5. Prayer

Learning Objectives

- Understanding what prayer is.
- Discover the reasons why we pray.
- Tips for how to pray.

Welcome [10 mins]

Welcome the group to this session, recap the last session and review how the challenge went.

The challenge was to think and pray about an idea or project you could do this year that would contribute to the Great Commission and matches up with the centre of those three circles (Competency, Passions and Needs).

🏸 **Bonus Game: [10 mins]**
Select a game that will best suit your group and setting. Consider games this week that fit with the theme of asking and listening.

> ***Pray for the session***

Introduction [10 mins]

Icebreaker:

In small groups or with everyone:

Ask: "If you could ask God one question and definitely get the answer, what would it be?"

Today we are going to be looking at one of the most misunderstood and exciting parts of the Christian life: Prayer.

Ask: What comes to mind when we talk about "prayer"?

Have them discuss this in pairs and get every pair to feedback at least one reflection.

📽️ **Video: "24/7 Prayer Why Pray"**
Watch this video together
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVHUx_EJnUs

Often prayer is seen as a strange or difficult task for super-spiritual old people at the back of church. However, this really is not the case.

Prayer is simple: Prayer is communicating and connecting with God. Being a Christian is about living in a relationship with God, and prayer is how we go deeper in that relationship, by talking and spending time with him.

Jesus said that we don't need to use special or clever words. We can talk to God like we would a parent or a friend.

📖 **Matthew 6:7 says**
“*When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again.”*

Today we are going to look at spending time with God on your own. In the next session, we will focus more on hearing God’s voice when praying for others.

Bible Focus [25 mins]

Encourage different members of the group to find the Bible verses mentioned below and read them out if they are able.

We can learn about prayer through what Jesus and his followers did and said about prayer.

📖 **Read Luke 5:16**

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

Jesus prayed a lot. Even though he was the Saviour, he still prioritised spending time with God.

📖 **Luke 11:1-4**

"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.”

He said to them, “When you pray, say:
“‘Father,[a]
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come.[b]
Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.[c]
And lead us not into temptation.[d]’”

Jesus taught the disciples how to pray.

You’ll probably know this as “The Lord’s prayer”. Whilst it is a great prayer to pray word-for-word, Jesus didn’t intend us to pray those exact words every time we pray; it is a model for how to pray.

For example:

- He starts by speaking to God personally as his Dad.
- He then praises God.
- He prays for God’s plan to happen on Earth.
- He prays for provision for all that we’ll need (not all that we want though!)
- Then asks for forgiveness for themselves.
- Forgives others
- Finally, a prayer of protection from temptation

So, we can use this model too and use our own words when we pray.

📖 **Read: Colossians 2:2-4**

"My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments."

Not only did Jesus model a life of prayer, but the Apostles (the early Church leaders) prayed, prioritised prayer and commanded other Christians to pray.

If you read through the New Testament, or look at great Christian leaders across the world over the past 2,000 years, one thing they all hold in common is that they prayed… a lot.

Often, we only think of prayer as asking God for something. However, prayer is about more than just giving God a shopping list.

Would you come back tomorrow if he gave you everything you wanted today? God wants to be in relationship with us. Imagine a child who only came to talk to their Dad when they wanted something but never spent any quality time with him – that's not much of a relationship. God wants to hang out with you, tell you things, laugh with you and spend quality time with you because he loves you.

📖 **Read Matthew 6:6-8**

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. 8 Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

> *“He knows what you need before you ask it.”*

ASK – If God already knows what we need, why do you think he tells us to pray for it?

Because prayer is primarily about intimacy, not asking for things, God asks us to share what’s on our hearts and minds with him.

Prayer is also about listening and being responsive in our heart and then living this out through our actions.

ASK – Have you ever just tried to sit and spend time with God without asking him for anything?

🙏 **Activity**

God wants us to ask him for the things we need. He also wants to speak to us about the things we should do. But God also wants us to slow down at times, and just *be* with God.

There is a story in Luke 10 where Jesus is at the house of two sisters called Mary and Martha. Whilst Martha was busy in the kitchen, Mary just sat at Jesus' feet listening to him. Martha got frustrated, but Jesus told her that Mary had chosen to do one of the most important things she could: spending time with Him and not rushing around being busy.

So, we're going to practice just spending time with Jesus for a couple of minutes.

- Encourage young people to find somewhere comfortable and free from distractions.
- Put some quiet instrumental worship music on in the background.
- Ask the young people to close their eyes and picture themselves in a safe place. Then ask them to imagine that Jesus is with them. Tell them not to ask him anything, just rest in God's presence and listen.
- Do this for 2-3 minutes.

Get feedback:

How did it feel just being still?

Did you feel the need to *Do or Say* something?

Did anyone feel God say anything to them that they'd like to share?

Of course, God does also want us to come to him for help and to give us good gifts.

📖 **Read:**

James 5:17
"Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years."

Acts 4:31
"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly."

Prayer changes things! God still answers, changes situations, heals the sick and provides for those in need. Prayer works, so why wouldn't you want to speak to God?

But prayer also changes us. The more time you spend with someone, the more you start to act and maybe even sound like that person. As we spend time with God, we can find we start changing, and some of our prayers may even get answered through us.

You can give a personal example here of when you have become the answer to your prayers.

Richard Foster has written some of the most popular books about prayer and spiritual disciplines in the last 100 years. He said this:

> *“To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic in our lives.”*

Praying to God is not meant to be a duty, but a joy and a privilege. If we see prayer as a chore, it can defeat the point of prayer altogether. Duty and discipline are not great motivators. Passion and love are!

Share with person next to you; what person you love spending time with the most?

Share who that is in your life (perhaps your spouse or best friend).

I don’t need to be persuaded to spend time with that person; in fact, I look forward to spending time with them.

Prayer should not be like seeing that relative that you know you should visit but don’t enjoy being with. Prayer should be more like spending time seeing your favourite person in the world.

🙏 **Activity: [2 minutes]**

Invite young people to close their eyes.

SAY
- Imagine a door closed in front of you that you could reach out and walk through.

- Behind that door is the person who loves you most in the world.

- Who knows everything about you.

- He wrote down every funny thing you’ve ever done and laughed at every one of your jokes.

- Every time something good happened in your life, he invited his friends over and had a party.

- Also, He’s the most creative person in the universe, the richest and most powerful, who knows everything and can do anything…

PAUSE for 30 seconds.

I don’t know about you, but I want to hang out with Him!

YP can open their eyes.

When we pray, we open that door and we are able to spend time with God.

Like any good friendship or relationship, you have to put effort into growing the relationship and there has to be some discipline to maintain it and keep it healthy. In a busy world full of distractions, you have to plan to make time for each other, even if you’re madly in love or the best of friends.

Like a sport you love or learning an instrument, you need to practice and train so you can keep doing it and improve.

📌 **TOP TIPS**

Here are some ways that you could grow in your prayer with God…

1. Keep a journal – try writing down or drawing your prayers and note down anything God says or when he answers prayer. You can use the “Echo” prayer app to do this if you find your phone easier to use.

2. Try praying the Bible If you don’t know what to pray, try copying the prayers the disciples wrote down. The Psalms have also been used as prayers for thousands of years.
See appendix for Biblical prayers sheet.

3. Use the Lord’s prayer as a guide as we did earlier in the session.

4. Try setting an alarm to pray at the same time every day.

5. Go for a prayer walk – if you get distracted at home, going for a walk can be a great way to get alone with God.

6. Book in prayer times in your day/week like you would do with a meeting with a friend. You wouldn’t skip out on your friend without rescheduling, do the same with Jesus.

7. Develop a rhythm of life that is consistent and sustainable. There’s no point setting yourself a target of two hours of prayer a day at first when it will be very difficult to keep. The key is to be consistent. Start by doing a little more than you are doing now but do it regularly. E.g. Try praying 10 minutes at the start of every day and for one extended time of 30 mins once a week.

8. Write a prayer list – This helps us to be consistent and persist in prayer until we see God answer.

9. Use helpful apps – E.g. Lectio 365, Abide or Soultime

Testimony: [5 mins]

Get a couple of the leaders to share a story of when God answered a prayer clearly in their life. Try and choose two contrasting stories, perhaps one immediate answer prayer such as a prayer for healing or prophecy and then one that wasn’t answered for a long time.

God always answers prayer. It just may not be in the way we want or expect. Sometimes it’s an immediate yes, sometimes he says not yet, and sometimes he just says no. Even “no” is an answer to prayer, and we can remember that, as it said in Matthew 6, he knows what we really need better than we do.

Application: [20 mins]

Put some quiet music on in the background and practice praying and spending time with God using the following activities.

Choose a couple of the prayer activities below depending on how much time you have left in your session, or you can pick one and spend longer on that one.

🙏 **Bonus activity**
Try doing an additional activity with any remaining time.

At the end of the session draw the group back together and get some feedback.

ASK -

What did you find helpful or difficult?

How did it feel not simply asking God for a list of things but to spend time with him?

Is there anything you would want to try again?

🙏 **Activity: ACTS Prayers [10 minutes]**

Spend 2 minutes on each section/letter.

Adoration – Spend time praising God
Confession – Saying sorry to God
Thanksgiving – Giving thanks
Supplication (Asking) - Ask God about what's on your heart

If you have space, we recommend using four prayer stations around the room. See https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/search/resources/ for ideas

🙏 **Activity: The Lord's Prayer**

See 24//7 "The Lord's Prayer 60-minute guide" - Reduce the timings for each section appropriately
or
Try spending a couple of minutes on each of the following

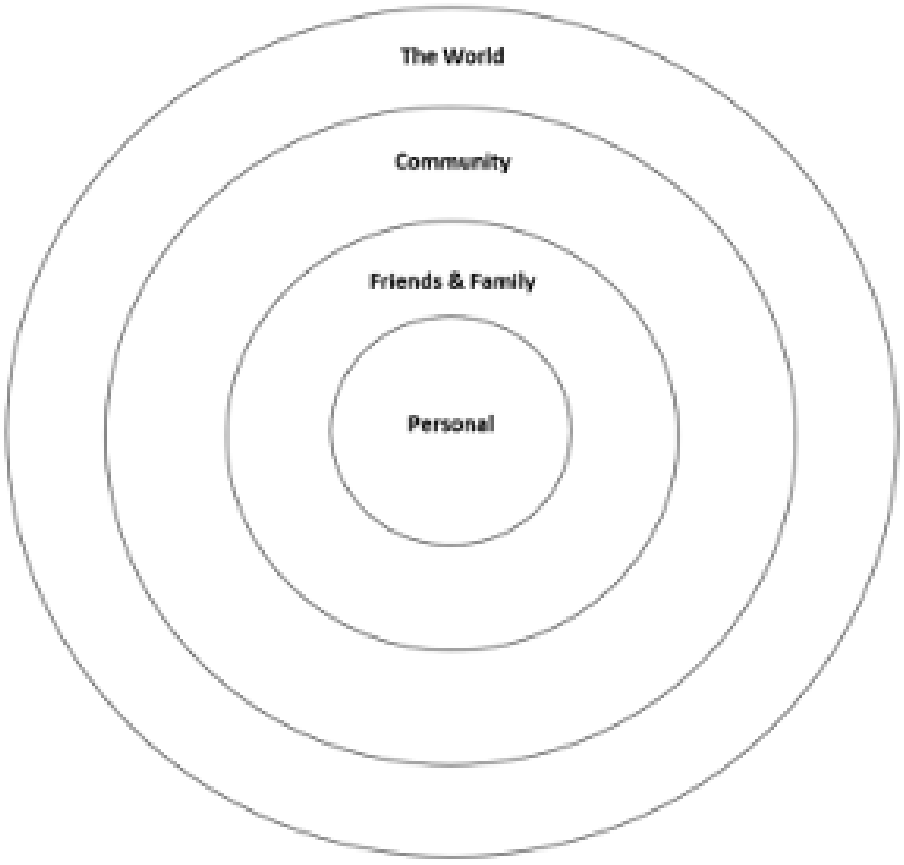
- **"Our Father"** - Talk to God personally as your Dad - what do you want to say?
- **"Holy is your name"** - Praise God – tell him how amazing he is and what you think of him
- **"Your Kingdom come"** - Prays for God's plan to happen on Earth. - What do you think God wants to see changed in the world?
- **"Our daily bread"** - Pray for provision of all that you'll need and ask God for freedom from desiring thing that you might want but not need.
- **"Seek forgiveness"** – Confess anything you have done or thought, which is wrong recently.
- **"Forgive others" -** take a moment to forgive and bless anyone that has hurt or offended you.
- **"Lead us away from temptation"** - Finally, ask God to help you avoid temptation. You can name specific one's that you think you might struggle with.

🙏 **Activity: Write a Prayer List**

You could use the concentric circles diagram below as a model and include the following. It may be helpful to draw the diagram on a whiteboard or Flipchart paper.

- Things you want God to do in your life
- Friends/family to pray for
- Your community, school
- World issues

An easy way to do this is with the “Inner Room” App by 24/7, you can create lists, set reminders, and it can add suggestions of things to pray for.



Conclusion & Challenge [2 mins]

Prayer is about communicating and connecting with God. It is about so much more than just bringing a list of requests to him. Prayer is the door to knowing him better and seeing transformation in our own lives. The exciting thing is, the more we pray, the more amazing answers we can expect.

Challenge:

The challenge for this session is to spend a regular time with God every day until our next session. For example, get up 10 minutes early, set an alarm at the same time each day or make it the last thing you do before going to bed. It could just be a few minutes but the challenge is try completing your new habit every day.

> ***Pray to end the session***