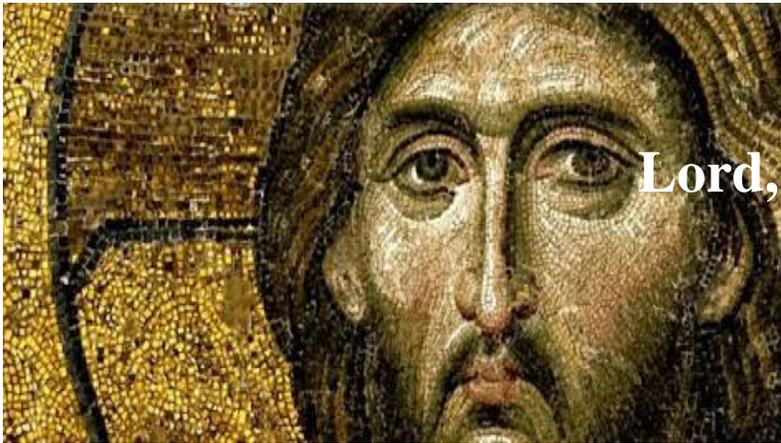


# **Lord, Teach Us to Pray**

*High School Mini Course*



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# Lord, Teach Us to Pray

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## Introduction for Teacher

Prayer is how we get ourselves on God’s wavelength, how we “speak” with him. So of the thousands of languages in existence today, prayer is certainly the most important! It is in these conversations, in this mode of being, that salvation, eternity, and the fullest human life here and now are possible.

A lifetime of prayer brings understanding, enlightenment, love, and peace beyond anything the human mind can process but which the heart and soul do indeed slowly begin to comprehend ... “now in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now we know in part; then we will understand fully, even as we have been fully understood.” (I Corinthians 13:12)

## A few guidelines

- The twelve sessions are designed for sixty minutes but are easily adaptable to a shorter or longer class time. The timing of segments is approximate and serves only as a planning tool. If a discussion is going well, let it go longer; if an activity isn’t engaging interest, cut it short. Be flexible.
- This course assumes that students are gathered in a place where a blackboard or newsprint/white board can be used. If in a more informal setting, adapt accordingly.
- An instructor’s ‘script’ provides the information a student text would otherwise supply. Clearly you can’t sit in class and read it – the script needs to become the basis for your own intimate ‘looking into the faces of your students’ teacher talk. Follow it for its instructional purpose, replacing phrases and words with what you’re more comfortable saying. It’s designed to work as is, but is simply a *guideline*. Thorough preparation is key.
- The “Checkpoint” at the beginning of each session is the main message. This is the point – if no other – kids need to confidently take away from the lesson.
- Scripture is an important part of the course and students may bring their own Bibles or have access to a set kept at Sunday School. Or you may choose to have them look verses up on their phones – a great skill to develop for their daily lives. *Bible Gateway* is an excellent online tool.

- Since Scripture is the richest resource for prayer, these sessions offer lots of Bible citations. If you think they are excessive, eliminate some from your lesson. You might choose to simply read some instead of asking students to look them up.
- For most sessions there will be a formal prayer chosen from the prayer book *Here I Am, Lord* (followed by a brief discussion) as well as other prayer activities.
- Prayer journaling will also be a component of every class session. Feel free to participate yourself.
- There are discussion questions throughout the curriculum; be prepared to share your own answers where appropriate.
- The only materials you need to teach this course are listed below. C can be ordered through the Christian Education Curriculum and Resource Catalog at our ministries website, [www.vemkar.us](http://www.vemkar.us).
  - a. This instructor's text. You can download and print a chapter at a time, but do read through the entire curriculum before the first session.
  - b. Occasional simple materials (i.e. paper, a bowl of water, etc.) for prayer activities. Be prepared.
  - c. *Here I Am, Lord*, a copy for each student that will be kept in the classroom and taken home at the last session. While every session does not explicitly direct students to return these and their journals to your desk, they will need to do so.
  - d. *Here I Am, Lord*, a copy for each student that will be kept in the classroom and taken home at the last session. While every session does not explicitly direct students to return their books to your desk, they will need to do so.
  - e. A prayer journal, a copy for each student that will be kept in the classroom and taken home at the last session. These can be simple, small lined journals from the dollar store or journals purchased from Christian suppliers ([www.ctainc.org](http://www.ctainc.org); [www.autom.com](http://www.autom.com))
  - f. A heart for prayer. Pray for your students!

*With gratitude for ideas from [www.ministrytoyouth.com](http://www.ministrytoyouth.com) in Sessions 2 and 9.*



## What Is Prayer?

### SESSION ONE

**CHECKPOINT:** *Prayer is the best path to knowing God, ourselves, and what life's all about.*

1. Welcome students and distribute *Here I Am Lord*. Have them write their names in their books. Then pray together with the first prayer on page 34 and discuss the question. Continue: "What do you think might be one of the best ways we *can* discover what's keeping us from God?" Discuss but conclude with the idea that it is *prayer*. "If prayer is the way we communicate with God, then it makes sense that it's the best way to discover what's *keeping* us from him, right? And just so we can see where we are right now with this, let's begin by doing some off-the-top-of-our-head thinking about prayer."

Use the following activities to get a prayer conversation going. Make a note of comments made now and in the webbing exercise to use in review next week.

**Continuum.** Identify one end of an imaginary line as NEVER and the other end as SEVERAL TIMES A DAY. Then ask students to line up somewhere on the imaginary line in answer to the question:

***How often do you pray other than at church?***

Once they've found their place on the imaginary line, follow up with questions.

When do you find yourself praying?

What do you pray about?

**Either/or.** In this exercise, students are to be at one end of the imaginary line or the other – nothing in between. Give them the following choices and after each, discuss. Some talking points are provided, but the students' comments and reasons should come first.

- a. **Is prayer more like stumbling in the dark OR walking in the light?** (Stumbling in the dark might refer to the uncertainty of the future, the fact that we can never really know God fully, that we pray with faith; walking in the light can refer to praying with the full confidence that God hears us, that prayer is a way to become more like God which would be an enlightened, light-filled life.)
- b. **Is prayer more like a window OR a mirror?** (A window suggests insight into the world, a way to look out and see things and people clearly, imagine a wall that is suddenly a window – vision, sunlight, clarity; a mirror suggests looking at yourself, seeing who you are and what you look like in God's eyes, clarity about yourself, etc.)

c. **Is prayer more like looking up OR looking down?** (Up can refer to our awe, the grandeur of God, the fact that we are his children, respect, etc.; down can refer to humility, stillness and quiet, contemplation, etc.) (30 min)

2. “Great! Okay, everyone take your seat and let’s think about this word together. Prayer.” Write the word *prayer* on the board and ask what comes to mind when students see this word. As each answer is given, draw lines from the word and write it at the end of each line (webbing). Conclude: “We’ve brought some good ideas together. Let’s turn to *Here I Am, Lord* for more.” Read from ‘What is prayer?’ on the first page of **A Few Words...** end with the last bullet point on the 3<sup>rd</sup> page, pausing to ask these questions (or any you come up with):
- a. How can we spend time with Jesus daily? What could that mean practically? (Answers might include keeping the Bible and prayer a part of our routine – good habits to develop; using his teaching as a guide for our decisions and choices and behaviors; feeling his presence)
  - b. Is there a good habit you have that you recall was hard at first to develop? (Discussion could include health habits, exercise or sports practice, music practice, etc.)
  - c. This business of God’s answer to our questions or prayer concerns –is it hard? (Hard to know how he speaks to us, how to hear his ‘voice’ in our lives; and yet as we get to know him more through prayer, we get better at this.)

Conclude with the checkpoint: “So pulling these ideas together and recalling what we just read in *Here I Am, Lord*: Maybe we can say that prayer is the best way to know God, ourselves, and what life’s all about. If prayer can accomplish *that*, it’s got to be the most important things we can learn. . (15 min)

3. After students return to their seats, continue: “The name of this course is *Lord, Teach Us to Pray* which isn’t just a random title. It comes from an actual moment in the Bible.” Have students open their Bibles to Luke 11:1 (or look up on their phones – might be a good opportunity to introduce them to Bible Gateway. By just Googling a Bible passage or verse, they can read it in the translation of their choice):

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’”

Continue: “These disciples had seen everything: amazing healings and miracles. But the only thing they asked Jesus to teach them was *how to pray*. Why do you think this was so? When you ask someone – a friend, a family member – to teach you something, why do you ask that particular person?” Discuss. Answers might include their expertise, they’ve proven their capabilities, you feel comfortable and close enough to ask. Make sure to include that the disciples had clearly seen the importance of prayer to Jesus, that he prayed often and his prayers seemed to empower him in a way they wanted to emulate. Tell students they’ll be exploring that further in a subsequent class.

4. In the time remaining, distribute prayer journals. Ask students *not* to put their names in it, as these will be personal; they can draw a symbol on the cover that will identify it as theirs. Tell them: “It’s important to get into the habit of being in God’s presence in a focused way, of communicating with the God who created us and loves us. So we’re going to have a time to journal every Sunday. I’ll usually give you a specific prayer assignment. But today, date your entry and then just start writing some words to God - what you’re feeling about yourself, the world, what you need, doubts, problems, or just thanks or any combination.” When there is a minute left to the class, ask students to stop writing, to silently read their entries as a closing reflection. Have students bring up the prayer journals and prayer books and place in a large box or desk drawer for distribution at the beginning of the next class. End with an Amen. *(15 min)*

# Prayer





## Prayer Builds a Relationship

### SESSION TWO

**CHECKPOINT:** *Prayer is about building a relationship with God.*

1. Welcome students and have them retrieve their prayer journals and copies of *Here I Am, Lord*. Open to page 38, read the bottom prayer together and discuss the question. (10 min)
2. Continue: “We left off last session with the disciples wanting to learn from Jesus how to pray. In many ways we are like the disciples: people who want to follow Jesus but need to learn what that means. So maybe it’s important to see what it *does* mean to follow Jesus. Turn to Matthew 4:18-22. Just to set the scene, Jesus was baptized and in the wilderness facing Satan’s temptations and has now begun to teach.” Read with students.

<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” <sup>20</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.

3. Ask: “What is the first thing Jesus says to these men who will be his disciples? Yes, ‘*Come, follow me.*’” Write this on the board. “What does it mean to follow someone?” Discuss. Make sure it is mentioned that to follow someone you need to keep them in sight (you could give an example of following someone in a car to get to a place you’ve never been). “Social networks like Twitter make it as simple as clicking a button. And most people follow people or events, as long as it keeps them entertained. But what does Jesus have to say about following him?” Ask a student to read Luke 9:23-26. Follow up by reading the version from *The Message* (you can do this right on your phone and let students know what version you are reading):

Then he told them what they could expect for themselves: “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat – I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? If any of you is embarrassed with me and the way I’m leading you, know that the Son of Man will be far more embarrassed with you when he arrives in all his splendor in company with the Father and the holy angels.

“By the way, is following Jesus only for those who have it all together? No! Jesus invited the lowly of his time – fishermen, tax collectors, women (who weren’t treated very well in those days), and even thieves. They didn’t always understand what Jesus was saying. They didn’t always do what Jesus asked them to do. But they believed in him and made the commitment. No matter who you are, where you grew up, or what is going on in your life right now, you can follow Jesus. All you need is faith and commitment.

“What is commitment, and what are some examples of things you commit to? Discuss. Give students time to answer and share. “You know, these days the world teaches that commitment really isn’t all that important. What is more important is your happiness and entertainment. If you are happy and entertained, then commit to it. If you become unhappy or bored, then don’t worry about it – just find something new. What Jesus says in this passage, then, is shocking to some people. In fact, if he had tweeted it today, many people would be hitting the “unfollow” button! Jesus says that following him is a commitment. It’s a day-by-day journey.

“And it is giving over control of your life to him. Anyone can follow him, but they must make the commitment. It is not just a fun add-on to your life. It means letting him lead your whole life so that no one should have to guess who you are following.

“Jesus said that following him would take commitment and surrender, but he also promised that it would be worth it. He promised that if you give your life up to him, you will find a better life. (15 min)

4. “The next thing Jesus says is ‘*I will make you....*’ Stop there, write that phrase on the board. “What is Jesus saying? Is this just a matter of he leads, and you follow and just watch? What’s going to happen?” Discuss. “Yes, he’s going to do something with us, we are going to be different, made into something other than who we were before we followed him. Okay, so far, so good.”

“And finally? What is he going to make us into? Yes ‘*fishers of people.*’ So instead of doing their thing as fishermen, instead of catching fish, they will be bringing people to them, actually to Jesus through them. So they will *witness* to what has happened to them and people will listen and follow the Lord as well.

“So what is being Christian all about then? Looks like it’s about following Christ not just as a fan, but to grow into a relationship with him, and allow him to be at work in our lives. Let’s check out 2 Corinthians 3:18 together:

<sup>18</sup> And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate<sup>[a]</sup> the Lord’s glory, are being *transformed into his image* with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

“So maybe it’s impossible to really and truly follow Jesus and *not* be changed? In 1 Corinthians 1:9 we actually read that God invites us to enter into a *friendship* with his Son, Jesus Christ. A friendship! (5 min)

5. “Think about what you do with or for and how you behave towards someone you really care about – maybe a best friend, a brother or sister you’re close to, even parents.” Ask and wait for answers, then prompt them.

“Well we certainly know their name. What else?” Discuss, bringing out points below. Encourage students to think of a real person they love. You might have to give them hints and certainly follow up with examples (i.e. pleasing a person – you might go camping even if you’re not a fan, because your father/best friend loves to)

I spend time with him / her

I give gifts

I make sacrifices

I do things to please him / her I wouldn’t do on my own

I change and adjust as relationship develops

I share happy times and sad – laugh and cry together

I reveal my deepest secrets

I make commitments

I fight and argue and make up

My friend has other completely different relationships we know nothing about

We start resembling our friend – sometimes appearance, likes and dislikes

Conclude: “So when you think about it, these all apply to God, to our relationship with him. How does this relationship grow stronger? Well we’re going to find out over the next weeks that the most important way is through *prayer*, that prayer is about building a relationship with him. (15 min)

6. In the time remaining, distribute prayer journals. Ask students to date their entry and then write “Help me follow you, Lord.” They can pray about what’s *keeping* them from following him, or they’re confusions about what it means to follow him, or how they might plan to start doing so, or anything at all. When there is a minute left to the class, ask students to stop writing. Together, read the prayer on p. 33 and end with an ‘Amen.’ Have students bring up the prayer journals and prayer books and place in a large box or desk drawer for distribution at the beginning of the next class. (15 min)





# What Does Jesus Say About Prayer?

## SESSION THREE

**CHECKPOINT:** *Jesus prayed often; this was the only thing the disciples asked him to teach them.*

1. Write the verses in procedure #4 on the board before class begins. Welcome students and have them retrieve their prayer journals and copies of *Here I Am, Lord*. Open to page 15, read Psalm 23 together. As a review, ask students: “Last week we started talking about prayer. Do you recall some of the things we all said?” Discuss and conclude with the idea that prayer is about building a relationship with God. (10 min)

2. “In thinking about this person, his Lord, his God, St. Paul tells us in Philippians 3:7-8 the following (have students look this up and follow along – the New Living Translation is particularly clear):

<sup>7</sup> I once considered these things as valuable, but I now consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. <sup>8</sup> Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ.

“Just an interesting footnote: that word “garbage” in Biblical Greek has a really bad meaning too: something like manure. We have to ask ourselves, *you* have to ask yourselves: is everything I value in life worthless and even repulsive to me compared to knowing Christ?”

3. “Let’s take a few moments now to write in our prayer journals about this very thing. Share with God what’s important to you in your life. Think hard about this. If you have questions, ask them. If you need help sorting out your priorities, ask him.” When a minute remains, ask students to wrap up their thoughts. (10 min)
4. Continue: “So here’s a question that prayer answers: how do we get to know who God is and love him? Well I think it would be safe to say that the most important resource for understanding prayer is the example of Jesus himself, right?” Have students copy the verses on the board in their journals, look them up, and write a few words on what each tells us about prayer. If you think time will not suffice, divide readings among students. Allow 15 minutes for the assignment and then discuss for an additional 20 minutes. The references (and suggested meanings and discussion questions):

- a. **Mark 1:35/Luke 5:16/Luke 6:12.** *Pray often for strength and guidance.* Jesus prays constantly and withdraws to pray alone frequently (there are many more such references). Even when the crowds pursue him, he always looks to his Father in prayer for strength. When might be good times for us to follow this example?

- b. **Luke 22:39-44.** *Surrender what you want to God's will.* This is the prayer at Gethsemane: Jesus first asks for what he wants – that this cup of suffering pass; then surrenders to the Father's will and purpose. This is a tough one, because how do we know God's character? How do we know what he wants for us? By knowing Him as best as we can. This is where prayer is so important – a way to get to know God over our lifetimes, and the closer we get, the more we understand!
  - c. **Luke 11:9-13.** *Seek and you will find.* Prayer requires a heart that's really looking for God. When we make the effort to get in touch with God, he rewards us. It's not that God will give us exactly what we want. Instead, when we look for God in prayer, we are *always* rewarded with his loving guidance.
  - d. **Matthew 21:22.** *Ask in faith.* Prayer comes out of deep belief; then we can hear God's answer. You might want to share this anecdote: In his book *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Robert Coles tells the story of a little boy who, after hearing God talk to so many people in Old Testament stories, asked his rabbi what the voice of God might have sounded like and how people could hear him, to which the rabbi responded: "Well, the voice of God is heard by the people *who are listening.*"
  - e. **Luke 9:29.** *Prayer changes us.* It was when Jesus was praying that he was transfigured. (The Transfiguration is recounted in the two other synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Mark; interestingly, they do not mention this moment of prayer.) What might this mean for us?
  - f. **Matthew 5:44.** *Pray for enemies.* Is this hard to do? Why?
  - g. **Matthew 6:6-7.** *Pray alone, no fancy words.*
  - h. **Matthew 6: 9-13.** *When at a loss for words, these are all you need: The Lord's Prayer.* There will be two sessions devoted to this prayer.
  - i. **Psalms 46:10.** *We can feel God's presence in stillness and silence.* How often, if ever, are we silent and still? (35 min)
5. To conclude in prayer: "So our final few moments will be a prayer activity--if prayer is a conversation, we need to listen, not just talk. We need to open our hearts to God's voice just as the people of the Bible did. Let's just sit in silence for the last few moments of class. Empty your mind of everything and just imagine that God has something to say to you. Do nothing, just listen." Allow a few moments of silence, then say "Amen." Ask students to deposit their journals and prayer books up front before they depart. (5 min)





## What Does the Bible Say About Prayer?

### SESSION FOUR

**CHECKPOINT:** *The Bible shows us why and how to pray.*

1. Welcome students and have them retrieve their prayer journals and copies of *Here I Am, Lord*. On the board, have already written out the Bible citations in procedure #4 but also:

So God created humankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

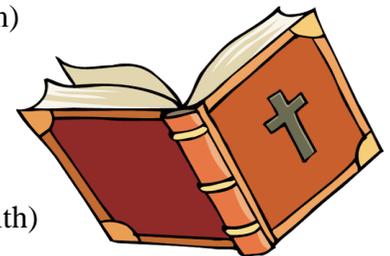
2. Ask students to open to page 17, read the prayer together and discuss the question. “Last week we talked about what we learned from Jesus in prayer. If you need help remembering, just open your journals to where you made notes last week. What did we learn? We certainly learned that he prayed often for strength and guidance from the Father.” Continue, using your notes from last week and encouraging students to contribute. *(15 min)*
3. Continue: “This morning’s prayer was based on Scripture. That’s where we turned to see what Jesus taught us about prayer. But the whole Bible from the beginning of our story in the Old Testament all the way through the Book of Revelation teaches us about prayer – this unique language we speak with God. And this morning we’re going to look at some of the important messages we get from Scripture in general about prayer. Let’s start at the beginning in the book about the beginning, Genesis. Here’s what we come to at the end of God’s creation of everything else – the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, the sky, the seas and all the creatures in them.” Turn to what you had written on the board and ask a volunteer to read. “So what’s going on here? Can you describe in your own words what you just read?” Discuss, emphasizing:
  - a. We were created in his image. Unlike all the rest of creation, we were created to be like him, to therefore be able to communicate and relate to him. Your pet dog or cat is indeed one of God’s beloved creatures but they cannot know God or look for him and love him as you are able to.
  - b. We were created male and female. He created us to be in relationship, to be completed in that relationship. Interestingly, relationship is what God is all about, isn’t it? God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the early Orthodox Fathers described the relationship between these three Persons of the Trinity as a kind of a “perfect communion, flow, a radical relatedness.” And God created us to be in relationship with him. The marriage metaphor is one we find often in

Scripture as we see God described as loving us as passionately as a spouse (most famously in the books of Hosea and the Song of Songs.) But maybe this is not so much about getting married – not everyone gets married or has children. It’s really about intimacy and fellowship, that we need others to be fully human.

(10 min)

4. “How does prayer feature in the lives of the people of the Bible? Every person who has been effective in God’s service prayed – the patriarch Abraham, the liberator and law-giver Moses, King David, the prophet Isaiah, the evangelizer St. Paul, Mary, the Mother of God. But let’s see for ourselves what we can learn. And there’s so much in the Bible about prayer, that we’re only going to take a peek at some of it and we’re all going to help so we get it done.” Ask students to copy down Bible citations on the Board, allowing space in between for notes. Then assign a reading to each student (if the class is small, you can give a few readings). Exclude the last reading so that you can read it together at the end. Ask them to look up their assigned verse(s) and be prepared to read it aloud and explain the meaning in their own words. Allow 5 minutes for their work and 20 for sharing and discussion. (This needs to be done at a peppy pace or it will be tedious. If you want to whittle down the number of readings, do so.) Connect discussion to everyday life, i.e. have you ever needed to forgive someone for doing or saying something that hurt you? Was it hard? Etc. Conclude with the I Kings reference as it leads into their journaling exercise.

1 Chronicles 16:11	(Look to God for strength; always seek him)
Psalms 50:15	(God hears prayer in times of trouble)
Psalms 51:1	(Pray for mercy)
Psalms 22:1	(Pleading, feeling abandoned)
Psalms 46:10	(Stillness is important to knowing God)
Psalms 145:18	(The Lord is near all who call on him in faith)
Job 22:27	(Pray and God hears but you do your part)
Jeremiah 29:12	(Pray! The Lord is listening)
Mark 11:25	(Forgive others in your prayer – so that God might forgive you)
Acts 1:14	(Devoted themselves to prayer; pray with others)
Romans 8:26	(We often don’t know how to pray: the Holy Spirit helps us!)
Romans 12:12	(Be happy in hope, patient in times of trouble, faithful in prayer)
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18	(Be joyful! Always pray! Give thanks!)
Ephesians 6:18	(Pray on all occasions; pray for others)
Philippians 4:6	(Don’t worry! Just pray)
Colossians 4:2	(Devote yourselves to prayer)
James 5:13-14	(Pray when in trouble, when happy, when sick)
James 5:16	(Pray for one another; prayers of righteous people are powerful)
1 John 5:14-15	(Pray according to his will)
1 Kings 3:5-14	(Solomon’s inspiring prayer for wisdom)



(25 min)

5. “Let’s take the rest of class to write in our prayer journals. Answer God’s question to Solomon: what do you want from me? Let’s pray about this in our journals.” When a minute remains, ask students to wrap up their thoughts. Students can deposit their prayer books and journals in the box on your desk and depart. *(10 min)*



*Lord,  
Hear Our  
Prayer*





## The Prayer Book of the Bible: Psalms

### SESSION FIVE

**CHECKPOINT:** *Prayer is about how we feel; the Psalms are a great example.*

1. Before class, write psalm citations in Procedure #6 on the board. Also, have large sheets of newsprint taped around the room with a marker available at each. At the top of each sheet have one of these words: SAD, ANGRY, HAPPY, FAITH-FILLED, WORRIED, and AFRAID. (The newsprint is ideal so that everyone can look together at the things that bring on these feelings. But if you feel students will be more comfortable expressing these privately: pass around sheets of paper which identify each of these feelings along the bottom of the page. Have them write their responses on the top, then fold the paper in a thin strip over their answer and pass it along to the next student who will do the same. In that way, no one sees anyone else's answer. Demonstrate before you begin.)
2. Welcome students and have them retrieve their prayer journals and copies of *Here I Am, Lord*. Read Psalm 55 on page 24 together. Instead of the discussion question ask students to look at the sheets around the room (or explain the sheets that will be passed around), visit each one, and write their own answer to “what makes you angry? Happy? Etc. After ten minutes, ask students to be seated (even if some didn't get to them all).
3. Have students open again to the psalm you read as an opening prayer. Ask them to underline (distribute pencils if they don't have one) the most important word in the psalm for them, the one that jumps out, speaks to them. Discuss. Hopefully, someone will have identified the “emotion” word “anguish.” (If not conclude with pointing to it as what spoke to you.)  
*(20 min)*
4. Continue:” Look at that word “anguish,” which means suffering or great pain - this is a feeling expressed in lots of psalms. We've spent the last two weeks looking at the richest source for understanding prayer there is – the Bible. But in fact, in the Bible there is a very special book *filled with just prayers*, and that is the Book of Psalms.” Point to the list of feelings around the room. “And they are all about how the people of God were feeling and wanted to share with him as a *community*. What makes us feel so many different emotions? Anger, sorrow, joy and so on? Well, let's see what does that for us today.” Review the lists. “So these are the kinds of feelings we have today, in this year, thousands of years after the psalms were written, but not much different at all from what people were feeling then.”

Share the following information and you can write important words on the board (underlined word/phrases below can serve as a guide for what to write):

5. “In Hebrew, the Book of Psalms is called “Songs of praise.” Praise is the perfect word, since even though the psalms expressed every possible human emotion – awe, joy, gratitude, fear, anger, and doubt – in the end, they were about trust and faith.

“The early Christian community read the Hebrew Bible in the Greek version or Septuagint. In the Septuagint, the word “*psalmoi*” was used for this collection of prayers. And this word comes from *psalterion* -- the stringed instrument that often accompanied these songs (and from where we get the word Psalter; (*Kirk Saghmosatz or Saghmosaran* in Armenian).

“The psalms may seem modern in the feelings they share. But they were actually following traditional Near Eastern forms and were probably used as prayers of worship or celebration or community grief to be sung or chanted; instructions for choirmasters appear throughout.

“Many of the psalms are attributed to King David (c. 1000 B.C.) who is said to have composed and helped organize music for worship; others were written by those in his court. The Early Church was deeply influenced by synagogue worship in which the psalms were read as Scripture, but also recited as prayers and sung as hymns and so, from the first, Christians treasured the Book of Psalms.

“They are an important feature of Christian liturgy, including the Armenian Badarak and its daily and other services. Unfortunately, since we don’t know Scripture *that* well and our liturgical services are in a language we don’t understand, the frequent psalm quotations are easily missed. We’ll take a closer look at that next time. So when we read the Psalms, we ask ourselves what it might have been expressing by and for the community. And then, what it is saying about God in our lives.” (10 min)

6. Direct students’ attention to the psalm references on the board. Psalm 8:9; 138:1; 106:4; 91:10-11; 33:22; 118:6; 118:24; 51:3-4; 9:1-2, 23:1-2. Look them up together (or you can assign verses to different students who will then read them aloud). Identify the emotion conveyed. (Awe, praise, plea for help, trust in God’s protection, hope, fear but God will strengthen, shame, hate, gratitude, peace/contentment)

Conclude with Psalm 137. Have someone read it aloud. Continue: “Armenians often feel something special about this Psalm: the sadness and anger of people driven from their homeland. This would have been sung by the community while in exile in Babylon in the sixth century B.C. Anything strike you? What title would you give this psalm? What type of music would you choose to set it to? (Country, rap, jazz, classical, etc.) What musical instrument would you choose to accompany it? (20 min)

7. “Let’s take a few moments now to write in our prayer journals. In keeping with this whole topic of feelings, what might you want to share with God about how you are feeling today?” When a minute remains, ask students to wrap up.
8. Conclude: “Let’s end with the prayer we sing as a community at the end of Badarak that comes from Psalm 34:1. I’ll say it first and then let’s repeat together: I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall at all times be in my mouth.” Ask students to deposit their journals and prayer books up front before they depart. *(10 min)*

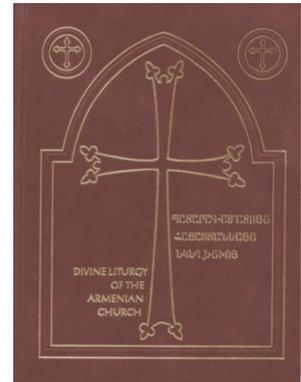


# Liturgical Prayer: Praying and Worshipping Together

## SESSION SIX

**CHECKPOINT:** *Worship is praying together in one voice, with one heart.*

1. You will need Divine Liturgy Pew Books for this session; incense is optional but a nice touch. Also a clear pitcher filled with water and a bowl (see Procedure #9). Have the prayer journal assignment on the board (Procedure #6). Have them turn to page 6 and read Psalm 100 as an opening prayer, which is said during the Preparation part of the liturgy. Continue: “Last week we talked about feelings in the psalms. What are some feelings expressed in *this* psalm as altar servers and priest begin to celebrate the Divine Liturgy? (*Joy, praise, happiness, strong faith, gratitude, acknowledgement of God’s mercy and truth*). I’m going to light incense since this is a smell we associate with our Badarak worship. Do you know what the incense signifies? Can you guess? Turn to Psalm 141:2.” Have a volunteer read: ‘May my prayer come to you like the sweet smell of incense. When I lift up my hands in prayer...’ “So in addition to serving as a way of blessing the people and things like the altar, when the deacon or priest swings the pourvar or censer– the smoke rises up as our prayers do.”  
*(10 min)*



2. Continue: “What we have in our hands is the Divine Liturgy Pew Book, the book that helps us participate in Sunday Badarak. Why do you think we need this when we’re sitting in the pews?” Discuss and conclude with ... “and to be able to be in this together – to pray the prayers and sing the hymns – which are basically prayers that are sung – in *one voice*. Turn to page 20 and read those first words: “with one accord.” So what might this mean?” Pause for answers. “Well, we’re praying with one will and one voice. We can have our private time with God anytime anywhere as Christians, but we truly become the “Church” when we pray in one voice at Badarak. Powerful! Turn to page 34. Let’s read the commentary as we begin what are called “The Intercessions,” where the deacon leads us in prayers for just about everyone and everything.” Have a volunteer read aloud. “And how do we conclude those prayers led by the priest and deacon? Look at page 38: where the choir sings: “Usdamenaynee” – What’s the translation? “From all and for all.”
3. “Scripture is the rock on which our liturgy stands, by the way. And since we just took a close look at the psalms, let’s see how foundational they are to our Divine Liturgy. First, turn to page 45 and notice the deacon’s instruction – sing psalms – said three times! Now start on page 1 and keep turning the pages, and let’s just call out any psalm references we find and I’ll list them on the board: Page 1: *Psalm 131*; Page 4: *Psalm 26*; Page 6: *Psalms*

100, 43; Page 10: *Psalm 93*; Page 24: *Psalm 19:6, 68:33*; Page 25: *Psalm 24:7-10* (you might choose to comment: This is a poignant exchange between the priest and the deacon when he is presenting the chalice to the priest – “Ov eh sa takavor parats? Der zorootyants.” Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts. “Sa inkn eh takavor parats!” *This is the King of Glory!*; Page 50: *Psalm 28:9*.

4. Pause here to say: “It’s interesting that even where the Pew Book doesn’t specifically cite a psalm, there are psalms embedded in our prayers and hymns. For example, turn back to page 47 where we sing *Orhnyal eh Asdvadz* (feel free to sing a line). Notice these beautiful words as we are about to receive communion: “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet!” These were inspired by Psalms 34(8) and 119:103. The next four lines of this hymn are a direct quotation from Psalm 148 (1-2).

Continue: Page 53: *Psalm 113:2*; Page 55: *Psalm 34:1*; Page 57 (requiem: *Psalm 130:1*; Page 61: *Psalm 34: 1*).

5. Conclude: “This is just a look at where the *Psalms* crop up in our liturgical prayers. We don’t have the time to see all the other references from the Bible – Old and New Testament. For example, when we sing Soorp, soorp (Holy, holy) we are quoting the Book of Isaiah. When the priest chants “take, eat” (“arek, gerek” he is quoting Jesus in the Gospels. It would take a long time to look into every Biblical citation in our liturgy!”  
(20 min)
6. “Let’s take a few moments now to write in our prayer journals.” Have students come up and retrieve theirs. “Today, let’s share this (refer to what you’ve written on the board): “Lord, here’s what I feel about you when I’m in church OR “Lord here’s what I want to feel about you when I’m in church but I can’t because...” *When a minute remains, ask students to wrap up their thoughts. (10 min)*
7. “Okay, from private prayer back to prayer in worship. When we pray together in one voice at liturgy, we definitely need a leader, someone who will announce what it is we are praying for so that we can focus our hearts and minds. In the church that is often the deacon who presents a series of prayer petitions called a litany. Can someone kindly look up that word for us?” (*A series of petitions for use in church services or processions, usually recited by the clergy and responded to in a recurring formula by the people, a repetitive series.*) Let’s look at an example of this on pp 15 and 16.” Tell students that you will take the part of the deacon and they will be the congregation and choir, responding “Lord have mercy.” Read through the litany together. End with “Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy” at the bottom of page 16.

8. Now assign students to write a one-line prayer petition in their prayer journals that begins with “For.... (*Following the pattern of church litanies, they could be about the world, the environment, leaders, groups of people, not personal so much as universal* ) Share your own by writing it on the board first so they have a clear example. Allow a few moments for them to think and write and then direct them to read them as you begin the litany with “Again in peace let us pray to the Lord.” And for everyone to be listening and praying with that request each time, responding “Lord, have mercy.” End with “Remember, Lord, and have mercy.” (15 min)

9. To conclude the session in prayer: Set out the large clear pitcher of water and a large clear plastic or glass bowl: “Think about how when we pray together at Badarak, all our prayers are said with one voice. And how every prayer offered mixes with the prayers of everyone else present.

“So as the deacon leads us in prayer, we are praying for these things *together*. Think of a concern you have, a person, place, or situation you want to lift up in prayer. When you are ready, pour some of the water from the pitcher into the bowl to represent those prayers. Watch as they mix with the water added by others, representing your prayers mixing and becoming one with those of the whole group.” With the last one, say: ‘We offer these prayers up to you, Lord, in one heart and one voice.’ Students may deposit their prayer books and journals and depart. (5 min)





## People of Prayer: St. Gregory of Narek

## SESSION SEVEN

**CHECKPOINT:** *Prayer is personal and about where you are in the moment.*

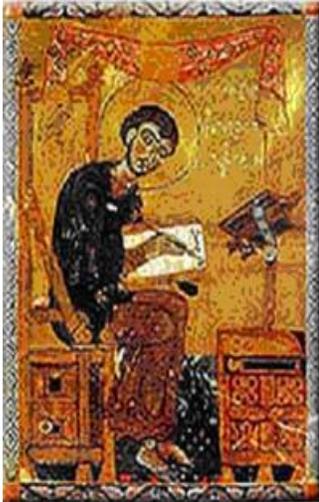
1. Welcome students and have them retrieve their prayer journals and copies of *Here I Am, Lord*. Open with the prayer on page 54 and discuss the question. Ask if students can share a story about one of the “ifs” in their lives. Be prepared with one to share. (15 min)
2. “Last week we talked about praying together in worship. Let’s just get our thoughts together again on that before moving on. On what book is our liturgy very solidly based? The Bible. We looked up lots of references. And we discussed what was unique about liturgical prayer, praying together in worship. How *is* prayer in worship different from individual Christian prayer? Well, together in church, we are praying as the Church, the Body of Christ in prayer, we are praying in one voice. Okay, excellent.”
3. Write *St. Gregory of Narek* on the board with room below for information to be written. Continue: “When we talk about prayer in the context of the Armenian Church, we have to stop and take a look at one of the greatest prayer writers in our tradition: St. Gregory of Narek. And when we’re learning about prayer, there’s nothing better than seeing how this works out in an actual person’s life, in this case a saint of the church.” Ask students to Google his name and share information; as they do, create an outline that addresses when he lived, a few biographical details, and his work. Discuss and then as a summary, have them open *Here I Am, Lord* to pp 104 and read the concise biographical summary aloud. (15 min)
4. Open to page 61 and read the prayer together. Rather than the given reflection question, discuss as follows: “What are the nouns St. Gregory has used to describe himself? I’ll start with the first one: a book.” Discuss implications of this word and then do the same for the other nouns (see below). Then: “How does he qualify each? I’ll start with the first one: a *living* book.” (See below.) Discuss other adjectives (see below).

**Book** (many chapters, written down, memories, past, present, future, words, stories).  
*Living: growing, changing, adding new things; like the scroll in Ezekiel, lamentations – woeful*

**A City** (teeming with life, good aspects and bad, history, a future, populated with different people, different stories)  
*Without walls and towers: vulnerable, unprotected.*

**A House** (a place where people live, normally a happy place)  
*Empty, without doors for protection, exposed*

**Salt** (an important element; Jesus calls us salt of the earth - Matthew 5:13)  
*Tasteless, Jesus also said if salt loses its taste what good is it?*



**Salty water**

*It's undrinkable*

**Land**

*But uncultivable*

**Field** (the very word connotes a place to plant, for things to grow)

*Barren and full of weed*

**Olive tree**

*With no olive, bears no fruit*

**A plant** (something that will grow and provide beauty or food)

*Dead, but talking (Pharisees were called whitewashed tombs by Jesus – talking but dead!)*

**A candle** (something that normally provides light and perhaps heat)

*Burnt out and unable to be relit*

“What’s his mood? Pretty low! Ever felt like this – even one of his images? He shares these feelings with God and you see in all his prayers, how much he looks to God for renewal, for true purpose and meaning. I’m sure there are times we feel like this but we tend to turn to different things to feel better. What do *you* do to cheer up?” Discuss.

“Whatever it is that we do, it’s very temporary. St. Gregory turns to God again and again because he knew that strengthening that relationship through prayer was the permanent fix to what was troubling him and that life and life’s meaning *comes from God*.

*(20 min)*

5. Have students open their prayer journals. “Today in our prayer journals let’s imitate St. Gregory’s honest and open prayer style. He taught us that prayer can be very *personal*. Start your prayer like this: “Lord, I am...” and communicate a few images of yourself as you feel right now. Start with a simple image, then follow with a bit of elaboration. For example: ‘Lord, I am a tree and – then you go on to describe yourself as that tree. Or ‘Lord, I am a 1000-page book’– and you elaborate. So first thing, find something you could compare yourself with and then describe it a bit. And your mood is right now – so if you feel on top of the world, doubtful, low, whatever, find a poetic and prayerful way to share it the Lord.” Let the class know when a minute remains and conclude exercise.
6. Conclude with St. Gregory’s prayer on p. 18 of *Here I Am, Lord* which class can read together. Have students return journals and prayer books and dismiss class. *(10 min)*



## People of Prayer: St. Nersess Shnorhali

## SESSION EIGHT

**CHECKPOINT:** *Pray for the right things (like wisdom).*

1. Welcome students and have them retrieve their prayer journals and copies of *Here I Am, Lord*. Open with St. Nersess' prayer on page 44. Then tell the class: "Last time we took a close look at one of the great prayer writers in the Armenian Church, St. Gregory of Narek. Even though he was a spiritual leader and a member of a religious community, his prayers were very personal. And we found that out in doing a simple exercise with one of his prayers.

There is always one other name that comes up when we talk about prayer in the Armenian Church tradition. And that's St. Nersess Shnorhali." Have students turn to page 106 in the prayer book and read the brief bio on him. "We opened class with a prayer that you probably have prayed often in Sunday School and in church, which is actually just one stanza out of the 24 in his famous "I Confess with Faith" (*Havadov Khosdovanim*) prayer. And like the *Hayr Mer*, we say this so often and so unthinkingly that we forget what it is we're praying for.

"So what is this prayer all about? What are asking for? *(Pause for answer.)* Clearly, we are asking for God's wisdom (just like Solomon did, if you remember from our first session). Let's think a minute about this idea of wisdom." Discuss:

- a. What do you think it means to be smart?
  - b. Is there a difference between being smart and being wise? What is it?
  - c. Who is the smartest person you know? Who is the wisest person you know? What makes him or her smart or wise?
  - d. How wise do you think you are? What are you wise about?
  - e. Where do you get your wisdom *from*? *(20 min)*
2. "We will get help with the answer for this one by the epistle writer James. Let's turn now to James 1:5-6."
    - a. What does this passage say we should do if we feel we lack wisdom? *(Ask for it, which is what we do in this prayer.)*
    - b. What promise is issued if we ask? *(We will be given wisdom by God.)*
    - c. How must we ask if we expect to receive wisdom? *(In belief.)*

“James says ask for wisdom and you’ll get it. But sometimes we get confused about what wisdom is. James further defines what it is we should be asking for in 3:13-17.” Discuss: “What is heaven-sent wisdom like according to James?” (*Depending on the translation: pure, peace-loving, gentle, willing to yield – submissive is a dirty word to most people; you might want to discuss what’s really being implied here, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*)

3. So let’s put this all together. The important point here is that being “wise” is relying on God, trusting that his way is always the best way and *his* wisdom, the best wisdom. But there’s another important point because this might seem so abstract. Practically speaking, Solomon knew *what to pray for*. That’s so important to know! What are some things you pray for – be absolutely honest. For example, I’m sure you’ve had a test and prayed to do well on it. What else?” If there are no immediate answers, volunteer your own – praying that a medical test will show that you’re healthy, that you get the job you applied for, etc. “But one of the things we learn the more we pray, the closer we get to God, is what prayer requests are all about in this personal relationship with God. So sure, we can pray to do well on a test just like you can ask a friend to keep his fingers crossed that you do okay. But better might be what?” (Answers might include, giving you the energy to study hard, strength to avoid a social invitation if it conflicts with your study, etc.) (20 min)



4. “Today’s prayer journal assignment is simple. Pray for wisdom. Be specific. Where do you need help being wise? Advise class when 5 minutes remain. For this prayer journal assignment, ask for volunteers to share if they wish.
5. Let’s end class with another stanza from St. Nersess’ 24-verse prayer. Have students turn to p. 26 in the prayer book and pray aloud together. (10 min)





## The Prayer Jesus Gave Us

### *Dear Heavenly Father...*

SESSION NINE

**Checkpoint:** *God is our heavenly Father.*

1. Welcome students and have them retrieve their prayer journals and copies of *Here I Am, Lord*. Begin by asking students to stand in a circle. Tell them that they will be playing a game to test their ability to finish each other's sentences. Have them stand in a circle. Continue: "We're going to sing a well-known song by going around the circle and each person can only say a total of 5 words of the song and then it passes to the next person in the circle. If they can't finish the next 5 words, they pass. Let's practice with one you will know: Let's sing "Happy Birthday" to get the game going." Have every student participate and you can conclude the song if left in mid-sentence. Do this, then try the Star-Spangled Banner or any popular song that's appropriate (make sure you know the words!).
2. After singing a few songs, return to seats. Continue: "That was just a warm-up. But you know when you think of it, there's a prayer that Jesus gave us that sort of finishes our prayer sentences for us....the Lord's Prayer. Let's try it, but we won't go around the circle, let's just say it together: 'Our Father, who art in... ' (15 min)
3. Where do we learn about this prayer? Well, like everything else about Jesus, in the Bible." Ask students to turn to Matthew 6:9-13 in their Bibles or on their phones and read. "So this is the prayer Jesus gave us, the Lord's Prayer or *Hayr Mer* in Armenian. We say it in church, we say it when we gather, I'm sure we say it at home at times, and we can say it anytime because it covers everything, really."
4. Continue: "There's one other place where this prayer is mentioned, but in a slightly shorter version. Turn to Luke 11:1 and let's read. What is happening here? (*When disciples see Jesus praying, they express the desire to learn themselves*). If you remember, in our very first session on prayer, we noticed that of all the amazing things the disciples saw their Lord do – healing the sick, making the blind see, walking on water, *raising people from the dead*, the only thing they ever asked him to teach them was *how to pray!* Why do you think this was true?" Accept all reasonable answers but make sure it is mentioned that with all the times they had seen Jesus withdraw to pray, they must have seen how it changed and empowered him.

5. “So why a prayer of specific words? Jesus taught and demonstrated many other ways of prayer, right? For example: alone in your room. What other ways?” See what students have to say, making sure they remember: praying alone, praying in silence, praying as a community in worship. Continue: “But in these handful of words, maybe we’re seeing an *approach* to prayer, a sort of outline of important conversation points. In a way, maybe it teaches us all we need to know about prayer. If that’s so, it’s important we understand those points. Let’s look at the prayer a bit more closely.”



6. Give each student or pairs of students (as you wish, depending on class size) a phrase from The Lord’s Prayer with this challenge: Create a meme or Instagram photo to explain your phrase in a creative way.

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

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

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Have students share their creative expression of the Lord’s Prayer. (25 min)

7. Continue: “What’s the very first thing we say in this prayer? *Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name*: “What do these words tell us?” Discuss. Include (or conclude): “This is a greeting, isn’t it? It’s a way of opening our line of communication by saying *who* he is, reminding ourselves of our relationship with him, and spelling out how we feel about him, our reverence for him. It’s almost a one-line praise song. It’s like saying: God, I have some things to say and ask but first let me just say...you are my Father in heaven and your name is holy, really special to me. Let’s remember too that while we use masculine pronouns and names, God is not male...or female. He is all of this and none of this – it’s beyond our understanding so we do the best we can in talking about him. And by the way, Christians still use the 17<sup>th</sup> century King James translation of the Lord’s Prayer which has words like *thy*. Don’t be fooled into thinking this is fancy language, this is formal, this is what you say when you address the high and mighty God. On the contrary, it’s actually the familiar term for “you” in early modern English, so it’s intimate, it’s close.

8. “Why is it important to start prayer this way?” Discuss. Make sure to include the fact that this is a reminder to us and our acknowledgment to God of his centrality for our lives, his goodness, and his awesome place in the universe. “We saw that the psalmists understood this. Whatever feeling they shared, whatever requests they were making, this reverence for God was almost always at the center of their prayer. Let’s practice this in our prayer journals today,” Have students open their prayer journals. “Psalm 100 is one of those psalms that could be a great beginning to any prayer.” Have students turn to it and read it together. This psalm reminds us of a lot of amazing things about God. Pick the one that speaks to you, phrase it in your own words and use that phrase as way to launch your thoughts this morning. For example, maybe you want to start with the idea that God made you, created you. Or that he is good (verse 5).” Advise class when a minute remains for them to wrap up their writing.
9. Distribute the Lord’s Prayer handout and end class by praying it in the two languages of the Armenian Church. Make sure students understand that hallowed = holy; debts = our wrong-doings, our sins and then say the prayer in English and Armenian. (20 min)





## The Prayer Jesus Gave Us

### *Your Will Be Done*

SESSION TEN

**CHECKPOINT:** *Prayer brings us closer to knowing God's will.*

1. Have the verses from procedure #2 on the board before class. Welcome students and have them retrieve their prayer journals and copies of Here I Am, Lord. Open with the Lord's Prayer on p. 71 and discuss the question. Review the main points of "Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name" from the last session. (10 min)
2. Continue. *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* "There are two things here that need defining. What is this kingdom? What is God's will?" Write both of these on the board. "We learn a whole lot about the kingdom from Jesus himself, don't we? The Gospel of Matthew is filled with what are called parables of the kingdom, stories to help us understand. And it would take a lot of Sundays to read and study them all, but let's look at just a few important ideas." Assign a reading to each student and have them be prepared to read it. As they do, summarize as follows:



Matthew 6:33 (it's the most important thing, and once you "get" it, everything else follows)

Matthew 13:45-46 (a pearl, more valuable than anything)

Matthew 4:17 (repent, means change direction, *change*, so the kingdom of heaven is about being renewed)

Zechariah 14:9 (on that day he'll be king over all – so it points to a perfect future when God's reign is complete)

1 Chronicles 29: 11 (as above!)

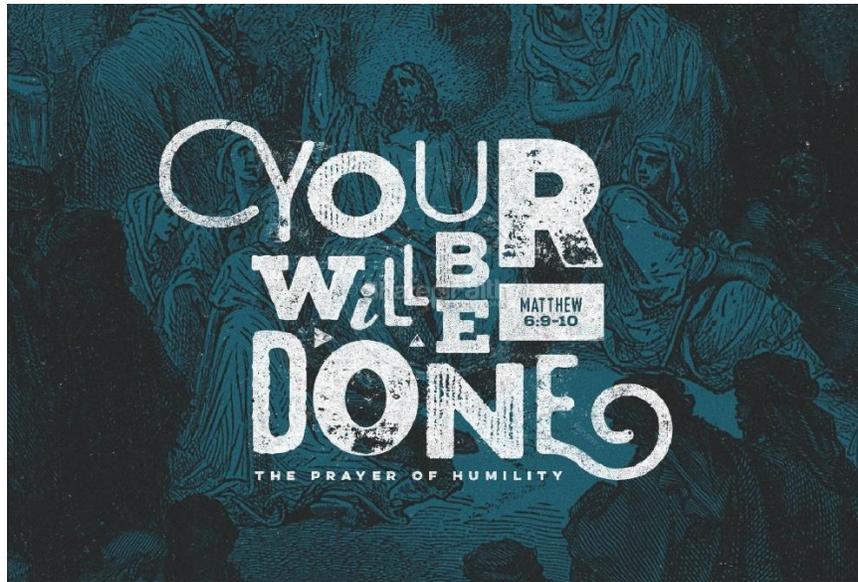
Romans 12:2 (be transformed and renewed)

“When you are under the lordship of Jesus, that is *already* the kingdom of God – under that lordship your life is blessed....  
(15 min)

3. “Now how about – ‘Thy will be done.’” Have students turn to Ephesians 5:15-17 and ask a volunteer to read. “So, here what are being told? – If you’re smart you will know the will of God. But how would you know his will? Not that we can compare your relationship with your parents with your relationship with God, but in a way, we *can*. After all we call God our heavenly *Father*, and there are images of God as mother as well in the Bible. How do you know how your mom or dad feels? What they expect from you?” Discuss, but make sure to include: 1) they tell you and 2) you know them in a daily, loving relationship; these are also true of God – how are these achieved? Prayer!
4. “Think about it: If you pray to do what God would do, or in other words ‘do His will’ – THAT is a prayer that never fails. When we pray to do things the way God would have us do them, our prayers are answered, no matter what. So, everyday ask yourself this question: What would God do in each situation that I face? The more you ask that question, and ask God to help you answer the question, the closer you get to his will. This is the most important point of today’s lesson.
5. Journal activity. Think of a tough situation you are facing. Maybe a decision you need to make. Family or friend issues. A worry. Now, ask God to help you just do his will in the situation. God what do you want me to do here? And for God to just help you take each step as He would. Think of what some of those steps might be in resolving your situation.  
(15 min)
6. Continue: “*Give us this day our daily bread*. Is this about actual bread? What is the significance of bread?” Discuss, making sure to include that it is the staff of life, basic to human sustenance; Jesus called himself the bread of life – John 6:35; that whoever shares in him, will never hunger. But does Jesus mean we will never be hungry? Or is it that he can provide all we need to be satisfied? Ask students what they feel they need to be fully satisfied in life. Discuss.
7. “*And forgive us our debts – as we have forgiven our debtors*. Why is it important to forgive?” Discuss and conclude with a look at Matthew 6:14-15 (Forgive others and then your Father will forgive you) and Colossians 3:12-14 (forgive as your Father forgives you) and the observation that our forgiving hearts are modeled on God’s and a pre-requisite for his merciful forgiveness of us.
8. “Finally: *And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil*. What do you think this might mean? (This will be hard – students will wonder why God would lead anyone into temptation). Well, God has put his beloved faithful to the test. He asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. He allowed the devil to ruin his faithful servant Job. By the way, he saved both of these men from their ‘tests.’ And most amazingly...well you all know the story of Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness. But let’s take a closer look with one last

dive into Scripture; look at Matthew 4:1. What’s happening here? The Holy Spirit has led Jesus to his temptations. SO maybe we’re asking God to keep us from these tests – tests that we might not do as well at as the people I just mentioned.” (10 min)

9. Conclude with this prayer exercise using the Lord’s Prayer handout. Direct students to write a single word or a few words that summarize that thought on line indicated. Allow 5 minutes for this. Then after you read each line, students will chime in together with their words (simultaneously). Go through together and conclude with an Amen. If you wish, comment briefly on of the words /phrases you heard. (10 min)





## Prayer as a Way of Life

### *Knowing Jesus*

SESSION ELEVEN

**CHECKPOINT:** *Knowing Jesus is a matter of life and...the best life.*

1. *You'll need pieces of paper and a basket or bowl for the concluding prayer exercise.*  
Welcome students and have them retrieve their prayer journals and copies of *Here I Am, Lord*. As a follow-up to the sessions on the Lord's Prayer, distribute the handout "I Cannot Pray..." and have class take turns reading. Allow a few seconds between 'verses' for the words to sink in. Discuss however many you wish to explore how students may think they specifically apply to their lives. Come prepared to share yourself. Then ask them to open their prayer journals and choose a verse that speaks to them. Have them prayerfully contemplate why and how it applies to them. Give them a minute's notice when time will be up. *(30 min)*
2. Write the acronym ACTS on the board in letters one under the other, allowing room on either side for further writing. Tell the class: "You know, we have done a whole lot of praying together and learning about prayer. One of the classic summaries of what prayer is all about is known as 'ACTS.' Which is great because really, when you think about it, what we've learned is that prayer IS about action, about doing... it is a series of acts. These letters stand for (*write as you speak them*) the four basic *kinds* of prayer and before I ask you to guess what they stand for, let me give you a hint." Write next to each in order: *Wow! Oops! Thanks! Gimme!* So, for A? Yes, adoration – like we said about the opening lines of the Lord's Prayer and all the psalms – it's about telling God that you *know* who he is and just as all the people of the Bible did when they actually met their awesome Lord, we sort of fall to our knees in wonder and awe – but with words." Continue soliciting answers for the other three (confession, thanksgiving, supplication) and elaborate together with the class what each means. *(10 min)*
3. Continue: "You know, even as we keep these prayer approaches in mind, let's never forget that these reflect *human* needs and feelings and an outline like this is just a way of organizing this in our very limited human heads; prayer is *not* a transaction, it's not a "deal" so much as a way of tapping into the mind and heart of God.

"We want to get to know God, to grow closer to Jesus Christ – that's our goal as Christians and I think we've certainly learned that prayer is the most important way for

this to happen, for us to develop the kind of relationship with Jesus that makes a *difference* in our lives. So that it's not just going mindlessly through religious 'motions' like... I'll go to church, pray before meals, be nice... And Jesus himself tells us how important this is!" Have students turn to Matthew 7:21-23 and ask a volunteer to read. Ask students for their understanding. Conclude: "Yes, it's about doing all the "busy" work of being a Christian – even coming to Sunday School! – but never really bothering to get to know the Lord personally. And that's about your life here and now *and* eternity. Those have to be the four most painful words we could hear, Jesus telling us "I never knew you."  
(5 min)

4. "So towards that end, let's get serious about what this means in our lives. We're going to create our own *rule of prayer* (*write these words on the board as you say them*), a sort of practical guide for ourselves going forward. A rule of prayer sounds kind of dull but it's just a term that refers to what ultimate authority a group of faithful – such as a community of monks living in a monastery or an order of nuns – will live under throughout the day and day after day. The origins of this type of thing began as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, when people were living lives completely devoted to their relationship with Jesus. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> century among Christians in Egypt, people we have come to call the "desert mothers and fathers" would go off and live in the desert wilderness alone and in communities. There are wonderful collections of their stories available today to read and be inspired by.

"And these early simple rules developed into rules for large religious communities. One of the most important monastic voices in Western Christianity was Saint Benedict (6<sup>th</sup> c.). He developed a famous rule for religious orders that organized the day into regular periods of communal and private prayer, sleep, meals, spiritual reading, and manual labor and God would be glorified in the way each of these things would be done.

"This kind of lifestyle would have been in operation as well at the world famous Monastery of Narek, Narekavank, in the 10<sup>th</sup> century where our St. Gregory of Narek lived. He, too, would have shared structured meals, times of prayer, times of scholarly work, times of labor and service.

5. "Following these examples, a rule of prayer involves setting up some sort of discipline that acknowledges that *God* is the center of our lives, *we* are not. Right away, this puts us off balance, right? Because as 21<sup>st</sup> century people, we feel *we* are the center. Well, we're not monks or nuns. But in our own small way, we can create a rule of prayer for ourselves, a way of finding God through prayer, Scripture and worship.

“So let’s give it a try and just start during this last few minutes of class – we’re going to be practical and realistic and see how we can live more prayerful lives.” Tell students that starting now and continuing next time they’ll be working on a list together of 10 ways they can bring prayer into their lives in simple ways. As each is formulated it can be written in their prayer journals. Discuss together and agree on the first. (10 min)

6. Conclude class with the following prayer exercise. “An important daily rule of prayer is praying for others – for people you know, for the world. Let’s start today with each other.” Distribute slips of paper and have every student write their name on one. Place the pieces of paper into the basket. Then pass it around the group and ask each to take out a piece of paper. Encourage them to pray daily for that person during the coming week. (5 min)





## Prayer as a Way of Life

### *My Rule of Prayer*

## SESSION TWELVE

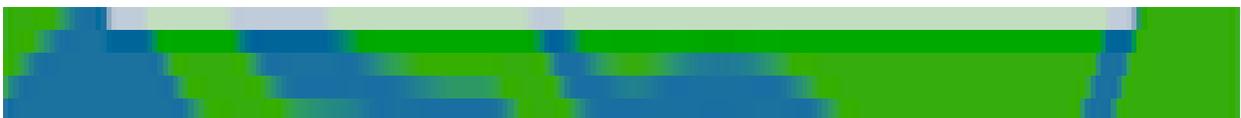
**CHECKPOINT:** *Prayer is a way of life!*

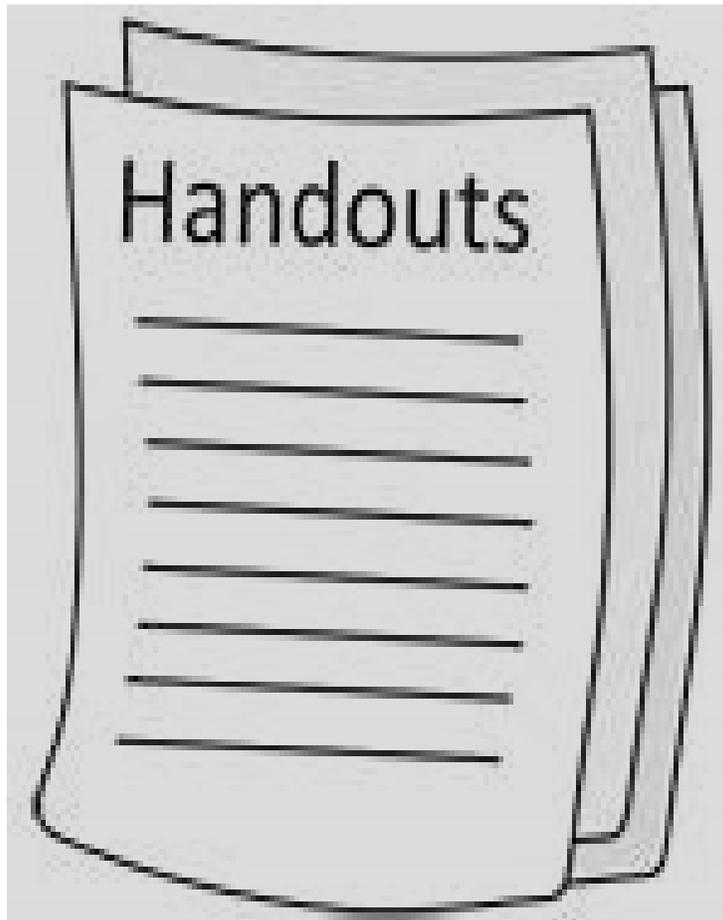
1. You might want to have refreshments to celebrate your last session. Ask students to come up for their prayer books and journals (they will be taking both home with them at the end of the session). Pray the short “thank you” prayer at the bottom of p 97 and discuss the question. *(15 min)*
  
2. Continue their “Rule of Prayer” list. Allow 10 minutes for individual work and 10 minutes to share, during which time, students can add ideas they didn’t have to their own list in their journals. They will probably have many good ideas. Some to consider:
  - a. Find opportunities throughout the day to express thanks to God (in the shower, thank you for water), concern for others (hearing an ambulance siren, praying for health and courage to the ailing), etc.
  - b. Pray before and/or after meals.
  - c. Say the Lord’s Prayer or “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace” in the morning before you start your day.
  - d. Prayerfully review your day at bedtime, give thanks, express concern, pray for others. (They will practice that at the end of the session.)
  - e. Keep a prayer journal (they already have one they can continue writing in).
  - f. Keep a gratitude journal, recording 3 things you are thankful for each day (again, they can use their prayer journals).
  - g. Reading the Bible for 5 minutes a day before bedtime or anytime, slowly and undistractedly. *(20 min)*
  
3. Distribute refreshments. Continue: “You did a great job at coming up with this list. Please, don’t just shelve it in your bookcase, but look at it and even if you work in a few of these ideas to your day – what a great gift that would be! You’re going to be surprised how, over time, it’s going to change you. It’s like doing push-ups – you’ll see yourself getting stronger and stronger and more spiritually confident over time. And a lot happier.

“One of the prayer ideas we talked about was spending a few moments at the end of the day prayerfully reflecting.” Distribute “A Prayerful Evening Exercise” as you continue. “I’m giving you an example of something you could do.” Review the reflection together. Then ask them to think about their day yesterday and write about it in their journals. To conclude the exercise, students will share an answer to one of the specific questions in #3. Be prepared with one of your own.

4. Dismiss class with a big group “Amen!” and make sure everyone takes home their prayer book and journal. *(25 min)*

AMEN!





# The LORD'S Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, \_\_\_\_\_  
hallowed be thy name. \_\_\_\_\_  
Thy kingdom come, \_\_\_\_\_  
thy will be done \_\_\_\_\_  
on earth as it is in heaven. \_\_\_\_\_  
Give us this day our daily bread \_\_\_\_\_  
and forgive us our debts \_\_\_\_\_  
as we forgive our debtors. \_\_\_\_\_  
And lead us not into  
temptation, \_\_\_\_\_  
but deliver us from evil, \_\_\_\_\_  
for thine is the kingdom \_\_\_\_\_  
and the power \_\_\_\_\_  
and the glory forever \_\_\_\_\_  
Amen.

## Hayr Mer

Hayr mer, vor hergeens yes.  
soorp yegheetsee anoon ko.  
Yegestseh arkayootyoon ko,  
yegheetseen gamk ko  
vorbes hergeens yev hergree.  
Uzhats mer hanabazort door mez  
aysor  
togh mez uzbardees mer  
vorbes yev mek toghoomk merots  
bardabanats.  
Yev mee daneer uzmez ee  
portsootyoon,  
Ayl purgya ee chareh,  
Zee ko eh arkayootyoon  
yev zoorootyoon  
yev park  
haveedyanus. Amen.



## **I Cannot Pray...**

I cannot pray OUR if I only live for myself.

I cannot pray FATHER if I do not demonstrate this relationship in my daily life.

I cannot pray WHO ART IN HEAVEN if all my interests and pursuits are in earthly things.

I cannot pray HALLOWED BE THY NAME if I, made in his image, am not striving for holiness.

I cannot pray THY KINGDOM COME if I am unwilling to give up my own self-rule and accept God as the Lord of my life.

I cannot pray THY WILL BE DONE if I am unwilling or resentful of having it in my life.

I cannot pray ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN unless I am truly ready to give myself to his service here and now.

I cannot pray GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD if I fail to learn what is really important to my life and if I ignore the genuine needs of my fellow human beings.

I cannot pray FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS if I continue to harbor a grudge against anyone.

I cannot pray LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION if I deliberately place myself in its path.



I cannot pray DELIVER US FROM EVIL if I do not put on the whole armor of God.

I cannot pray THINE IS THE KINGDOM if I do not give the King the disciplined obedience of a loyal subject.

I cannot pray THINE IS THE POWER if I have worldly fears.

I cannot pray THINE IS THE GLORY if I am seeking my own glory first.

I cannot pray FOREVER if the horizon of my life is bounded completely by time.

I cannot pray AMEN unless I honestly say, "Cost what it may, this is my prayer."



## A Prayerful Evening Exercise

*Each evening, spend five minutes in quiet prayer by reading through this exercise.*

1. I place myself in the loving presence of Jesus; I ask for the grace to accept that I am loved as I *am* at this moment. I take a moment to thank God for his constant and eternal love for me.
2. With the help of my Lord, I try to get in touch with what has been happening in me and through me today.
3. As I think of the day that has just ended, I might reflect on some of these questions, always ending with the last (in bold):
  - a. When I recall the people I encountered today, who do I remember and what was my experience (good, bad, angry, sad, joyous, annoyed)?
  - b. Where did I experience regret?
  - c. When did I feel the most alive today?
  - d. What experiences took me away from God today?
  - e. What experiences brought me closer to God this day?
  - f. For what am I most grateful to God today?