

Lesson 1

What Is Prayer?

Bible Lesson: Luke 18:9-14

Memory Verse: Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Enrichment Memory Verse: With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. *Ephesians 6:18*

Catechism Student Memory Work:

What is prayer? Prayer is the child-like communion of our hearts with God, in which we tell Him all our needs, and earnestly seek some gift from Him. (#265)

Catechism Reference for Teacher:

But can all pray in this manner? No, not the impenitent; their hearts are not right with God, and they do not seek Him earnestly. (#267)

See also *Luther's Large Catechism* p.78-81.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Prepare to Teach

- ▶ that prayer is the cry of the helpless and needy
- ▶ that prayer is heart-to-heart talk with our Heavenly Father

Prepare Materials

- ▶ various pictures of people praying
- ▶ wall poster of *The Lord's Prayer*
- ▶ praying hands nametags (pattern in Teacher Manual)
- ▶ colored construction paper for nametags
- ▶ pretzels or other salty snack
- ▶ praying hands picture (pattern in Teacher Manual)

Introduction

The lesson theme for today asks the question, "What is prayer?" For a third grade student, the concept of prayer may be one that he or she does not fully understand. Hopefully, your students have had the opportunity to hear others pray, such as parents, pastors, and Sunday school teachers. Children may be in the habit of saying table grace at home or may join in praying the Lord's Prayer during worship services. However, the idea that they can talk to God personally may be a new idea for some of the students. Praying may be something that has always been done for them by someone else. You have the opportunity this year to help these young boys and girls gain the confidence that prayer is "the child-like communion of our hearts with God in which we tell Him all our needs and earnestly seek some gift from Him"¹

Prayer Preparation

1. Talk to God in a child-like way about your personal needs.
2. Thank the Lord for each of the children He has placed in your class this year, and ask Him to bless these children.
3. Spend some time in heart-to-heart conversation with the Lord.

Bible Study

To answer the question “What is prayer?” we will look at a parable that demonstrates what prayer is and what prayer is not.

There are two characters in the parable in Luke 18:9-14: the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer. The Pharisees were the “religious purists” of Jesus’ day. Their main concern was the keeping of the Jewish law. These men had zeal to be more holy than the law demanded. Evidence of this is seen in the statement of the Pharisee in Luke 18:12: “I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.” The Jewish people were required to fast (go without food) only on the annual Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16:29, 23:27-32), the day when the High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people. While the High Priest was in the temple before God making atonement for their sins, the people were to deny themselves food as an act of humility before God. The Pharisees had taken this act of humility and made it into a practice that they took religious pride in. They expected that God would honor them for going above and beyond the call of duty in their devotion to Him. But devotion apart from humbleness of the heart is self-righteousness. God does not honor self-righteousness; He despises it. Self-righteousness is a rejection of Christ’s righteousness.

The other character in the parable is a tax-gatherer. Zaccheus, the wee little man whom Jesus met with in Luke 19:1-10, is the most famous of the tax-gatherers that we meet in Scripture. The tax-gatherers were people who collected taxes on behalf of the Roman government. They were despised because they were notorious for collecting more tax money than they were required to and then keeping the profits for themselves. As this man came into the temple, we see immediately a posture of humility. Luke 18:13 tells that the tax-gatherer stood at a distance, that he “was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven,” and that he “was beating his breast” as he called out to God saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!”

When Jesus spoke to the crowd at the conclusion of the parable, He stated, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:14). Jesus wanted us to know that He loves to hear and respond to the cries of the helpless and needy.

It is a blessing to know that Jesus hears us when we cry out to Him for mercy. Your special privilege this week is to help your students see that they can call out to Jesus for help in any and every time of need in their lives.

¹ *Luther’s Small Catechism Explained*, consisting of *Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism 1529* and *Luther’s Small Catechism Explained in Questions and Answers* by H. U. Sverdrup (The Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 10th Reprinting, 1995), 83.

BEGINNING YOUR CLASS HOUR

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Gather various pictures of people praying, and put these up on your classroom wall or bulletin board before your first class session begins. Also include an illustrated wall poster of *The Lord’s Prayer* (available from AFLC Parish Education).

Warmly greet the children as they enter the classroom. **INTRODUCE** yourself, and use the time before class to visit with students and learn something about each one. You may also

want to **WRITE** your name on the chalkboard to help students become familiar with it.

It would be helpful to have nametags for the first day of class. **MAKE** special nametags from construction paper in the shape of praying hands to introduce the theme for this year (pattern in Teacher Manual). As you give out the nametags, **ASK** the students if they can tell you the shape of the nametags. Ask them if they know what prayer is. **EXPLAIN** that Jesus teaches us about prayer in the Bible.

This year we are going to learn about prayer. We will learn answers to questions like:

*What is prayer?
Who can pray?
Why should we pray?
When can we pray?
Does God answer prayer?*

SAY: We will also learn a very special prayer that is sometimes called “the perfect prayer” because it is the prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray. It is called *The Lord’s Prayer*. Direct the students’ attention to the poster on the wall and invite them to **READ** the Lord’s Prayer together.

Take time to pray as you begin this study on prayer and the Lord’s Prayer. Thank God for your Sunday school class. Thank Him for giving us the Bible to teach us about Jesus. Thank Him for each student, mentioning them by name. Pray that God would prepare our hearts to hear His Word and that He would teach us to pray.

Hymns and Songs

INTRODUCE the theme hymn for this quarter, “Our Father, Throned in Heaven Above” from the Ambassador Hymnal p.220. Have the students look at the hymn printed on the back of their student books or follow along in a hymnal, reading the text together. **ASK** if any of the phrases sound familiar (they should recognize “Thy kingdom come” and “Give us this day”). **EXPLAIN** that this song has three stanzas about the Lord’s Prayer. So as we learn each stanza, we will be learning to sing the Lord’s Prayer.

HUM the melody or play it on an instrument so that the students may start to learn it. Ask the students to hum along with you. Students may recognize this famous tune, which is called the “Tallis’ Canon” (written by Thomas Tallis).

Enrichment hymns and songs:

“Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire” AH p.195
“Lord, Teach Us How to Pray Aright” AH p.179
“God, Our Father, Hear Your Children” SGL p.67

“Always Take Time to Pray” SSF p.57

TEACHING TODAY’S BIBLE LESSON

Introduce the Lesson

Offer pretzels or another salty snack to your students. Let them eat as many as they would like, but do not offer them water. Then drink a glass of water yourself. Your students will probably ask for some water too. **EXPLAIN** that salt makes us thirsty. When we are thirsty, we need water. This is a physical need. **ASK:** What other things does our physical body need? (food, clothing, shelter)

When we need something, we ask for help. Sometimes we may ask a parent or grandparent, aunt or uncle, or a friend. Today we are going to learn about Someone else who is concerned about our needs.

Learn the New Words

Take time each week to define and discuss the new words before going through the lesson.

This will help students to better understand the lesson as you are reading together.

prayer heart-to-heart talk with our Heavenly Father

Pharisee a religious leader of the Jews who strictly observed both the written and oral law and often thought he was better than other people

publican a tax collector, often looked down upon and hated by the common people

ashamed humiliated, feeling guilty

pleaded begged

fasted went without food or drink

boasted bragged, expressed pride in oneself

Roman relating to the city of Rome

taxes money required to be paid to the government

merciful compassionate and forgiving
sinner one whose heart is evil and who does wrong things

repent to be sorry for our sin, to turn away from evil and turn to God

Encourage students to look for the new words in their lessons each week, which are in italics in the student book. They may want to circle or highlight them as you read the lesson together.

Read the Lesson

Take time each week to first read the Bible text together as a class (Luke 18:9-14). Then read the lesson from the student book, taking turns reading each paragraph.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Imagine you've been playing outside all morning. Your breakfast was only a slice of toast as you ran out the door. By mid-morning, your stomach is rumbling, and you are very hungry. You can't wait for lunch. Who would you ask for something to eat? Most likely you would ask your mother or father. They are the people who are most concerned about your needs. They would be happy to give you the food that you need.

Do you know who else is concerned about your needs? Your Heavenly Father. He is even more concerned about you than your mother and father! He wants you to come to Him with every need, and He is very happy to give you what you need.

In our lessons this year, we will be learning about *prayer*. Do you know what prayer is? Prayer is heart-to-heart talk with our Heavenly Father. Prayer simply means to talk with God about everything that concerns us. Prayer means to call upon God in every need.

In Luke 18, two men went into the temple to pray. One of these men was a *Pharisee*. He thought he was better than other people. He *boasted* to God about the good things he had done, but that was not prayer. He bragged that

he *fasted* twice a week and gave to God one-tenth of everything he earned. That was not prayer either. The Pharisee was not truly praying. He did not come to the temple because He needed God. He came to brag about himself. Remember, to pray means to call upon God in our need.

The other man in our story was a *publican* or a tax-gatherer. His job was to collect *Roman taxes*. Tax-gatherers were very greedy and took extra money from people to keep for themselves. But this publican knew he was a *sinner*. He knew he had done wrong and that he needed God to help him. He didn't brag about himself. He was so *ashamed* of his sin, he couldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven. In his great need, he *pleaded* with God to save him, "God, be *merciful* to me, the sinner!" This man truly understood what it means to pray. He went to God with his great need and called upon God to help. God heard his prayer and forgave him.

It is not natural for us to pray and admit to God that we need help. There are many things that we are able to do. Most of us can run and walk. Most of us can help Mom with the dishes. Most of us can bat a ball. We like to think that we are able to do these things all by ourselves.

But the things of God are things that we are not able to do. By ourselves, we are not able to believe in God, we are not able to *repent* of our sin, and we are not even able to pray. We may think that we are able. By nature, we are like the Pharisee and brag about what we think we are able to do. But we cannot believe, repent, or pray unless God teaches us and helps us. We are helpless and need God.

When God shows us our need, then we will come to Him in prayer. We will talk to God as we talk to our mother or father about our needs. We will tell God how much we need Him to help us. God teaches us to pray, and He hears us each time we come to Him in prayer.

Reinforce the Lesson

Use the questions in this section each week to guide students in reviewing important points of the lesson.

What does prayer mean? It means to talk with God about everything that concerns us and to call upon Him in our need. When God shows us our need, then we will come to Him to pray. Then we will talk to God as we talk to our mother or father about our needs. We will tell God how much we need Him to help us.

Besides your parents, who is concerned with every need you have? God is! He loves us more than anyone else.

Who were the two men that came to the temple? A Pharisee and a publican.

Did both men pray to God? No, the Pharisee came to brag about himself, not because he needed God.

Tell about the prayer of the publican. He knew He was a sinner and that He had done wrong things. He prayed, "God, be merciful to

me, the sinner." The Bible says he was not even willing to lift up his eyes to heaven, and he beat his chest. He knew he was unworthy of God's mercy and that He needed God to help Him. This was totally opposite from the attitude and actions of the Pharisee.

Can you remember some of the things from our lesson that we are not able to do by ourselves? to believe in God, to repent of our sin, to pray to God

God teaches us to pray, and He hears us each time we come to Him in prayer. Let's ask God quietly for His help. We can pray with the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Encourage students to bow their heads and close their eyes. Allow time for silent prayer.

APPLYING THE BIBLE LESSON

Teach the Memory Verse

Read the verse together. Then use the Seeker and Sayer game to learn and review the memory verse. One child will be the seeker. Randomly give several other children one word to say from the verse. As they each repeat their word, the seeker's job is to line up the children in the correct order. When he or she is finished, the sayers will say the verse. If time permits, allow other children to have a turn at being the seeker. You may want to divide the verse into two sections at first and then combine altogether.

*Rejoice always; pray without ceasing;
in everything give thanks;
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

You may want to sing "Rejoice in the Lord Always" (SGL p.43) to help reinforce the memory verse.

The goal in the following weeks will be for students to memorize the Bible verse and catechism before the next class session. This will be their weekly assignment and will help students to gain more from their lessons in class each week. Some students may not be

used to memorizing, but it is important to encourage them to hide God's Word in their hearts. The creative ideas for teaching the memory verses will then serve as a review for most students but will also help others to learn the verses. The teacher should also memorize the Bible verses and catechism to serve as a model for the students. You may want to give a reward at the end of the quarter to those who have memorized all the memory verses, enrichment verses, and catechism.

Study the Catechism

What is prayer? Prayer is the child-like communion of our hearts with God, in which we tell Him all our needs, and earnestly seek some gift from Him. (#265)

Make sure each student has a catechism, and help them locate the Lord's Prayer section of the catechism and the question of the day. (Note that *Luther's Small Catechism* includes all the petitions and meanings but no extra questions. The hardcover edition of *Luther's Small Catechism Explained* contains other questions and answers about prayer such as those included in Lessons 1-6. Also note the additional catechism references listed in the

introductory section of each lesson that would be helpful reading in preparation for teaching. Reference information on *Luther's Large Catechism* is included on the Resource List.)

EXPLAIN that we can talk to God anytime of day or night because God never sleeps. He is always listening for our prayers and is happy to have us come to Him with our needs. He wants us to “pray without ceasing.” We can pray out loud or in the quietness of our hearts. God will still hear us and answer our prayers.

Give each student a copy of the picture of praying hands (pattern in Teacher Manual). Have them **WRITE** “Pray without ceasing” across the hands and then **COLOR** the picture. Encourage them to put the picture up in their rooms at home as a reminder to talk with God and bring their needs to Him throughout each day.

Do the Activities Together

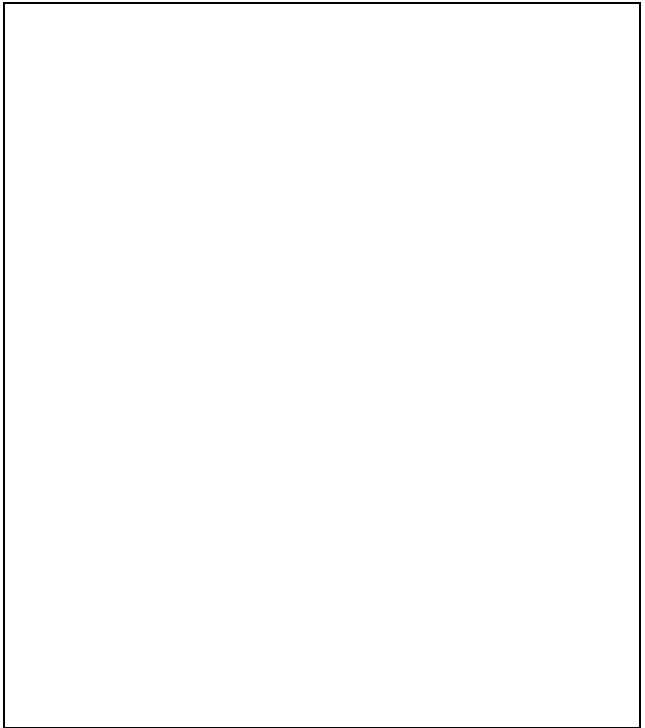
The activity worksheets for this section are printed in the student books.

ACTIVITY 1

Read and answer the questions. Note in the parable that the Pharisee was praying “to himself.” Our prayers are directed to the Holy God. The Pharisee thought he had no needs and bragged about his good deeds, “praying” to himself so that others would see.

ANSWERS:

Pharisee, publican
1-C, 2-D, 3-A, 4-B, 5-E, 6-B



APPLY:

1. All have sinned and fall short of God's glory.
2. Jesus lovingly told this parable that people might see how they are like the Pharisee. He wanted them to see the sinful attitude of their hearts and to humble themselves before God and repent of their sin.

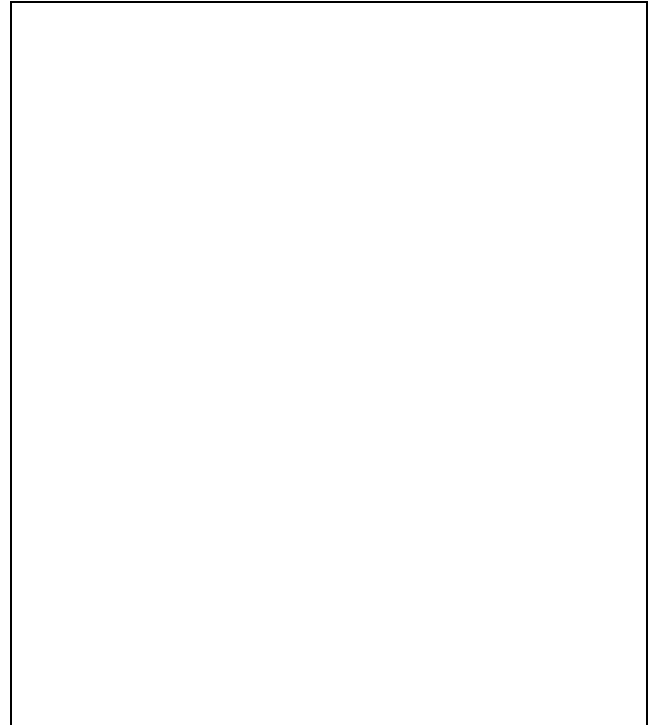
14. sinner

REMINDE students of Romans 3:23 that says all have sinned. We all need to recognize our sin and come to Jesus asking for forgiveness.

ACTIVITY 2

GUIDE the students in looking up each Bible verse to find the answers to the crossword puzzle. Answers are from the NASB version of the Bible.

- | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|------------------|
| ANSWERS: | ACROSS | DOWN |
| | 1. Prayer | 2. righteousness |
| | 3. God is holy | 5. repent |
| | 4. trusted | 6. justified |
| | 7. humble | 8. exalted |
| | 10. all | 9. call |
| | 11. merciful | 11. me |
| | 12. eyes | 13. need |



CLOSING YOUR CLASS HOUR

Closing Prayer

Invite students to call upon God with their needs today and pray short sentence prayers. Encourage them to talk with God about everything that concerns them this week and to have a daily heart-to-heart talk with their Heavenly Father.

possibly enrichment verse) and catechism memory work and to be able to tell the main points of the lesson. Sometimes there may also be an additional assignment or project for students to complete at home in preparation for the next class. Students could also be encouraged to read the Bible lesson text for the following week in preparation for the next lesson.

Home Assignment

- ▶ Memory Verse: Psalm 50:15
- ▶ Catechism: *What is prayer?*
- ▶ Enrichment Memory Verse: Matthew 7:7-8
- ▶ Find a prayer written in the Bible for next week. Students may need parents or another adult to help them. Looking in the Psalms would be a good place to start.

Gather the nametags before students leave the classroom so you can use these again next week.

The goal for each week will be for students to be able to recite the memory verse (and

You may want to consider sending the student books home and asking the children to do their lessons prior to class. You will need to decide as a teacher what will work best for your particular class.

Note that in most class sessions, there will not be time to complete ALL the activities that are included in the teacher manual. A variety of activities have been provided to give the teacher different options to choose from that will fit best with a particular class. Extra activity pages that you don't have time for in class can be sent home with the students, who can be encouraged to complete them at home. This will help to reinforce the lesson throughout the week. Encourage them to do the activities with their parents.

The goal is to complete one lesson per class session in order to teach all the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. Be careful not to go too slow so that students miss out on the second and third quarter student books. If only one or two books are covered, the students will have an incomplete study of the Lord's Prayer and will miss out on some important lessons on thankfulness, trials, temptation, and forgiveness. Or if you want to do a more thorough study and take more time with the lessons, consider beginning the third quarter book in the fall of the next year so that students will still be able to complete the study.