

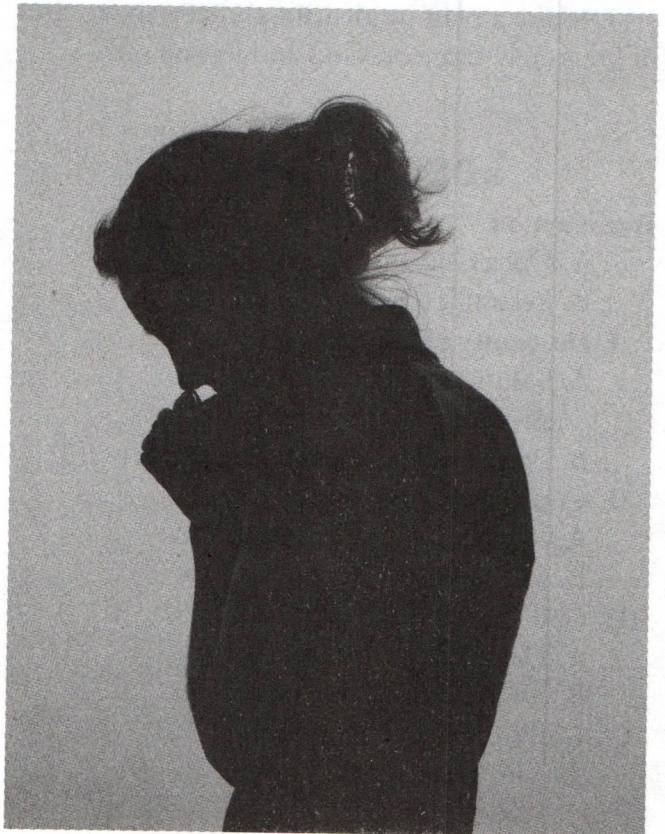
The Lord Is King

Devotional Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Background Scripture: Psalms 9, 10

Psalm 10:12-18

- ¹² Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God.
Do not forget the helpless.
- ¹³ Why does the wicked man revile God?
Why does he say to himself,
“He won’t call me to account”?
- ¹⁴ But you, God, see the trouble of the
afflicted;
you consider their grief and take it in
hand.
The victims commit themselves to you;
you are the helper of the fatherless.
- ¹⁵ Break the arm of the wicked man;
call the evildoer to account for his
wickedness
that would not otherwise be found out.
- ¹⁶ The LORD is King for ever and ever;
the nations will perish from his land.
- ¹⁷ You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted;
you encourage them, and you listen to
their cry,
- ¹⁸ defending the fatherless and the
oppressed,
so that mere earthly mortals
will never again strike terror.



Key Text

You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry. —Psalm 10:17

Introduction

A. Does God Listen?

Mark Twain once said, "Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest." Most of us desire to live with honor, courage, joy, and goodness most of the time. Sometimes we succeed. Twain was, as usual, probably too pessimistic, but his point stands. The human pursuit of the good suffers from inconsistency. We want to be good but are surprised by people who consistently are.

The Christian confession, however, is that God's pursuit of the good does not suffer in the same way. God consistently seeks the good for all creation. The search can be complicated, however, because humans are complicated. Sometimes, injustice and evil seem to prevail, and we wonder if God is. We wonder whether he hears the cries for help that vulnerable people utter.

This question carries some urgency for believers in the God of the Bible. If God is active in the world, what is that activity? Does God sit around listening to praise songs and cheering on our church growth plans or pious sermons? Or do these things sometimes offend God when they don't result in (or from) our assistance to the poor or oppressed? Today's text points us to the correct answers.

B. Lesson Context

Psalms 9 and 10 were originally a single poem. It was split apart to serve separate purposes. Ancient Hebrew manuscripts count them as two psalms, while the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, counts them together as one.

The entire poem falls into four roughly equally sized sections: Psalms 9:1-10; 9:11-20; 10:1-9; and 10:10-18. Each part contributes something to the overall picture as the poem moves toward a request for God's help in a world of suffering and struggle.

Psalms 9 and 10 form a partial acrostic as they use 17 letters of the 22-letter Hebrew alphabet successively, as the lines progress. (A complete example of using all 22 letters to form the acros-

A King

Forever and Ever

Unit 2: Our God Reigns

Lessons 6-9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the psalmist's confidence in God.
2. Identify one or more imprecatory elements of the psalm.
3. Make a plan to identify and correct an area of life to rely more on God and less on self.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Does God Listen?
- B. Lesson Context

I. Humanity's Evil (Psalm 10:12-13)

- A. Solution to a Problem (v. 12)
Being God's Hands
- B. Problem That Needs a Solution (v. 13)

II. God's Awareness (Psalm 10:14)

- A. Regarding Oppressors (v. 14a)
- B. Regarding Outcome (v. 14b-c)

III. God's Intervention (Psalm 10:15)

- A. Desired Retribution (v. 15a)
- B. Desired Scope (v. 15b)

IV. God's Character (Psalm 10:16-18)

- A. The One Who Reigns (v. 16)
Wasted Money?
- B. The One Who Hears (v. 17)
- C. The One Who Rescues (v. 18)

Conclusion

- A. The God Who Helps
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

tic is Psalm 37.) It is unclear whether the incomplete nature of the acrostic of Psalms 9 and 10 was deliberate.

Many digital Bibles label the titles or headings of the Psalms as “verse zero.” So, if you’re using an electronic Bible, these headings can offer additional context or insight into the following psalm. Many psalms, however, lack a superscription, and Psalm 10 is one of those. However, the superscription of Psalm 9 applies to Psalm 10 as well, given the unitary nature of the two passages. That superscription reads, “For the director of music. To the tune of ‘The Death of the Son.’ A psalm of David.” The son in question is perhaps David’s son Absalom. David, “the man anointed by the God of Jacob” (2 Samuel 23:1), is credited as the writer of about half the 150 psalms.

I. Humanity’s Evil

(Psalm 10:12-13)

A. Solution to a Problem (v. 12)

12a. Arise, LORD!

We see here the first of three requested actions—requests that go from general to specific. See also Psalms 3:7; 9:19; 17:13; and 132:8.

12b. Lift up your hand, O God.

The sense of this requested action is a desire for divine retribution. Such a desire implies a desire for God to assume the role of the divine warrior (as in Psalm 106:26 and Isaiah 26:11). It also can paint a picture of God’s ability to save (compare Psalm 17:7). But the two ideas are not mutually exclusive—the former can result in the latter.

An image of God’s engaging in war is problematic to modern eyes. This is because the image can be misused to justify atrocities by some people against others. Scripture often uses this imagery to depict God’s commitment to ending wrongdoing and ensuring justice (example: Isaiah 59:9-21).

12c. Do not forget the helpless.

We come to the third requested action—the most specific of the three. People *forget*, but God does not: “The wicked go down to the realm of the

dead, all the nations that forget God. But God will never forget the needy; the hope of the afflicted will never perish” (Psalm 9:17-18). Therefore, this request may seem strange, given that God always has complete mastery of all facts. Even so, the psalmist speaks similarly in several other passages (13:1; 9:12; 25:6; 42:9; 44:24; 74:19; 77:9). Suffering or a sense of isolation often results in a feeling of being forsaken (compare Psalms 22:1; 71:9-13; contrast Ezra 9:9), thus the cry of desperation.

Such cries come from *the helpless*. The word being translated occurs again in Psalms 9:12 and 10:17 (see below), where it is translated as “afflicted.” The fact that this word occurs 31 times in the Psalms indicates its importance.

What Do You Think?

What specific request can you bring before God in prayer for those in your neighborhood or town experiencing suffering?

Digging Deeper

In what ways might God use you as an answer to these prayers?

Being God’s Hands

Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566) was a clergyman who was one of the first Spanish settlers in the New World. Initially in favor of slavery, he eventually saw this to be wrong. Consequently, he dedicated his life to advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples in the Americas. Witnessing people’s suffering at the hands of the Spanish conquerors, he felt compelled to act. Just as the author of Psalm 10 asks God to help the oppressed, de las Casas likely viewed

How to Say It

Absalom	Ab-suh-lum.
Assyria	Uh-sear-ee-uh.
Babylonia	Bab-ih-low-nee-uh.
exegesis	ek-suh-gee-sus.
Psalter	Sawl-tur.
Septuagint	Sep-too-ih-jent.
Zephaniah	Zef-uh-nye-uh.

himself as an instrument of God in addressing such injustices.

Consequently, de las Casas mobilized resources, recruited sympathizers, and organized relief missions to assist and support the oppressed and needy—and he spent 50 years of his life in this endeavor. God sometimes intervenes personally to make things right, but he prefers to work through people to do so (Ezekiel 22:30). How does the story of de las Casas motivate you to act as God’s hands and stand up for oppressed people? —O. P.

B. Problem That Needs a Solution (v. 13)

13. Why does the wicked man revile God? Why does he say to himself, “He won’t call me to account”?

This verse adds to the description of *the wicked* in Psalm 10:3b. To *revile God* is to despise or disdain him. What such a person says *to himself* is assumed to be above accountability. But that is never true (Genesis 9:5; Deuteronomy 18:19; Ezekiel 3:18-20; 33:6-10; Romans 3:19).

Sinful conduct toward those in need can take two general forms: active oppression (compare Isaiah 10:1-2; James 5:1-4) and benign neglect (compare Deuteronomy 15:7-8; 1 John 3:17). The care of vulnerable people does not interest the wicked—only their exploitation. Either behavior shows contempt for God (Proverbs 14:31; 17:5).

The righteous person, by contrast, fears God. He or she shows this by doing good for others, even at personal risk (example: Exodus 1:17). The wicked have gotten away with their behavior for so long that they think themselves to be immune from God’s justice (contrast 2 Peter 3:9).

II. God’s Awareness

(Psalm 10:14)

A. Regarding Oppressors (v. 14a)

14a. But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief

The appeal to God becomes more direct as the psalm calls God’s attention to the attitudes and actions of the wicked. God is aware of such behaviors and responds to them. And,

just as important, the psalmist is aware of God’s awareness.

The word translated *trouble* is also translated “misery” (Proverbs 31:7) and “labor” (Ecclesiastes 2:21-24). The word translated *grief* similarly has a somewhat wide range of possible meanings, including “anger” (Ecclesiastes 7:9) and provocation (1 Samuel 1:6). The focus is therefore not so much on the attitudes and actions of evildoers but rather on the results of their evil actions. Some human suffering comes about because of the actions of others, and God takes up the cause of the vulnerable.

What Do You Think?

In what ways are you aware of God’s awareness of your attitudes and actions?

Digging Deeper

What will you do in light of that fact?

B. Regarding Outcome (v. 14b-c)

14b. and take it in hand.

This clause translates as “to give with your hand.” The idea is that God raises his arm to defeat the evildoers in the earlier verses, so he also uses his strength to provide for the oppressed by his hand (compare Psalm 104:28; contrast Isaiah 36:15; 37:10).

14c. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.

In the Old Testament, the people most at risk or in need are often categorized as widows, the poor, and *the fatherless* (examples: Isaiah 10:2; Zechariah 7:10). A fourth category used sometimes is “stranger,” referring to a non-Israelite (example: Leviticus 25:35). Usually, however, only two are mentioned in the same verse, and that is the case here.

Helpless people realize that God is all they have. The psalmist takes God’s care for such people as a given, a theme often occurring in Scripture (examples: Exodus 22:21-24; Isaiah 58:6-7). The descriptor of God as the “helper” of those in need frequently appears in the Old Testament (examples: Psalms 37:40; 54:4; 79:9; Isaiah 41:13-14).

We must embrace God's concern for how people treat one another (Leviticus 25:35; Luke 6:27-42; etc.). Condemnation of those who neglect or exploit the vulnerable is not a lesser concern in the New Testament (Luke 16:19-31; etc.). Those who sincerely cry out to God for help will find a listening ear. Trust in God's willingness to aid defines the very heart of faith (1 Timothy 4:10).

III. God's Intervention

(Psalm 10:15)

A. Desired Retribution (v. 15a)

15a. Break the arm of the wicked man;

The text requests punishment for the evildoer. In seeing the phrase *break the arm*, we might humorously think of "being disarmed" in a pun-like way. But that would be reading a modern concept into the text. Instead, we should be engaged in discerning the psalmist's original intent (a practice called *exegesis*).

We begin traveling down the road to correct exegesis when we realize that the word *arm* is not referring to a literal breaking of someone's physical arm. Instead, the word is a figure of speech for the concept of *power* (examples: Deuteronomy 4:34; 9:29; Jeremiah 27:5; 32:17). We see God's breaking of arms in just that sense in Ezekiel 30:21-24.

The image of breaking arms of the wicked also appears in Psalm 37:17, where the word translated "arm" here is translated "power." The breaking of enemies' "teeth" in Psalm 3:7 is similar. God, as a mighty warrior, is undoubtedly able to do this (Jeremiah 20:11; Zephaniah 3:17). But the image in the text at hand seems to be that of the evildoers as being like soon-to-be powerless warriors. Their arms are broken; they can no longer oppress the vulnerable.

The psalms also speak, conversely, of the need of the righteous to be brokenhearted for God to sustain and redeem (Psalms 34:18; 51:17; 69:20; 147:3). Those who have been crushed by life have a sure advocate in God. Connecting the two ideas, we see the breaking of the arms of the wicked as God's response to the decision of the wicked not to break their hearts before God.

B. Desired Scope (v. 15b)

15b. call the evildoer to account for his wickedness that would not otherwise be found out.

This half-verse may seem puzzling at first. The ancient Greek version, the Septuagint (see Lesson Context), is translated as "his sin shall be sought for, and shall not be found." The idea is that God's cleansing of sin is to be so complete that there is none (zero!) left to be found. The unerring ability to discern good and evil and to assess the proper response qualifies God to be; as Abraham put it, "the Judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25).

IV. God's Character

(Psalm 10:16-18)

A. The One Who Reigns (v. 16)

16a. The LORD is King for ever and ever;

God's actions fall into three categories: he creates, rules, and redeems. The confession of the Lord's kingship acknowledges the second of those three. It is a significant idea in the Psalter (Psalms 93-99, especially). *The Lord is King* over the nations and peoples, whether they like it or not. God's rule should be a subject of confession and worship.

The psalmist calls upon all reading or singing this text to recall that God—not the idols nor the rulers of empires—is the ultimate ruler. No other sovereign reigns *for ever and ever* (Psalms 21:4; 41:13; 45:6; 48:14; etc.).

What Do You Think?

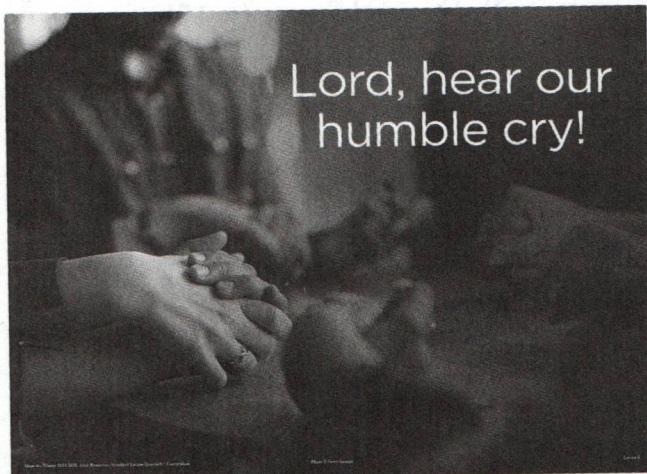
How does the knowledge that "the Lord is King for ever and ever" influence your current behavior?

Digging Deeper

In what ways does this truth give you hope? In what ways is this truth difficult for you to accept?

Wasted Money?

Does your church waste money? Some church buildings are ornate, indicating significant expenditures. The pricey artistic expressions may include



Visual for Lesson 6. Before concluding class, allow learners one minute to consider how they might humbly cry out to God for the needs of others.

depictions of Bible personalities and events via stained glass, lithographs, statuettes, iconography, architecture, etc. The faith tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church is an excellent example of this.

It's easy to criticize all this as a waste of money (compare Mark 14:4-5). The gentle response is that such works of art—many from centuries past—were (and are) ways to communicate biblical truth to disadvantaged people who were (or are) unable to read. God's kingship, such as in Psalm 10:16, is an oft-repeated theme in the various art forms. This theme is also repeated in the Scriptures because, quite simply, we need constant reminders (compare Psalms 29:10; 41:13; 45:6; 48:14; 93:2; 145:1; etc.).

The truths of God's eternal kingship, as embodied by the person and work of Christ, must be communicated (Matthew 28:19-20). What method will you use? —O. P.

16b. the nations will perish from his land.

The second half of the verse says something about the future of the Israelites. Centuries after David's reign (1010–970 BC), the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah came to be dominated by a succession of massive pagan empires. First, it was Assyria, then Babylonia, then Persia. This order of invasion was predicted in Deuteronomy 8:20: "Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God."

For *the nations to perish from his land* reflects confidence that domination by foreign empires will end.

The psalm does not blame the Israelites' coming travails solely on those great empires. Instead, 20/20 hindsight allows us to detect a hint of repentance-to-come since that is a prerequisite for the removal of God's judgment that comes via those empires (Isaiah 7:18-25; 13:1-5, 19; etc.).

B. The One Who Hears (v. 17)

17. You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,

The word translated *afflicted* is the same translated "helpless" in Psalm 10:12, above. The verse before us gives us the opposite of Psalm 10:3, which speaks of the desires of wicked people. Other psalms witness the double-edged nature of human *desire*. Some desires are evil (Psalms 78:29-31; 106:14-15; 112:10), and some are holy (21:2; 38:9). The latter is the case in this verse.

The difference between the heart of the humble and that of the wicked is key. The heart of the wicked is one of disloyalty (Psalm 78:8, 37). God listens to our prayers when we offer them from a pure, undivided heart.

What Do You Think?

What steps do you take to ensure your heart does not become disloyal and wicked toward God?

Digging Deeper

Who is an accountability partner who can help you in this regard?

C. The One Who Rescues (v. 18)

18a. defending the fatherless and the oppressed,

For God to defend *the fatherless and the oppressed* is a model for humans to do likewise (compare Psalm 82:3; Isaiah 1:17; contrast Isaiah 1:23; Jeremiah 5:28). Orphans as a vulnerable group are discussed in the commentary on Psalm 10:14c above (see also Deuteronomy 24:17). The word translated *oppressed* is somewhat rare in the

Old Testament, occurring only here and in Psalms 9:9; 74:21; and Proverbs 26:28 (where it is translated “those it hurts”).

18b. so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.

As God protects those lacking families, support systems, etc., we should see this as a model to emulate. We are to be God’s hands and feet in relieving oppression.

What Do You Think?

Who are the “fatherless” and the “oppressed” in your neighborhood? in your city?

Digging Deeper

To what extent should believers advocate for using political and social systems to bring assistance to people who are victims of injustice and oppression?

Conclusion

A. The God Who Helps

People cry out to God during times of distress and count on him to rescue them from that trouble (Psalm 30:10). We may find ourselves without any human helper in various situations as we cry out to God in our isolation and fear. We cry for help even when the distress originates in our stubbornness and sinfulness. When that happens, God sometimes turns a deaf ear to our prayers (Jeremiah 7:16; 11:14; 14:11; Lamentations 3:8, 44). At such times, we need to examine the motives of our hearts, and Psalm 10 helps us do so.

Psalm 10 speaks of the God who helps. This image of God appears frequently in the book of Psalms and elsewhere in the Bible. It is fundamental to the understanding of God that the church inherited from ancient Israel. God is neither distant nor indifferent. His level of concern for suffering humanity far exceeds our own. His interest does not ebb and flow like the fictitious pagan gods.

We may feel that God is distant when our prayers are not answered on our timetable. Such was the case with a particular Bible college professor who realized the need to make a transition

in his teaching ministry. A teaching position at a different college seemed to be a good fit, but after an interview, the possibility fell through when one faculty member voted *no* for the applicant. The following year, however, the professor was called to a different position for which he was ideally suited. God’s timing was perfect, but it took 20/20 hindsight to see that fact. “God’s timing is perfect” is still the answer to the church’s cry, “O Lord, how long?” (compare Psalms 6:3; 13:1-2; etc.).

The confession that God is a helper is an acknowledgment that leads to great confidence in our hearts. It comforts us during times of terror; it equips us to live holy lives. As the helper, God allows us to remember that no human abuse can ultimately destroy us or diminish the value of our lives. “The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me? The Lord is with me; he is my helper. I look in triumph on my enemies” (Psalm 118:6-7).

Such confidence does not come from a sense of pride or the idle belief in our superiority. It comes instead from an awareness that we serve a trustworthy God who aids those in need as long as we recognize our own needs and the shared needs of others. We cannot claim grace for ourselves but deny it to others. The divine helper stands ready to equip those seeking his mercy with a pure heart.

We cry out not only for our own needs but also on behalf of others who are oppressed in some way. However, we should anticipate that God may expect his help to that person to come through your hands!

B. Prayer

O God of the orphan, the widow, and the oppressed, attune us to the needs of your world! Be the king of our lives and celebrate with us when the lives of our brothers and sisters flourish because of your mercy. We humbly ask that you use us in your work of overcoming evil. Lord, hear our humble cry! In Jesus’ name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God is still available to help.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Have this question written on the board as class members arrive:

What was a situation that most disappointed you regarding how things turned out?

Learners can begin pondering this question as they arrive. Invite responses after cautioning against using real names or situations involving your own church. As learners respond, ask them whether the disappointment included disappointment with God. (*Option.* Wait until all have responded who are inclined to do so before asking that question rhetorically.) Acknowledge the reality of emotions that accompanied the situations.

Alternative. If the above is problematic for the nature of your class, substitute the activity “Listen to Grandpa . . . or Don’t?” from the activity page, which you can download. Distribute copies to study pairs or triads to complete as indicated.

After either activity, transition to Bible study by acknowledging the reality of competing ideas about “how things should be” and what action should be taken (or not taken) to achieve ideal results. Explain that Psalm 10 offers insight into such questions.

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer from the class to read Psalm 10:12-18, today’s text. Then role-play a debate that is concerning this resolution, which you write on the board:

Resolved: God-as-King has always placed a priority on reversing the situation of the oppressed and providing for their needs.

Divide the class into two groups: one to support the truth of the resolution and one to take a skeptical approach. Allow each group time to

talk among themselves to discuss debate strategy and content. To help your groups get their thinking started, you can distribute a “hints” handout (you create) that suggests various possibilities. Some of those possibilities include (1) the use of examples to support or oppose the resolution, (2) Paul’s technique in Acts 17:16-33, where he did not quote Scripture to support his arguments, (3) the techniques of Paul’s opponents in that same passage, (4) a possible misinterpretation of the psalm itself, and (5) consideration of the imprecatory (curse) elements of the psalm.

Conduct the debate in this format:

1. Main argument(s) in favor of the resolution
2. Main argument(s) opposed to the resolution
3. Refutation(s) of the “in favor” position
4. Refutation(s) of the “opposed” position

Option. If the “in favor” side has the burden of proof, reverse steps 3 and 4.

Into Life

Distribute handouts (you create) of the following *case study* involving a true story: A woman was having lunch with several colleagues at work. During the meal, she expressed an unending stream of distressing thoughts regarding her adult son, who was getting himself into financial trouble in various ways. She kept bemoaning the fact that her son wouldn’t listen to her. At one point, a colleague reminded her about Jesus’ instructions on not worrying but letting God handle things (referring to Matthew 6:25-34). She responded, “I’m not worried. I’m concerned.” Have study pairs or triads discuss an appropriate “more God, less me” response.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Justice Begins Now . . . with Me?” exercise from the activity page as a take-home for learners to complete as indicated. To have a higher level of compliance, state that participants should be prepared to read their prayers to the class next week.