

PRAYER

GOD HELPS

PRAYER
PEOPLE
PRAY

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BAND

PRAYER
D

PLANNING GUIDE

PRAYER



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This planning guide is a part of LIFE, a Christian Studies curriculum developed for Lutheran schools.

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God helps people pray is one of twelve concepts covered by LIFE curriculum.

This BAND D planning guide contains model units for two years of middle secondary school.

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GOD HELPS PEOPLE PRAY

AIMS

The ultimate aim of LIFE curriculum is that

- students will come to know God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- students will have faith in God as their Father, Saviour, and Helper.

We understand that faith is entirely a gift of the Holy Spirit.

We teach in obedience to Jesus' command to go and teach.

*How can people have faith in the Lord
and ask him to save them,
if they have never heard about him?
And how can they hear,
unless someone tells them?
Romans 10:14 (CEV)*

GOD HELPS PEOPLE PRAY

As Christians we believe this and are compelled to tell others.

Our aim in teaching this concept is that students

- hear,
- explore and
- reflect on

these faith statements:

1. God invites people to pray to him in Jesus' name
2. God promises to hear and answer prayer
3. Jesus taught people to pray

BACKGROUND NOTES FOR TEACHERS

GOD HELPS PEOPLE PRAY

WHAT IS PRAYER? Prayer is communicating with God. Christian prayer is an expression of the relationship God has restored with people through Jesus Christ. It is a conversation with God that God initiates; we talk to God because he has spoken to us and invites us to speak to him.

Christian prayer flows from Christian faith. It is based on the gospel of God's love and acceptance for the sake of Jesus Christ. We don't pray in order to get close to God; we pray because God is already and always close to us and invites and encourages us to communicate with him by our words and thoughts, and even just by our deep longings (Romans 8:14–17, 26,27). Note also how already in the Old Testament people of faith, such as Abraham, Moses and the psalmists, spoke with God very intimately, sometimes even 'argued' with God).

God says to each person who believes in Jesus: 'You are my child. I love you. Come and talk to me about any and every part of your life' (Psalm 50:15; Matthew 7:7,8).

ASK, THANK, PRAISE We can talk to God about anything and everything in our prayers. We praise and thank God for all that he is and all that he does for us. We ask for things we need for our spiritual and our physical life. God encourages us also to pray for other people (1 Timothy 2:1,2; Matthew 5:44).

Our Father wants us to pray regularly, in any situation and at any time (1 Thessalonians 5:17,18): in public or private (Matthew 6:6), in stillness and isolation or in busyness and turmoil.

IN JESUS' NAME We can't talk about prayer without talking about Jesus. Jesus alone makes prayer possible. It is through Jesus that we have access to the Father (John 14:6; Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 10:19–22). Jesus has removed the obstacles and barriers that stop God from hearing prayer, namely, human sin and guilt. We are children of God 'through faith in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:26).

Jesus tells us that we should pray 'in his name' (John 16:23). This is like Jesus giving us his credit card and his pin number to draw on God's account. To pray in Jesus' name does not mean just tacking Jesus' name onto our prayers as some kind of magic formula. It means praying with faith in Jesus Christ, approaching God with Jesus' credentials instead of our own.

We ask 'for Jesus' sake' — not because of who we are or what we have done, but because of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for us.

DOES GOD ANSWER PRAYER? God promises to answer every prayer that comes from faith in Jesus (John 14:13,14; 15:7; 16:23; Matthew 7:7–11; Psalm 50:15). So Christians can pray with complete confidence.

God's answer might be something he **does** (eg healing, protecting, forgiving). Often God wants to use us ourselves as his agents for answering our prayers. Or God's

answer might be something he **says** (eg encouraging, reassuring [eg 2 Corinthians 12:7–10]). This does not mean that we should expect some direct message from God in answer to our prayers (although, of course, God can answer this way if he chooses). But in many instances God's answer to our prayers is already available to us in the things he says to us in the Scriptures. This is one of the reasons why prayer should always be closely linked to reading and hearing God's word.

Christians believe that God answers prayer in his own way and in his own time. Often God's method and timing are better than what we had in mind. Sometimes we see his answer right away. But often we recognise God's answer only when we look back some time later. Because we trust our Father's love and wisdom, we leave it to him to decide. He knows best what we need (Matthew 6:32b).

As Girgensohn has pointed out, in actual fact God has already answered all our prayers in Jesus, even before we pray. 'He himself

When the Holy Spirit leads people to faith in Jesus, he makes it possible for them to pray. Christian prayer is an expression of faith in which we speak to God with the confidence that he will hear us for Jesus' sake.

Theological Foundations of LIFE Curriculum

[Jesus] and what is given and promised in him, is the ultimate answer to all prayer'. (*Teaching Luther's Catechism* p 208f, Muhlenberg Press 1959)

NOT A MEANS OF GRACE Some Christians tend to make prayer a 'means of grace', for example, when they say: 'We get God's love (and forgiveness) by praying for it'. Lutherans reject this. God gives these and other blessings to us through his word and the sacraments. It is **God's answer — not our praying** that gets these blessings for us. (Note Luther's explanations of the first four prayers in the Lord's Prayer).

'YOUR WILL BE DONE' As Christians we know that God's will for us (what God wants for us) is always 'good and gracious'. This gives us the confidence to ask unconditionally for those things we know quite clearly that God wants for us — spiritual blessings, such as forgiveness, faith, the gift of the Spirit. However, when we don't know precisely what

God wants for us (for example, physical blessings such as health, work, happy families), we say: 'Father, give us these things if it is your will'.

THE LORD'S PRAYER We learn much about prayer from Jesus' example and teaching. The gospels frequently report that Jesus spent time in prayer (eg Matthew 14:23; and especially his prayer for his disciples [John 17] and his prayers in Gethsemane and on the cross).

The Lord's Prayer teaches us how to pray. For example, we pray as children talking to a loving Father. We get our priorities right: first, things about God ('Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done . . .'), then things about us ('Give us this day . . .') etc). We say 'our', 'we' and 'us' because we are praying not just for ourselves, but also for others.

The Lord's Prayer is like the framework for our prayers. We fill in the details which might be different each time we pray.

FOR REFLECTION AND/OR DISCUSSION

1. What questions do the *Background Notes* raise for you? What questions do you think your students will have on the topic of Christian prayer?
2. Why is this an important topic to teach to your students? What implications might the topic have for the life of your school?
3.
 - a) Does prayer change us or change God or both?
 - b) Why do some Christians pray to the saints?
 - c) Does God answer the prayers of non-Christians?
4. What is the difference between Christian prayer and non-Christian prayer? between Christian prayer and New Age-style meditation?
5. Is it appropriate to speak about 'the power of prayer'? Does the 'power' lie in the prayer or in the one who answers prayer?

FOR FURTHER READING

Small Catechism, Large Catechism The Lord's Prayer

Teaching Luther's Catechism: The Lord's Prayer.
H Girgensohn, Muhlenberg Press, 1959

'Does prayer work?' *Good Question* : p 106 ed B Schwarz, 1995 Openbook

God for Us pp 44–46 D Strelan, 1988 Openbook

BAND D STUDENTS

DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

Not all students profess faith, and yet this is a time in their lives when they are seeking meaning and purpose for their lives. Students often express a desire to take a personal stance and commit themselves to a greater cause.

Students are keenly interested in their self-development, searching for a sense of identity and personal direction.

Students have unpredictable emotional responses. They can feel insecure and confused, in need of love and acceptance. They are capable of feeling a strong sense of guilt.

Friendship and relationships are an important focus for students.

Students are anxious about what their peers will think of them. Students' behaviour can be deceptive and cover up a yearning for a spiritual life.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING



Present faith in God as a journey that may not have a distinct beginning or neat stages.
 Present prayer as an activity that most people engage in at some time —whoever and whatever they believe in.
 Give students choice and the freedom to become involved in the more personal activities in their own time. Accept the fact that some students will not join in.
 Give students personal challenges, such as praying daily, keeping a spiritual journal.
 Work with the school chaplain to provide opportunities outside of the classroom situation for students to plan and participate in prayer experiences.



Provide opportunities for personal reflection and imaginative and meditative activities.
 Base teaching about prayer on the gospel assurance that all people are important to God and that they can therefore seek help and direction from God.



Emphasise that prayer is based on the promises of God as recorded in the Bible: the promise to listen and to answer prayer. Present God as the one who provides for all needs. Explore the involvement of each person of the Trinity in prayer.
 Introduce students to prayers of confession and emphasise God's forgiveness.
 Avoid giving students simplistic answers to their questions about prayer.



Present prayer in the context of a positive relationship with God.



Develop a classroom atmosphere which allows students to take risks and be honest with one another. Do not allow put-downs. Teach students how to own and ground their statements, so that evaluation of their comments can be aimed at the argument rather than at personal convictions.
 Give students choice and opportunities to respond to work individually and privately, eg by keeping a journal.

NOTES