



### Session Objective

If God already knows what we are thinking, why do we have to pray to God? This session will explore the reasons we pray, focusing primarily on how prayer strengthens our relationship with God and one another.

### Faith Statement

#### Question 95. What is prayer?

Prayer means calling upon God whose Spirit is always present with us. In prayer we approach God with reverence, confidence, and humility. Prayer involves both addressing God in praise, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication, and listening for God's word within our hearts. When we adore God, we are filled with wonder, love, and praise before God's heavenly glory. When we confess our sins to God, we ask for forgiveness with sorry hearts. When we give thanks to God, we acknowledge God's great goodness in all that has been provided for us. Finally, when we call upon God to hear our requests, we affirm that God is always near to us in times of need and sorrow.

—*Study Catechism: Confirmation Version*



### Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What's the first memory you have of praying?
- Who taught you how to pray?
- In what posture were you taught to pray? (*head bowed, hands folded, hands opened, and so on*)
- Is prayer important? Why or why not?
- Does it matter how you pray? Why or why not?
- Why should we pray?



### Explore

Read Ephesians 6:8, 1 Timothy 2:1, Colossians 1:9-12, and Philippians 4:6-7, exploring the following questions for each passage:

- What does the passage say about giving praise to God in prayer?
- What does the passage say about confessing to God?
- What does the passage say about giving thanks to God?
- What does the passage say about offering prayers for others to God?

Discuss how all the passages combine to give a complete picture of what prayer is.



### Express

Invite the participants to look through a daily newspaper for images that represent something or someone they would like to pray for. Give each person an opportunity to share what the image is and what his or her prayer is. Explore the following questions together:

- Does it make a difference to actually see the things we are praying for? Why or why not?
- Did you feel more connected to the people and places in the images? Why or why not?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "What is prayer?"



### Exit

Close in prayer using the acronym ACTS, which stands for adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Include all of these types of prayer in the closing prayer.





## Session Objective

In this session, participants will discuss why prayer is an important part of a faithful life. Prayer is a reflection of our theology in that it expresses what we really believe to be true about God. Participants will also explore what it means to be genuine and real to God in prayer.

## Faith Statement

### Question 121. What is the purpose of prayer?

Prayer brings us into communion with God. The more our lives are rooted in prayer, the more we sense how wonderful God is in grace, purity, majesty, and love. Prayer means offering our lives completely to God, submitting ourselves to God's will, and waiting faithfully for God's grace. Through prayer God frees us from anxiety, equips us for service, and deepens our faith.

— Study Catechism: Full Version



## Engage

Read the day's Faith Statement together and have the participants respond to the session question (Why is praying important?), using the Faith Statement as a guide. Use the following questions to guide the conversation.

- What is *communion with God*? How does prayer help us commune with God?
- What can help us see God in the world around us?
- What does it mean to offer ourselves fully to God? How might this set us free from worry and anxiety?
- Why is praying important?



## Explore

Read Matthew 6:9-13 and explore the following questions:

- How does this passage respond to the question, "Why is praying important?"
- What do you think the phrase *prayer is theology* means?

Read Philippians 4:6-7 and explore the following questions:

- How can praying what we believe help us feel connected to God?
- How can praying what we believe help us feel God's presence?

Read Luke 22:41-44 and explore the following questions:

- What words would you use to describe Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane?
- How is this prayer similar to the Lord's Prayer found in Matthew? How is it different?

- What emotions are portrayed in Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane? How do these emotions reflect honesty in prayer?
- Which of Jesus' prayers (the Lord's Prayer or the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane) is the most honest? Are the prayers equally honest? Why do you answer this way?



## Express

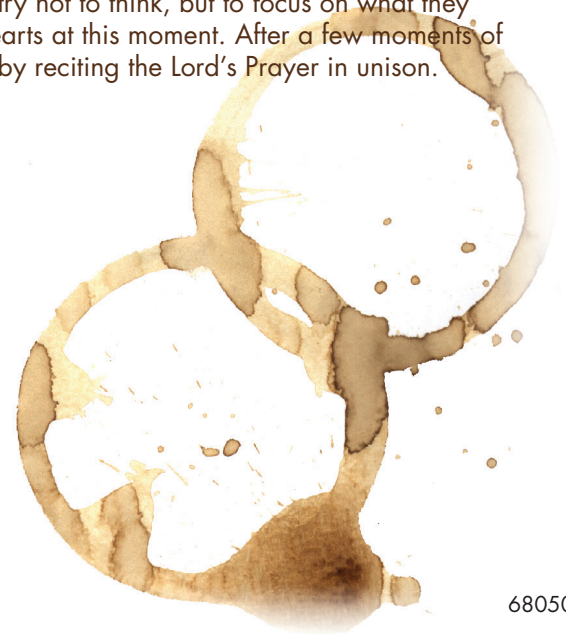
Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passages.

- What does it mean to *pray honestly*? Do you *pray honestly* when you pray?
- How can you apply today's discussion to your prayer life?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Why is praying important?"



## Exit

Invite your participants to focus on something on the table or in the room, and join in a few moments of silent prayer. Invite them to try not to think, but to focus on what they feel in their hearts at this moment. After a few moments of silence, close by reciting the Lord's Prayer in unison.





### Session Objective

Participants will learn that prayer is not a wish list to God. Instead, they will explore the idea that prayer is how we learn what God wants for us and from us.

### Faith Statement

Prayer is a conscious opening of the self to God, who initiates communion and communication with us. Prayer is receiving and responding, speaking and listening, waiting and acting in the presence of God. In prayer we respond to God in adoration, in thanksgiving, in confession, in supplication, in intercession, and in self-dedication.

—Book of Order, W-5.4001



### Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- When have you felt like your prayers were answered? When have you felt like your prayers were not answered?
- Do you see prayer more as a time to ask God for help? Or, do you see prayer more as a contemplation exercise? Why?
- Does God answer our prayers? Why or why not?



### Explore

Read John 14:12-14 and explore the following questions:

- Is prayer simply a wish list we give to God? Why or why not?
- How could this Scripture passage lead you to believe that prayer is a wish list we give to God?
- What was Jesus really talking about in this Scripture passage?

Read 1 Kings 18:25-40 and explore the following question:

- What does this passage teach us about prayer?



### Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passages.

- Do you think most people see prayer as a wish list? Why or why not?
- Have you ever treated prayer this way? What happened?
- How can we help people understand what prayer really is?



### Exit

Invite your participants to focus on something on the table or in the room, and join in a few moments of silent prayer. Invite them to try not to think, but to focus on what they feel in their hearts at this moment. After a few moments of silence, close by reciting the Lord's Prayer in unison.





# Why Does God Answer Our Prayers in Ways That Are Hard to Understand?



## Session Objective

Participants will discuss what keeps us from hearing and understanding God's answers to our prayers. They will also explore how we can hear God's answers by listening to our lives, creation, and even our dreams.

## Faith Statement

**Q. 129. What is meant by the third petition, "Your will be done, on earth as in heaven"?**

Of course, God's will is always done and will surely come to pass, whether we desire it or not. But the phrase "on earth as in heaven" means that we ask for the grace to do God's will on earth in the way that it is done in heaven—gladly and from the heart. We thus ask that all opposition to God's will might be removed from earth, and especially from our own hearts. We ask for the freedom to conform our desires and deeds more fully to God, so that we might be completely delivered from our sin. We yield ourselves, in life and in death, to God's will.

— Study Catechism: Full Version



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- Does God answer our prayers? Always?
- Are there situations in which God might not answer a prayer? If so, what kinds of prayers might God not answer?
- Is it a problem for us not to understand God's answers to our prayers? If so, is the problem more with God or more about us?
- If we can't understand God's answers to our prayers, does this mean we shouldn't pray? Why or why not?
- What might we do to better understand God's response to our prayers?



## Explore

Read Isaiah 55:2-3, 8-9 and explore the following questions:

- What can we learn from this Scripture passage about our relationship with God?
- What can we learn from this Scripture passage about humanity?
- What can we learn from this Scripture passage about prayer and talking to God?



## Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passages.

- How does God want us to react when we feel like our prayers are not being answered? How might our answer to this question affect our prayer lives?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Why does God answer our prayers in ways that are hard to understand?"



## Exit

Invite your participants to focus on something on the table or in the room, and join in a few moments of silent prayer. Invite them to try not to think, but to focus on what they feel in their hearts at this moment. After a few moments of silence, close by reciting the Lord's Prayer in unison.





### Session Objective

In this session, participants will explore how a prayer of confession is really a prayer for transformation. It is not just a list of all the bad things we have done, but a request for God to help us be changed.

### Faith Statement

**Q. 103. What is meant by the fifth petition, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us”?**

We pray that a new and right spirit will be put within us. We ask for the grace to treat others with the same mercy we have received from God. We ask that we will not resent or strike back at those who harm us, but that our hearts will be knit together with the merciful heart of God.

—Study Catechism: Confirmation Version



### Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- What causes a person to confess?
- What kinds of things does a person confess?
- Do people ever confess because they really want to change? Why do you think that?
- What is a prayer of confession?
- How can a prayer of confession show us a person really wants to change?



### Explore

Read Psalm 51 and explore the following questions:

- Who is this psalm really about?
- What do you think is the most important thing we can learn from this psalm?
- Verse 10 asks God to create a clean heart within us. What do you think that means?
- How would a clean heart and right spirit change you?
- How do you feel about the possibility of being changed by God through prayer?



### Express

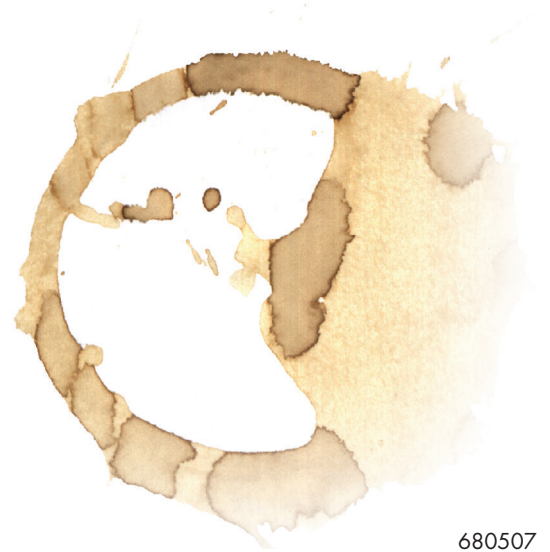
Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passages.

- Why are confession and forgiveness important?
- How can you help others understand why confession and forgiveness are important?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, “What is a prayer of confession?”



### Exit

Invite your participants to focus on something on the table or in the room, and join in a few moments of silent prayer. Invite them to try not to think, but to focus on what they feel in their hearts at this moment. After a few moments of silence, close by reciting the Lord's Prayer in unison.







# Do We Really Have to Close Our Eyes While Talking to God?



## Session Objective

In this session, participants will explore the different postures of prayer and how those postures can reflect the emotions behind prayer. They will also begin to think about which type of prayer is more comfortable for them in their personal prayer lives.

## Faith Statement

### Q. 185. How are we to pray?

We are to pray with an awful apprehension of the majesty of God, and deep sense of our own unworthiness, necessities, and sins; with penitent, thankful, and enlarged hearts; with understanding, faith, sincerity, fervency, love, and perseverance, waiting upon him with humble submission to his will.

—Westminster Larger Catechism



## Engage

Open your time together in prayer and lead a conversation based on the following questions:

- In what position were you first taught to pray? (*Bow your head? Fold your hands?*)
- Why do you think you were taught to pray like this?
- Do you still pray this way? Why or why not?
- Do you think the way we pray is important? Why or why not?



## Explore

Read Psalm 95:1-2, 6-7, Psalm 123:1-2, John 11:41, John 17:1, and Acts 21:5-6. After each passage is read, ask: What does this passage say about how we should pray? Explore the following questions:

- What types of prayer would be good done in a standing position?
- What types would be good in a kneeling position?
- What kinds of prayer seem right to be shouted? Whispered?
- Which do you think is more important, how we pray or what we pray? Why?



## Express

Use the following questions to help the participants express what they've learned. Also, consider discussing the questions from Engage again to see if anyone has any new perspectives after exploring the Bible passages.

- In what ways has our conversation helped you understand prayer?
- Are you interested in exploring different prayer postures? Why or why not?
- How would you respond if someone asked you, "Do we really have to close our eyes while talking to God?"



## Exit

Invite your participants to focus on something on the table or in the room, and join in a few moments of silent prayer. Invite them to try not to think, but to focus on what they feel in their hearts at this moment. After a few moments of silence, close by reciting the Lord's Prayer in unison.

