. Amen." --- Why this works for kids: - Relatable imagery (e.g., "praying with honesty" feels tangible). - Connection to their lives (tests, fears, friendships). - Action step (a prayer challenge for the week). - God's character (Jesus cared enough to pray deeply, and we can too!).

>> Missions Spotlight

In the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, ancient olive trees still grow , some over 900 years old. Pilgrims from every nation come to pray where Jesus prayed. Pray that every visitor would understand WHY Jesus prayed , and what He was about to do.

-> To the Cross

In the garden, Jesus prayed, 'Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will.' He didn't want to go to the cross , who would? But He chose to obey. His obedience is what saves us.