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Pray from the Heart

MATTHEW 6:9–13



GOAL

By learning what Jesus taught his disciples about prayer, children explore ways they can talk to God with their authentic selves.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Loving God, we come to you with our faith and our doubts, our struggles and our joys. Help us talk to you honestly, and teach your little ones to do the same. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Jesus places a template for prayer in the midst of other instructions: Don't flaunt your piety. Pray with joy. Store up your treasure where it counts. Bring your true, vulnerable, whole self to converse with God. Today's session explores some of the ways that might look for children.

THE BIBLE STORY

In today's passage from Matthew 6:9–13 are the roots of the Lord's Prayer, the prayer that Jesus taught to his followers and that Christians throughout time and around the world pray and teach. Though the words our churches use may vary some, this prayer has become a common denominator in a world full of church divisions. This session explores why Jesus' teaching about prayer is such a foundation for our prayer life and faith.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Children in your group may be familiar with the version of the Lord's Prayer that you use in worship. Familiar or not, they might not have looked closely at what the words of this ancient prayer mean, and how it invites them to talk with God. Today's session provides children with a continuity of faith and helps them understand what Jesus' prayer means, and how they might talk to God in these same ways, both formally and informally.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Situations" (p. 8): On four sheets of construction paper, write the following words, one phrase on each sheet of paper: "any of my friends," "best friend," "parent or trusted adult," and "no one."
- "Exploring Prayer" (p. 8): Obtain *Can I Pray with My Eyes Open?* by Susan Taylor Brown (Hyperion, 1999) or use the YouTube video "Can I Pray with My Eyes Open? Kid's Book Read Aloud—Written by Susan Taylor Brown" (bit.ly/FMCanIPray, 3:15).
- "Lord, Teach Us to Pray!" (p. 9): If the Lord's Prayer your congregation prays in worship is not the traditional version found on Resource Page 2, write in the words your congregations uses in the space provided between each phrase and the explanation of the phrase.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Give Us This Day" (p. 10): Obtain several types of bread from around the world, such as tortillas, naan, challah, French or Italian loaf, pretzel, corn bread, bagels, soda bread, croissants, as well as a gluten-free option. Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.



GETTING STARTED

- Cards cut from two or three copies of Resource Page 1
- Four pieces of prepared construction paper with phrases written on them

SITUATIONS

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Greet the children as they arrive. Display the four pieces of construction paper on a table and point out the phrases written on each: “any of my friends,” “best friend,” “parent or trusted adult,” and “no one.” Invite the children to look at the situation cards cut from Resource Page 1 and discuss who they might want to talk with about the situation, if they found themselves having that experience. Have them place each card on one of the construction paper pages. If there are differences of opinion, provide extra copies of the situation cards so that children may place them on more than one sheet of construction paper. Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ✿ Which situations could you talk about with any of your friends?
- ✿ Which ones might you prefer to talk to an adult or to your best friend?
- ✿ Which situations would you not want to share with anyone? Why?
- ✿ How do you decide who to talk to about things that matter?

PRAYING PSALM 136

QC

Invite the children to join you in the following litany with their response: “God’s love lasts forever.”

Give thanks to God, for God is good.

God’s love lasts forever.

Who hears us when we pray—

God’s love lasts forever.

Who invites us to draw close—

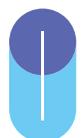
God’s love lasts forever.

Who welcomes us with open arms—

God’s love lasts forever.

Give thanks to the God of heaven and earth:

God’s love lasts forever.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Prepared construction paper sheets with situations from “Situations” (above)
- Three colors of sticky note pads
- Pencils, crayons
- Newsprint, marker
- Tape
- *Can I Pray with My Eyes Open?* by Susan Taylor Brown (Hyperion, 1999) or internet-connected device

EXPLORING PRAYER

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Invite the children to think back to the “Situations” (above) about conversations that matter. Wonder:

- ✿ What are some situations you might talk to God about?
- ✿ What would be some things you would *not* want to talk with God about?

Provide two colors of sticky notes, designating one color to be those things to talk about with God and another color those things the children would *not* want to talk about with God. Invite the children to write or draw pictures of things they would and would not like to talk about with God and place them on a sheet of newsprint titled “Talking with God.” Note some of the items on the sticky notes, keeping them anonymous. Ask the children if

there are any of the situations that were placed on the construction paper sheets from “Situations” (p. 8) that they would like to add to the newsprint. Have them tape those situations to the newsprint. Without pointing out specific items that children would not want to talk about with God, ask them why there might be things that some might not want to talk about with God.

Wonder together how prayer is a way to have a conversation with God. Tell the children that God hears all their prayers, their conversations, and nothing is off limits with God.

Invite the children to describe prayer, including things they might pray about, people they might pray with, and places or ways that they might pray. Read aloud *Can I Pray with My Eyes Open?* by Susan Taylor Brown or show the YouTube video “Can I Pray with My Eyes Open? Kid’s Book Read Aloud—Written by Susan Taylor Brown” (bit.ly/FMCanIPray, 3:15).

After the story, ask the children what ways or times to pray there were that they might not have thought about before. Provide the third color of sticky notes and invite the children to add words or pictures to the newsprint using the following questions:

- What are some of your favorite times to pray?
- What are some of your favorite places to pray?
- Where is the strangest place you’ve ever talked to God?
- What are some of the things we can talk to God about?

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY!

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Set the scene for the Bible story by telling the children that, long ago when Jesus lived, many people wanted to hear him teach about God and God’s love. One of these times of teaching took place on a mountainside; Jesus talked about many things including how to pray. Explain that it wasn’t that the people listening to Jesus didn’t pray, but Jesus gave them an example of a simple prayer to God, giving God praise and asking for what one needs, forgiveness, and guidance.

Invite the children to turn to Matthew 6:9–13 in their Bibles, and have a volunteer read aloud these verses. Ask if anyone recognizes these words. Comment, if necessary, that these verses are often called “The Lord’s Prayer.” Wonder what is similar or different to how your congregation prays the Lord’s Prayer.

Explain that different words that convey the same meaning may be used for words like *hallowed* or *holy*, *debts* and *debtors* or *trespasses* and *trespasses against us* or *sins* and *sins against us*. Tell the children that the closing words of praise that are often part of the Lord’s Prayer—“for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen”—were added by Christians of the early church many years after Jesus taught this prayer to his followers.

Distribute the phrases of the Lord’s Prayer cut from Resource Page 2 to seven teams or individuals in your group, or work together as one group. Invite each team or individual to read their phrase and think about what it means, using the notes included. Encourage the children to assist one another with reading, or pair strong readers with those who may need

- Bibles
- Phrases cut apart from Resource Page 2
- Paper
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils



Use the version of the Lord’s Prayer used in your congregation’s worship.

more help. Discuss any questions that they have and then invite them to illustrate what they think that phrase means. Ask them not to use any words on their pictures. Teams may make one picture together or each person may make a picture of their phrase. When all have finished their artwork, encourage them to tell the rest of the group about what they've drawn and what it means to them. Set aside pictures and phrases for "Picturing the Prayer" (p. 11).



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

- Internet-connected device



This version of the Lord's Prayer uses the word *trespasses* instead of *debts*.

- Several types of bread from around the world, such as tortillas, naan, challah, French or Italian loaf, pretzel, corn bread, bagels, soda bread, croissants, as well as a gluten-free option
- Napkins
- Knife
- Cups, water



Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

SINGING THE LORD'S PRAYER TOGETHER



Remind the children that the Lord's Prayer is prayed by Christians all around the world. Tell the children that they are going to listen to a Caribbean-inspired musical version of the Lord's Prayer. Teach them a few motions to the repeated phrase "Hallowed be thy name." Encourage the children to raise both hands overhead on the first beat of "Hallowed," extend both hands to their sides on the word "be," and clap on the word "name." Practice a few times, and then show the YouTube video "Our Father, Who Art in Heaven (Caribbean Lord's Prayer) [with Lyrics for Congregations]" (bit.ly/FMLordsPrayerCaribbean, 2:31) using the motions on the repeated phrase. Show the video a second time, inviting the children to add other motions or dance steps during the other parts of the song. The words to the song are displayed on the screen, so they may sing along as well.

GIVE US THIS DAY



Comment that, often when we pray, we ask for things we need or want. In Jesus' prayer, the only request is for a very physical thing. Wonder together what the following phrase from the Lord's Prayer means: "Give us this day our daily bread."

- ✦ Why do you think Jesus prayed for bread?
- ✦ Why do you think he didn't pray for something more exciting, like chocolate cake?
- ✦ What are some differences between bread and cake?
- ✦ What kinds of needs or wants can we talk to God about?

Remind the children that people all around the world eat some kind of bread, and that Christians all around the world pray this prayer. Show them some of the types of bread from other parts of the world. Provide samples of the breads. Invite the children to imagine what children their age in different parts of the world might be talking to God about.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

PICTURING THE PRAYER

Invite the children to tape their pictures of the Lord's Prayer from "Lord, Teach Us to Pray!" (p. 9) on a wall, in the order of the prayer. Add the corresponding phrases below each picture. If more than one child or group illustrated the same phrase, display all the pictures together with one copy of the phrase. Invite the whole group to gather around the illustrated prayer on the wall, and read it aloud together. As a group, choose one phrase to remove from the wall, leaving the illustration, and repeat the prayer, filling in the missing phrase from memory. Continue in this manner, leading the group to say the entire prayer from memory, using only the pictures as reminders. Leave the pictures posted as a reminder of this important prayer.

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- Pictures and phrases of the Lord's Prayer from "Lord, Teach Us to Pray!" (p. 9)
- Tape

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

Wonder how prayer is a conversation with God by using the following questions:

- What is your part in a conversation with a close friend or family member?
- What are some of the ways you can show a friend that you are paying attention to what he or she is saying?
- What do you think God would act like, if you were having a conversation?
- What are some ways that you think God pays attention when we pray?
- What is your part in a conversation with God?

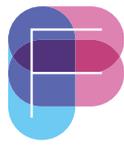
C D

- Cards cut from a copy of Resource Page 1
- Bag or basket

Place the cards cut from a copy of Resource Page 1 in a bag or basket. Ask for a pair of volunteers to role play a conversation for the rest of the group. Let one person play themselves, and the other play the role of God. Have the pair pull a card from the bag or basket and imagine how that conversation might go if they were talking to God about it. Invite them to role play such a conversation. Reflect with the whole group after each role play using the following questions:

- Can you imagine having a conversation like this with God? Why or why not?
- Do you think this is something you could talk to God about? Why or why not?
- What else do you think God might say to the person in this situation?

Wonder if there are things that are off limits to talk about with God. Tell the children that God wants us to bring our whole, authentic selves when we pray. God knows us as we really are, and invites us to be honest in all that we pray about.



FOLLOWING JESUS

PRAYING TOGETHER



Gather the children in the area of your room where the illustrated Lord's Prayer is displayed. Invite the children to pray the Lord's Prayer together using their bodies. Encourage them to find a position that feels like they are opening up their heart to God. Suggest that this might be holding their hands extended, lifting their hands up and their head back, crossing their hands over their heart, laying on the floor face up and arms extended, and so forth. Each person may find a position that works for them. Pray the Lord's Prayer together in those positions.

You can't decide what to choose for lunch.

You hear someone making fun of a child who just moved here from another country and does not speak English.

You don't have any money for lunch today.

You are feeling anxious, but you are afraid that if you tell someone, people will look at you.

You and a neighbor had an argument about the rules of a game you are playing.

You are pretty sure that you hurt your friend's feelings, but it feels awkward to bring it up with them again.

Your parents had a fight last night and you heard them yelling at each other.

You noticed an older neighbor having trouble rolling the garbage can back to their house.

Someone in your math class offered you a candy bar to let him copy your paper.

You saw some older children picking on a neighbor of yours after school.

You don't understand what's going on in math class, even though you have studied every night this week.

One of your friends made fun of your idea and hurt your feelings.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,

We can talk to God like a parent who loves us and wants to know what's going on in our lives. At the same time, God is so much bigger than we can even imagine. God's name is holy and special.

thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

When we pray this, we are asking God to make our world more like God's way of living. We are asking for the world not to be ruled by people's selfish wants, but to be a world that lives by God's own heart.

Give us this day our daily bread;

We can ask God for the things we need.

and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;

God knows that we don't always do the right thing, and that other people do wrong things to us. We pray for God to forgive us, and to give us the strength to forgive those who have hurt or wronged us.

Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil.

God knows that we can make bad choices. We ask God to help us turn away from those bad choices, and to make healthy, life-giving ones instead.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.

We pray to God because we know that the world is not really in our control at all. It's God's world, and all that is in the world, including us, depends completely on God's love.

Amen.

Amen is a little word that means "so be it" or "let it be so." When we say or sing this word at the end of a prayer or hymn, we mean "I agree!" with the words we've said or spoken.

