

Prayer

Even children in the church know that prayer is talking to God. It's simple. Yet as simple as prayer is, many of us struggle to incorporate prayer into daily life.

- Have you ever struggled to make prayer a part of your daily life?
- Why do you think making prayer a regular practice is a struggle for many Christians?
Are there ways in which you have successfully incorporated prayer into your daily life?

Why Should We Pray

God Commands Us to Pray

Oh, give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! - Psalm 105:1

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

- What can we learn from the fact that God has commanded us to pray?

God Invites Us to Pray

"Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." - John 16:24

"And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me." - Psalms 50:15

It's truly amazing that the Almighty God invites us to call upon Him in prayer AND promises to hear our prayers. Jesus, as our Great High Priest, ensures that our prayers are heard and answered.

- When you pray, do are you thinking about who God is and what He is capable of doing?
- Why do you think God invites us to pray?

Prayer is Powerful

We need to know this: all our shelter and protection rest in prayer alone. For we are far too weak to deal with the devil and all his power and followers who set themselves against us. They might easily crush us under their feet. Therefore, we must consider and take up those weapons with which Christians must be armed in order to stand against the devil (2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:11). For what do you imagine has done such great things up till now? What has stopped or quelled the counsels, purposes, murder, and riot of our enemies, by which the devil though he would crush us, together with the Gospel? It was the prayer of a few godly people standing in the middle like an iron wall on our side. -Luther's Large Catechism

One of the reasons people neglect prayer is because of the idea that prayer doesn't accomplish anything. But in the Bible, there are myriad examples of God answering prayer in very real and tangible ways.

Read the following passage of how God answered prayer.

After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, "O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the LORD." - 1 Samuel 1:9-11, 20

- Can you think of other times in the Bible when God answered prayer?
- God always answers prayer. He answers with "yes," "no," "later," and "I have something better for you." Can you think of a time in which God answered your prayer?

- When is a time you felt like your prayer was unanswered or unheard by God? How can we be sure God hears all our prayers? When you look back, can you better tell how God answered your prayers?

Types of Prayer

The practice of prayer can happen in many different ways. Here are some ways to pray.

Head Bowed and Kneeling

Bowing your head, closing your eyes, and kneeling can be a great way to pray because it helps you to focus on what you're praying about.

Arrow Prayer

An arrow prayer is simply shooting up a quick prayer to God. This might happen in your head or it might happen out loud, but it is simply bringing something to the Lord very quickly in the course of your day.

Meditative Prayer

Martin Luther teaches this kind of prayer in his letter to Peter the barber. Meditative prayer begins with reading Scripture or from the catechism and then thinking about what you have read.

After you read, ask:

- What does this Bible reading, or catechism section teach me? (Main Theme)
- What does it teach me to be thankful for? (Specific Gospel)
- What does it teach me to confess? (Specific Sin)
- What does it teach me to ask for? (Sanctification)

Let's practice this using the First Commandment: You shall have no other gods.
What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

- What does the First Commandment teach me?
- What does the First Commandment teach me to be thankful for?
- What does the first commandment teach me to confess? In what ways have I failed to keep this?
- For what does the First Commandment teach me to ask?

There are many other ways to pray as well!

- What are some ways you have prayed?
- Thinking about the three ways to pray listed above, how can you incorporate one or all of them into your daily life?

Where to Pray

With apologies to Dr. Seuss, "I will pray here and there. Say! I will pray anywhere!" We can pray anywhere! Thanks be to God He hears us no matter where we are!

- Do you have a place in which you pray?
- What are the benefits of having a quiet place for prayer?
- What are the benefits of praying while you are driving, doing the dishes, on the bus to school, at work, or at school?

Just Do It!

Studying prayer and talking about prayer is good. Actually, praying is even better!

- What steps will you take to incorporate prayer into your life?

Now that we've studied prayer, spend a few minutes together in prayer. How? That's up to you and your group.

Worship

Discuss

- What comes to mind for you when you hear the word "worship"?
- Is there a part of the Sunday morning service that is a favorite for you?
- Are there any parts of the service that do not really make sense to you?
- Do you have a favorite hymn or song that we use in worship?

Read

The Third Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." - Hebrews 10:24-25

- Clearly the Lord desires His people to gather for worship. But there are times when we don't feel like going. How do you find motivation for coming, even when you don't feel like it?
- Why do you think it is so important for Christians to gather?

"Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.'" - Luke 10:38-42

- Serving the Lord and being served by the Lord are both important and are both part of being a Christian. Which does Jesus say is more important?

What is Worship?

Historically Lutherans have described what happens each Sunday morning, not as worship, but as "The Divine Service." This term is helpful because "worship" describes a one-way action (from us to God), but "Divine Service" is a term that works both ways; from God to us and from us to God.

The [Lutheran Service Book](#) has a helpful introduction that helps us to better understand what happens in the Divine Service.

Our Lord serves us today through His holy Word and Sacraments. Through these means, He comes among us to deliver His forgiveness and salvation, freeing us from our sins and strengthening us for service to one another and to the world. At Holy Baptism, He puts His name upon us, pours His Holy Spirit into our hearts, and rescues us from sin, death, and the devil. Through Holy Absolution, He pronounces His forgiveness again and again. With His holy Word, written in Scripture and preached into our ears, He daily proclaims His abiding love for us through all the joys and sorrows of life in this world. In His Holy Supper, He gives us His own body and blood to eat and to drink as a priceless gift to nourish and strengthen us in body and soul.

The Lord's service calls forth our service—in sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to Him and in loving service to one another. Having been called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we receive His gifts with thankfulness and praise. With psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we joyfully confess all that God has done for us, declaring the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Our son joins with the songs of every saint from age to age, the new song of Christ's holy people, declaring: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing (Rev. 5:12).

Now let's walk through the major parts of the Divine Service. As a group discuss each part and whether we are serving the Lord, the Lord is serving us, or both. Circle the arrow that shows whether the section is from God to us (↓), from us to God (↑) or both (↓↑)

The Invocation



The service begins with these words: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." And the congregation responds, "Amen."

Confession and Absolution



The congregation confesses their sins to the Lord and then hears the gracious word of forgiveness from God through the pastor.

Introit/Psalm or Entrance Hymn ↓ ↑ ↓↑

The Introit, a Psalm, or an Entrance Hymn comes next in the service.

Kyrie ↓ ↑ ↓↑

Kyrie Eleison means "Lord have mercy" and that's exactly what the congregation says in this part of the service.

The Gloria In Excelsis or Hymn of Praise ↓ ↑ ↓↑

The congregation sing praises to God in songs that remind us who God is and what He has done for us.

The Readings ↓ ↑ ↓↑

The Word of God is read as the congregation listens.

Hymn of the Day ↓ ↑ ↓↑

The Hymn of the Day is chosen to reflect what is taught in the Scripture readings and will soon be proclaimed in the sermon.

Sermon ↓ ↑ ↓↑

In the sermon, the Word of God is taught and applied to us.

The Creed ↓ ↑ ↓↑

Whether it be the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, or Athanasian Creed, each one is a summary of what we believe as Christians and each clearly speaks of who God is and what He has done.

Prayer of the Church ↓ ↑ ↓↑

The congregation brings petitions before the Lord.

Offering ↓ ↑ ↓↑

The congregation brings offerings before the Lord to be used for the continued work of the church and care for those in need.

The Sanctus ↓ ↑ ↓↑

Sanctus means "Holy." In this part of the service the congregation sings, "Holy, holy, holy," joining the saints and angels in heaven who are singing "holy, holy, holy" to the Lord as well.

The Lord's Prayer ↓ ↑ ↓↑

The congregation together prays the prayer Jesus taught His disciples.

Agnus Dei ↓ ↑ ↓↑

"Agnus Dei" means "Lamb of God" and in this we ask the Lamb of God to have mercy on us and grant us peace.

Distribution ↓ ↑ ↓↑

The congregation comes forward to receive the body and blood of Jesus.

Post Communion Canticle or Nunc Dimittis ↓ ↑ ↓↑

Having received the body and blood of Jesus, we now sing praises to the God who has served us.

Benediction ↓ ↑ ↓↑

The congregation receives a threefold blessing from God.

Review

- After reviewing the Divine Service, were you surprised at how much of the service was from God to us?
- How can we, as Hebrews instructs us, encourage one another to gather together for worship?
- How might the repetition of many of the parts of the service, week after week, be beneficial for small children as they seek to participate in worship?
- Could there be a danger in simply "going through the motions"? How might this be avoided?
- Do you have a favorite part of the service?

Closing Prayer

Triune God, You invite us to come into Your presence where you feed us, forgive us, and equip us. Help us to grow in the desire to gather as one body so that we may receive the gifts you have for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Bible Reading

Discuss

- What are challenges that make it difficult for you to read the Bible daily?
- Have you, now or in the past, successfully made Bible reading part of your daily routine?
- What blessings are there in daily Bible reading?
- Do you have a book of the Bible that you return to most often? If so, why?

Why Read the Bible?

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." - Hebrews 4:12

- What does this verse from Hebrews teach us about reading the Bible?

"As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!' But he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'" - Luke 11:27-28

- What do these verses from Luke teach us about reading the Bible?
- The women have words of praise for those one who cared for Jesus and fed Him when He was a baby, but Jesus turns it around and says that those who receive the Word of God are the ones who are truly blessed. When we read the Bible are we serving God or is He serving us? Why is that important to remember?

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." - Psalms 119:105

- What does this verse teach us about reading the Bible?
- How does God's Word help us in our daily lives?

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." - 2 Timothy 3:16-17

- What are the uses of God's Word listed here? How does the Bible do these things? How can we apply these uses when reading the Bible?

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." - John 5:39-40

- What do these verses teach us about reading the Bible?
- The Jews to whom Jesus was speaking were very familiar with the Old Testament. What does Jesus say they missed in their reading of it and why is that so important?

But is there time?

The objection raised by many youths and adults alike is this: "But I don't have time!" Is that true though?

According to the survey conducted by Barna, the average 15-23 year-old estimates that he or she spends 2,767 hours a year on screen media while only spending 153 hours a year involved in "Taking in Spiritual Content." Even for a spiritually active person in this demographic the average hours estimated to be spend in "Taking in Spiritual Content" was only 291 hours per year.

Consider and discuss:

- How much time each day do I spend on social media?
- How much time each day do I spend watching television?
- How much time each day do I spend watching videos on YouTube?
- How much time each day do I spend surfing the internet?
- How can I plan to incorporate Bible reading and prayer into my daily routine?

Bible Reading Plans

Reading through the Bible in a year (or two)

This is pretty self-explanatory. You set out to read the entire Bible in a year or two. There is a plan for this at the beginning of [The Lutheran Study Bible](#) and CPH also has a two-year plan that you can find in the [Today's Light Devotional Bible](#). But you can also find loads of free plans online with a simple search.

Read a Chapter from the Old Testament, a Psalm, a Proverb, and the New Testament

Again, this is pretty self-explanatory. You can also choose to just do one or two of these; for instance, just the Old Testament and New Testament.

The Daily Lectionary

In the hymnal (p. 299) there is a daily lectionary that includes a reading from the Old Testament and New Testament for each day. The daily lectionary doesn't take you through the entire Bible, but through the major events and major themes. This is the same plan found in [The Treasury of Daily Prayer](#).

Study a Book of the Bible in Depth

Here is one more approach. The goal of this is not really to read through the entire Bible, but the more fully understand what you have read.

1. Pick a book of the Bible to study.

2. Listen to a recording of the entire book several times. You can download an app or listen online to several different translations being read. Why listen?

- "Faith comes by hearing" and Scripture is meant to be heard.
- Many of the books of the Bible (especially in the New Testament) were meant to be heard all at once.
- By listening to the whole book, you begin to get a sense for the major themes in the book and are not as distracted by the meaning of a given word or that phrase. You see the forest, not just the trees.

Note: The listening approach can also be used for the other Bible plans! Listening is a great way to be in the Word!

3. Read the entire book in one sitting. Do this at least twice before moving on to the next step. If you've chosen a very large book, you can break it up a bit, but the more of the book you can read in one sitting the better. As you read through, lightly pencil in a question mark next to any words or phrases that you don't really understand.

4. Now, read the book chapter by chapter, adding the use of cross reference verses. Cross reference verses are listed in the middle of many Bibles and if your Bible doesn't have such a cross reference, you can easily get a Bible that does.

As you read through the book again,

- look up one cross reference verse for each verse. Lightly mark the cross references you've looked up so that next time you read through the book you can look up the next cross references.
- circle any cross references that you found particularly helpful or that helped to answer any questions you had.
- read through the book chapter by chapter, then start again and read through it checking the next set of cross reference verses until you've used checked all of the cross references.
- Underline any phrases, verses, or sentences that seem to sum up the main point being made.
- If you're really dedicated, then put those phrases, verses, or sentences to memory.

Focused reading of a smaller number of verses.

Read through a book of the Bible by taking about 10-15 verses a day and really contemplating them and praying through them.

Review

- What are the pros and cons to the above approaches?
- Which of the approaches above seem like the best fit for you?
- Are there other approaches that you have used that have been helpful?
- Might one a certain approach be better at one time in your life and another approach be better at another time? Why or why not?
- How can we encourage one another to be in the Word?

For Further Discussion

- Have you ever done Bible Journaling (writing down your thoughts, reflections, prayers, etc. after doing the readings)? If so, was it helpful? In what way?
- Have you ever felt guilty about missing a day or reading?
- Might there be a danger in turning the reading of God's Word into a point of pride? How can we keep that from happening?
- What can you do when you don't understand a verse or section?
- Where do you do your Bible reading? Why?
- When do you do your Bible reading? Why?

Closing Prayer

Lord God, you speak to us through Your Word. What a blessing it is that in Your Word we can hear the voice of our Good Shepherd!

Service

Discuss

- What comes to mind for you when you hear the word "service?"
- Do you have anyone who comes to mind when you think of service?
- Have you ever thought of "service" as being a spiritual thing?

Read

The Second Article and Meaning

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

What does this mean?

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.

This is most certainly true.

- Jesus has saved us. He has redeemed us! Now what? For what purposes have we been redeemed according to Luther's explanation of the Second Article?
- How is it that we can serve Jesus?

"As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." - 1 Peter 2:4-5

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." - 1 Peter 2:9-10

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." - Romans 12:1-2

- Here, God's people are referred to as a "royal priesthood." What services did the priests do in the Old Testament?
- What do you think Peter means by "spiritual sacrifices?"
- What do you think it means to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice?"

"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." - John 13:1-17

- What does it look like to "wash the feet" of others?
- Are there any acts of service that should be considered to be beneath us as Christians?
- Does Jesus set an upper age limit or lower age limit for those who are called to serve others in love? In other words, can we say, "I'll serve, but when I get older" or "I've already served and now it's time for younger people to take over."
- What are some benefits when young and old serve side by side?

Acts of Service in the Bible

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world." - James 1:27

- Does the Bible relegate the visitation of orphans and widows to pastors and elders only?
- How can we, in our day, "visit" those who are in need in our congregation? In our community?

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." - 1 Peter 4:10-11

- Who are we to serve according to these verses?
- Who receives glory when we serve others?

"Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak." - Ephesians 6:18-20

- Is prayer a real way to serve others?
- Have you ever asked a brother or sister in Christ to pray for you? Why or why not?
- Have you ever had someone tell you that you are praying for them? How did it feel to know that?

Discuss

- "My church has asked me to serve in a certain way that fills a genuine need. I am quite capable of doing what the church has asked me to do, but it's not my favorite thing. There are other things I'd rather do, but they aren't what the church needs right now. What should I do?"
- What ways to serve others exist in your church? How can young people help in this? How can older members help?
- Are there needs in the church (ministry, human care, etc.) that the church has a difficult time finding people to help with? Why are these areas difficult to fill if every Christian is called to serve?
- In what ways do you serve others?
- In what ways might you be able to serve others in the church?