

Introduction

The following outline looks at different ways of praying within the Christian tradition. This could be part of a wider unit of work comparing and contrasting approaches to prayer between two major world Faiths. It will explore the importance of prayer to the life of a Christian and the variety of ways prayer can be expressed and experienced.

The intended learning outcomes for the children are that they:

- are able to identify in their own experience particular circumstances and objects, which help them concentrate on something important and precious to themselves.
- are able to understand what prayer is and why it is important to people of faith
- are able to recognise and talk about a range of aids to prayer that are common to most Christians.
- are able to express their opinions about various methods of praying
- are familiar with one or two well-known Christian prayers, and in particular the pattern for prayer as set out by Jesus in *The Lord's Prayer*

Development

1. Why do people pray?

Discuss with the class what words and ideas (if any) they associate with praying. What is it? Why pray? When do people pray? In what circumstances? How do people pray? Where? Who to? Do they know any prayers?

2. Christian Prayer

Explain that you are going to look at the way Christians pray to God. Explore it along the four strands of: actions, words, pictures/symbols, and objects.

3. Something to do

Demonstrate the use of hands together, hands outstretched, eyes closed, standing and kneeling (possibly incorporating the use of a prayer stool), and ask the children each time how this might help Christians? What do they think is the best way to stand or sit, if they want to be quiet and thoughtful? How should they hold their hands?

4. Something to focus on

Show the children an icon, a candle and a cross. The children should investigate in groups how they think Christians might use these objects to help them pray. Present the findings to the whole class but be sensitive, as children from some faith traditions could find the symbol of the cross offensive. Where necessary, the teacher should supplement what is shared with further information about how

the objects are used in prayer. They are all designed to help Christians focus on God.

What are the everyday objects or special symbols that help the children be quiet and think about what is important to them? What helps them access important memories that give them courage and inspiration?

N.B. *A-cross the World* (BRF books) contains a range of types of crosses with their stories.

5. Something to touch

Show the children a rosary or prayer rope and let them look at it carefully. Ask them what it is? Who might use it? How is it used? Why is it used? When is it used?

Read a story about prayer from Luke 18: 9-14

Ask questions, such as: why did Jesus tell this story? why do you think it might have surprised some people? what does it teach about prayer?

The prayer that the tax collector makes is very simple - *God be merciful to me a sinner*. Because many Christians believe that this is such an honest and complete prayer, it is often used as a repeated prayer. By repeating it lots of times, it can help people grow closer to God. Often people will repeat it a 100 times and to keep count they need the beads. Some other simple prayers that are repeated and used with beads are:

Luke 18 :38 *Jesus son of David have mercy on me* - often called The Jesus Prayer - and some Christians use a prayer to the Virgin Mary asking for help: *Hail Mary, full of grace, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death*.

(N.B. There is a craft outline for making a prayer rope in *A-cross the world* page 32)

What special objects would the children choose to help them remember what is important to them? They could make their own 'rosary' of special beads, choosing them by colour and size to represent significant people, places or events in their lives.

6. Something to hear

What kind of music helps the children to be peaceful and still? What special music gives them courage, hope and joy?

Some very good examples of Christian music for prayer come from the Christian community of Taizé in France (whose story is told briefly in *The Taizé Cross* in *A-cross-the World*)

7. Something to say

Look at the Lord's Prayer. Read the original in Matthew 6:5-18 and Luke 11:1-13. In both Bible readings there is more to talk about than just the outline prayer. For example, Jesus gives advice about how to pray (i.e. not in a showy way) and he tells a story to encourage people not to give up praying (the friend at midnight).

Now focus on the wording of the pattern for prayer that is given.
Why is it called the Lord's Prayer?

Here are some suggested actions that could accompany each line of the prayer, not only as a way of remembering it but also as a prompt to class discussion about what Jesus is suggesting Christians should always pray about.

1. Into a circle and all hold hands and lift them up high *Our Father*
 - ii. One hand pointing upwards *who art in Heaven*
 - iii. Bow head *Hallowed be your name*
 - iv. Hands beckoning *Your Kingdom come*
 - v.. Salute *Your will be done*
 - vi. Stamp both feet and then point with both hands upwards *On earth as it is in Heaven*
 - vii. Hands cupped in front to receive *Give us this day our daily bread*
 - viii. Wipe one palm over the other on each hand *Forgive us our sins*
 - ix. Turn and shake hands with those nearby *As we forgive those who sin against us*
 - x. Hands crossed in front of face *Lead us not in to temptation*
 - xi. One hand as a stop sign in front *Deliver us from evil*
 - xii. One hand pointing up *Yours is the kingdom*
 - xiii. Two hands high as fists *The power*
 - xiv. Hands waving high above *And the glory*
 - xv. Circle hands around each other *For ever and ever*
 - xvi. Clap hands together *Amen*

This is one way to remember the prayer. On the whole Christians do not use actions like these but they do nevertheless learn the prayer off by heart.

For an alternative and very effective way to reflect on The Lord's Prayer, see the final chapter of *The Lord's Prayer Unplugged* by Lucy Moore.

8. All these actions, words, symbols and objects help people who pray to concentrate and focus on what they can't see.

What things help the children concentrate and focus on something important? For example: a relative that lives a long way away; the memory of home when you are on holiday; a happy time in your life which is now in the past; other people who are in trouble or in need; or for those who believe in an invisible God, what can help them remember that God is always near and cares?

Make, with clay, four beads for a mini-prayer rosary, which will help the children focus on some of the above. They may wish to make up some words to go with their four beads e.g. I want to remember my granny who is ill; I want to remember the good holiday in...or with... that I had; I want to remember that God always loves me; I want to remember to care for my family.

9. Christians commonly think of prayer in one of three ways. Prayers are either thanking God for something (Thanks...) or asking for something (Please...) or saying sorry for something



(Sorry...). Look through a variety of prayers in an anthology of Christian prayers such as found in *the Lion Book of Children's Prayers* published by Lion Hudson or *Pocket Prayers for Children* published by the National Society with Church House Publishing.

N.B. When Christians say the word *Amen* at the end of a prayer, it means they are agreeing to whatever has been prayed.

Introduce the children to these well-known Christian prayers.

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, union;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.*
(attributed to St. Francis)

*Day by day, dear Lord,
Of thee three things I pray.
To love you more dearly,
To see thee more clearly;
To follow you more nearly;
Day by day.*
(St. Richard of Chichester)

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
The Love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all now and for evermore*
(from the end of one of St. Paul's letters in the Bible)

Which one do they like the best? Which lines do they think are the most important? Why do they think Christians pray these sorts of prayers? Can the children write some prayers of their own that might help Christians to ask God for something or thank God for something? Does your school have a special prayer of its own? Can the children write a special class prayer, perhaps with actions?

10. For more Christian prayers see:
365 Children's Prayers published by Lion Hudson
In Every Tiny Grain of Sand published by Walker
The Lion Prayer Collection published by Lion Hudson

For more on Christian prayer see:



Learning about Prayer published by Lion Hudson

Amen!