

PRAYER

Lesson 1: Prayer Begins with What God Has Done for Us

- 1. In prayer we approach the Father through Jesus, his Son*
- 2. In prayer we approach the Father with the help of his Spirit*

OPENING

What makes it easy to talk to someone? How do these things apply to our gracious God?

Prayer: O Lord, as we study your Word, pour out on us your Holy Spirit. Let us learn the joy of talking with you, and move us to speak with you from penitent and trusting hearts. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard of "active listening"? In active listening, you turn your entire body toward the speaker. You look him or her in the eye. You nod at appropriate moments, and you ask questions or offer brief comments to help yourself understand the person you are listening to. Active listening is an important skill. Communication won't happen if the listener expects the speaker to do all the work. God is an active listener. In fact, he alone has opened up the lines of communication between us and him. And, he helps us ask for the right things. In our first lesson we'll consider this question: When we pray that is, when we talk with God who is really doing the work?

I. In prayer we approach the Father through Jesus, his Son

John 20:17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

1. How does Jesus refer to God?
2. What comforting name does he give to the disciples?
3. Why can Jesus describe our relationship with God in these terms?

John 16:22-27: "So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. ²³ In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. ²⁵ Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. ²⁷ No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God."

4. Look closely at verses 26 and 27. Why can Christians pray to the Father?

5. What does it mean to pray "in Jesus' name"?

6. How do Jesus' words make you feel about praying?

7. *This We Believe*, the WELS statement of faith, describes the prayers of "all who do not know Christ" as "vain babblings addressed to false gods." Why is this accurate?

II. In prayer we approach the Father with the help of the Spirit

Romans 8:15-17,26,27 For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. ... ²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

1. What is our attitude toward God thanks to the Holy Spirit's work in us? What can we now call God? (v. 15-17)

2. Because of our "weakness," what difficulty do we experience in our prayer life? (v. 26)

3. How does the Holy Spirit help us? (v. 27)

4. Evaluate: Some churches teach that an unbeliever can become a Christian by praying a prayer in which he invites Jesus into his heart. (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3b No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.)

His Word in My Life

1.) Recently one of our former preschool parents, a Hindu man, came to the church doors. He explained that he was going through some difficult times with family and health. He asked me if he could go into the sanctuary and pray to God. Had you been in that situation, what insights from does today's lesson might you have incorporated into this teaching and witnessing opportunity?

2.) Evaluate: How is prayer like a phone message from a believer's mind to God's heart? How is it more than that?

Summary

God is at work when we pray. The Father has sent his Son to open the lines of communication between us and him. Jesus has made us his brothers and God's children. The blood of Jesus that atoned for our sins is the reason why we can pray with confidence to our God. The Holy Spirit sustains this faith in us and prays to our Father on our behalf. The Triune God is the most active listener there is.

Life with God

Consider including the following thoughts in your personal prayers this week.

- Day 1: Thank Jesus for giving you a gracious heavenly Father.
- Day 2: Thank God for the amazing privilege of speaking with him.
- Day 3: Think of an area of your life in which you don't know what to pray for. Thank the Holy Spirit for his ministry of intercession.
- Day 4: Ask Jesus to send the Holy Spirit to help you toward a more active prayer life.
- Day 5: Think of several specific places around the world where Christ is not known. Ask God to spread the gospel to people there so that prayers can be heard from those places.
- Day 6: Ask God to deepen your knowledge of him for the specific purpose of helping you to pray better.
- Day 7: Reread (or recall) Luther's explanation to the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism. Pray the entire Lord's Prayer with it in mind.