

Lesson 7

To Whom Shall We Pray?

Bible Lesson: Matthew 6:5-9

Memory Verse: “But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret.” *Matthew 6:6*

Enrichment Memory Verse: But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. *Jeremiah 10:10a*

Catechism Student Memory Work:

The Introduction: Our Father, who art in heaven.

What does this mean? God thereby tenderly encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father, and that we are truly His children, so that we may boldly and confidently come to Him in prayer, even as beloved children come to their dear father.

Catechism Reference for Teacher:

What is the importance of the words “who art in heaven”? By these words we are reminded of the exalted love and power of our heavenly Father, far above that of any earthly father. (#281)

See also #278, #279, the First Commandment and meaning, #19-37, and *Luther’s Large Catechism* p.81-84.

TEACHER PREPARATION

Prepare to Teach

- ▶ that we can come to the Father with cheerfulness and confidence as children come to their fathers
- ▶ that our Father in heaven will always hear us when we pray and will answer with love

Prepare Materials

- ▶ pictures that show various world religions that do not worship the one true God
- ▶ large stones in a metal pail, dry wood, and a small pail of water
- ▶ reproducible activity page (Elijah)
- ▶ wall poster of *The Lord’s Prayer*
- ▶ reproducible activity page (Susan)
- ▶ dictionary

Introduction

In preparation for this lesson, we should consider question #278 in *Luther’s Small Catechism Explained*. This study question asks, “Why would God have us speak to Him as ‘Our Father’?” The answer to that question reads as follows: “God thereby tenderly encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father, and that we are truly His children, so that we may boldly and confidently come to Him in prayer, even as beloved children come to their father.”¹

Our study of Matthew 6:6-9 will help us to see that as believers in Jesus Christ, we have the special privilege of coming to God with cheerfulness and confidence in the same way that children go to their earthly fathers with all of their joys and heartaches. This study will also help us to see that as children of the Heavenly Father we can be assured that our Father in heaven will always hear us when we pray, and that He will answer us in love.

Prayer Preparation

1. Find a quiet place where you can be alone with God, away from all distractions.
2. Spend some time in “childlike communion” with your Heavenly Father, simply telling Him of the joys and sorrows you may be experiencing today.
3. Ask the Lord to help you be sensitive to those students who may have trouble grasping the concept of God as a “loving” Father. You may have students in your class who do not have a father in their home, or they may not have a “loving” relationship with their father. These students will need extra help in seeing God as a “loving” father. Be prepared to explain to them that though we as sinners often fail to be loving towards others, God is a perfect Father and truly loves us like no earthly father can.

Bible Study

When Jesus said in Matthew 6:6, “But you, when you pray,” He had the expectation that the people He was talking to were people who were in the habit of praying—addressing God with various types of petitions. When Jesus went on in verse 6 to state, “Go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father,” He was not condemning public prayer. Richard Lenski, in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew states, “The contrast is here not with regard to public prayer in the congregation, but only with regard to personal prayer made for the purpose of display before men.”² We are encouraged to make a habit of having quiet, personal prayer times with God. Again, Lenski says, “To shut the door of one’s own room means to pray in complete privacy. All intrusion is barred out, the worshipper is alone with God. True praying must start in secret since its very nature is personal communion of the soul with God, and an attitude of prayer and any words of prayer that are not intended for God but to impress men are the worst possible prostitution of prayer. Hence to shut out men and any extraneous influences is an aid to prayer. He who has learned to pray thus in secret will know too, how to commune with God when other worshippers join him in prayer. Therefore, right praying in secret will aid participation in public worship.”³ It is therefore vital to our relationship with our Heavenly Father that we develop times of quiet communion with Him.

In verse 7, Jesus added a word of exhortation about the nature of our prayers. Jesus said, “When you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.” We should be mindful that it is not the length of our prayer or the use of a specific “formula” that will cause our prayers to be heard. God responds to the communion of our hearts with His, whether our words are many or few.

Some Christians have come to the conclusion that the Lord’s Prayer should not be prayed, since it could end up being just a prayer that is prayed as “meaningless repetition.” To keep the Lord’s Prayer from being prayed in a meaningless way, we should always make the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer a matter of heartfelt concern. There is nothing wrong with written prayers, whether the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, the praying of the Psalms, or prayers that are recorded in some other book of prayers. Written prayers can help teach us what to pray for and may also give us words to pray when we have difficulty expressing our thoughts. However, we are urged to pray “from the heart” and not as a magic formula that we think will somehow cause God to respond to us simply because we have used the “right words” or “right formula.” The Lord’s Prayer is the perfect prayer. When we think of it as less, it reveals our imperfection.

What a blessing is ours to hear the words of verse 8 where Jesus says, “Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” Our Heavenly Father knows exactly what we need even before we offer up our prayer to Him. He is after all the “all knowing” God of the universe. And even though He is the God of the universe, He still invites us to address Him as “Father.” The term “father” is one that involves relationship, personal relationship. God has already established a personal relationship with each of us. He personally provides food, clothing, shelter, and the same rain for the just as the unjust. Our need is to acknowledge our natural rebellion against Him, to personally seek His pardon, and to live dependent upon Him as our heavenly Father (Romans 8:12-17). A father is one who is charged with being responsible to meet the needs of a child. Jesus presents the God of the universe to us as a loving, caring father. Jesus wants each one of us to know that we can have a personal relationship with the God of the universe by trusting in Jesus as our Savior.

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), 85.

² R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 260-261.

³ Lenski, 261.

BEGINNING YOUR CLASS HOUR

Welcome and Opening Prayer

Welcome your students to class. Ask them about their week, and give time for them to share. Then ask students if they think all people worship and serve the one true God. **SHOW** pictures relating to different types of religions around the world. **EXPLAIN** that many people do not believe in Jesus as their Savior and worship other gods or idols.

As you pray today, include the foreign missionaries around the world. Perhaps there are missionaries from your church who serve in another country, or your church may give financial support to specific missionaries. Pray for these especially, and add a missionary family to your prayer journals.

EXPLAIN that we send out missionaries so people can hear the good news that Jesus died for their sins and come to know the one true God. All God's children can be missionaries wherever we are, no matter how young or old, short or tall.

Hymns and Songs

Sing the first two stanzas of the theme hymn, "Our Father, Throned in Heaven Above" (AH p.220 and printed on the back of the student book).

Enrichment hymns and songs:

"Dear Savior, Bless the Children" SGL p.79

"Thee, God, We Praise" AH p.202

"Praise the Lord" AH p.207

"For God So Loved the World" AH p.519 or SSF p.69

Review Last Week's Lesson

Review the memory verse and catechism from Lesson 6. You may also want to take time to review other memory verses, catechism memory work, and enrichment memory verses.

Use the following questions to help guide discussion and review of Lesson 6:

What are the two different kinds of gifts we are to pray for? spiritual gifts and temporal gifts

What do we pray for when we pray for spiritual gifts? Faith in Jesus, forgiveness of sins, the presence of the Holy Spirit.

What are some of the temporal gifts we can pray for? Food and clothing, a house to live in, friends to play with, health, jobs. We can even pray for things we don't need such as a new bike or special toy.

TEACHING TODAY'S BIBLE LESSON

Introduce the Lesson

Put some large stones into a metal pail. Then lay some dry wood on top of the stones. As the children watch, **POUR** water on top of the pile of stones and wood. Ask if they think the wood could burn when it is all wet? (**DO NOT** try to start a fire in the classroom!)

EXPLAIN that in our lesson today we will learn how the one true God brought fire upon a wet offering when a man prayed and trusted in God to answer His prayers.

Learn the New Words

inner room a quiet place to be alone, away from distractions and interruptions

altar an elevated place upon which religious sacrifices may be offered

consumed devoured or ate up

beloved one who is dearly loved

Elijah a prophet in the Old Testament

prophets of Baal false prophets who worshiped false gods called Baal

Mt. Carmel the mountain where Elijah stood against 850 heathen prophets of Baal and called on God to defeat them

trench a ditch or deep furrow in the ground

drenched soaked, wet through and through

tenderly kindly, warmheartedly, lovingly

Read the Lesson

In preparation for teaching this lesson, you may want to read about Elijah and the prophets of Baal in I Kings 18:20-39. Also help students find the Bible text for today's lesson in Matthew 6:5-9. Teacher read the first paragraph of the lesson and discuss with the children.

Then give students a copy of the picture of Elijah (reproducible page in Teacher Manual). Tell them to **LISTEN** closely as you read the remainder of the lesson to them. Ask them to **DRAW** and **COLOR** what they hear about in the story (the altar that Elijah built, God sending fire down from heaven, etc.)

TO WHOM SHALL WE PRAY?

Do you have a best friend? Someone you love being with and to whom you tell your thoughts and your secrets? Someone you just can't wait to talk with when you do well on a test or when you have exciting news to share? Your best friend might be someone you know from school or from your neighborhood. Or it might be your sister or brother or your mom or dad.

There is someone else who is your best friend. Do you know who that is? It is God. Even though you cannot see God, He is with you always, and He is your closest friend. He

wants to hear about all that happens to you each day and about everything that is important to you.

Matthew 6:6 says, "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret." Jesus teaches that you are to pray to God and to God alone.

Why is God the only one to whom you should pray? God is the only true God. He is the only One who knows your thoughts, hears your prayers, and enjoys your praise! He wants you to come with joy and confidence to Him just as you would come to your best friend. There is no one else who loves you as much as God does. There is no one else who is more concerned about your needs.

In the Old Testament, *Elijah* and the *prophets of Baal* met together on *Mt. Carmel* to determine whose god was the true God. The prophets who believed Baal was the true god built an altar, placed an ox upon it, and called upon their god to send fire from heaven to burn up the *altar*. They prayed and pleaded and called out in a loud voice to their god for hours. But there was no voice, no answer, nothing. Finally, they had to give up.

Then it was Elijah's turn. He built an altar of stone, dug a *trench* around it, and arranged the wood and the ox upon it. Then he *drenched* the altar with water. Not just once, but three times! The trench was filled with water. And then Elijah prayed. Do you remember what happened? Elijah's God answered him! He sent fire from heaven, and it *consumed* not only the ox, but also the wood and the stones and the dust. It even licked up the water that was in the trench!

Why was Elijah's prayer answered when the prophets of Baal were left waiting? Because Elijah prayed to the one true God. Elijah knew his God was there. Elijah could come confidently and cheerfully to God, knowing God would always listen and answer with love.

Do you remember the first commandment? It says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." Elijah knew this meant he was to pray to no one else but the one true and living God. It was God who was concerned about Elijah's

need, and it was God alone who could answer that need. There is no other God who knows what is best for you. There is no other God who will answer in love.

Reinforce the Lesson

ASK: Isn't it amazing how God demonstrated His love and power on Mt. Carmel? God answered the prayers of Elijah. God hears and answers our prayers too. He does not always give us everything we ask for, but He answers in the way He knows is best for us.

To **REVIEW** the story, assign parts and have your students act it out. They could use their Bibles for their dialogue or retell the story using a narrator.

APPLYING THE BIBLE LESSON

Teach the Memory Verse

Give each child a piece of paper and pencil. Have them pick up their pencils and close their eyes. Now, with eyes closed, tell them to draw a room with a door in the wall on their paper. When finished, they can open their eyes. Then tell them to write the words of the memory verse inside the "room" they have drawn.

Explain that as they drew their pictures, no one else saw what they were drawing because their eyes were closed. God invites us to pray to Him "in secret" because He does not want us to pray to try to impress other people. This does not mean that we shouldn't pray in public, but prayer is between God and us, not so that other people will see us or hear us.

*"But you, when you pray,
go into your inner room,
and when you have shut your door,
pray to your Father who is in secret."
Matthew 6:6*

Ask the students if any would like to recite the enrichment memory verse (note that this memory verse includes only the first portion of the verse, Jeremiah 10:10a). Encourage the students to keep learning these extra verses to hide God's Word in their hearts.

Also give students an opportunity to recite a favorite verse they have memorized this year. Ask them to explain why the verse is important to them. Encourage them to keep reviewing their memory verses regularly.

Study the Catechism

The Introduction: Our Father, who art in heaven. *What does this mean?* God thereby tenderly encourages us to believe that He is truly our Father, and that we are truly His children, so that we may boldly and confidently come to Him in prayer, even as beloved children come to their dear father.

SAY: Today we are starting to learn more about *The Lord's Prayer*. The rest of our lessons will focus on what Jesus teaches us about prayer through this special prayer that He taught His disciples. **SHOW** this prayer to students in their Bibles (Matthew 6:9-13). Then direct their attention to the illustrated wall poster of *The Lord's Prayer* (refer to this poster in each lesson hereafter). **EXPLAIN** that the *Introduction* teaches us to whom we are to pray. We are to pray to our Father who is in heaven. Note that the poster includes the words "Our Father" in several different languages. This reminds us that this prayer is a universal prayer, a prayer to be prayed by Christians of all nations. We all have the same Heavenly Father! (Note that *Luther's Small Catechism in Illustration Study Guide* would also be a useful reference here.)

Give students each a copy of the activity sheet (reproducible page in Teacher Manual). Allow the students to color the picture while you read the story about Susan to them. Then discuss the questions, and ask the students to write in the blanks a prayer of thanks that Susan may have prayed. Remind the children that God our Heavenly Father loves us and delights in hearing the prayers of His children.

Do the Activities Together

ACTIVITY 1

Have Bibles open to Matthew 6.

ANSWERS:

1. Ask a student to read Matthew 6:5. Then have a student look up in the dictionary what the word *hypocrite* means (a person who says he believes something but does not practice it; for example, a person who pretends to love God but really doesn't in the heart.)
- 2a. loves to stand in the synagogues (churches) and on the street corners
- 2b. to be seen by other people
3. We should pray to the one true God.
4. a) go into your room
b) shut the door
c) pray to your Father
Discuss that there are times when you need to pray alone and in secret and also times for God's people to pray together (see examples in Acts 2:42, 12:5, and Matthew 18:19-20). The Bible also instructs us to "pray without ceasing" in I Thessalonians 5:17.
5. God knows about the things we need.
6. God wants to give us good gifts.

APPLY: Why is God the only one to whom we should pray? He is the only true God. He is the only God who hears and answers our prayers. He loves us more than anyone else.

Then **ASK: Do you remember the first commandment from our lesson?** "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

ACTIVITY 2

Complete the equation for each math problem. Then fill in the blanks at the bottom of the page with the correct letters from the answers to the problems. (Keep in mind that some students may have a hard time with math. You may want to do this activity as a class and let the students call out the answer when they have it. Then move on to the next equation. Be encouraging, and help students as needed.)

- | | | |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| A 15+3=18 | I 53-11=42 | R 12x2=24 |
| C 10+20+10=40 | N 36 + 17 = 53 | S 28+22=50 |
| E 7x3=21 | O 14+7+6=27 | T 11+3+14=28 |
| F 21-5=16 | P 53-17=36 | U 65-4=61 |
| H 6+2+3=11 | Y 31+15=46 | W 17+15=32 |

**ANSWER: PRAY TO YOUR
FATHER WHO IS
IN SECRET**

List some places where you can go to pray.

Help the children think of special places that are quiet and away from distractions where they can pray (for example, in my bedroom, at my church, outside).

CLOSING YOUR CLASS HOUR

Closing Prayer

Always close your class time in prayer. **ENCOURAGE** the children to find a “prayer closet” in their home. This does not have to literally be a closet but a special place they can go and be alone with God. It may be their room or another quiet spot where they can “pray in secret.” Encourage children to spend some time in their “prayer closet” every day talking to God.

Remind the children that there are people all around us who do not know about the one true God and do not know Jesus as their Savior. Ask the children to **THINK** of one person who does not know Jesus and to add this person to their prayer journals.

Pray for these people who do not know Jesus. Then pray the Lord’s Prayer together and sing the Doxology (AH p.390).

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.*

Home Assignment

- ▶ Memory Verse: Psalm 148:13
- ▶ Catechism: The First Petition
- ▶ Enrichment Memory Verse: Proverbs 18:10
- ▶ Review memory verses, catechism memory work, and enrichment memory verses for quiz next week.
- ▶ Find information about your name. What does your name mean? Why were you given that name?