



Teachable moments are the best. It can happen by a tug on your sleeve or just about anything. Like being questioned, “What’s a *hallowed?*” Another time, with my eyes opened during the Lord’s prayer, I observed a group of three young children speak the few words they recognized from the Lord’s Prayer while drawing with crayons. Even though young children may not fully understand the words that comprise this foundational prayer, they seem to recognize it is important to the people sayin it and it is something worth learning. Like Jesus’ disciples, they want to know how to pray. Let the children explore the story of Jesus teaching the disciples to pray and watch them wonder about how they might enact the things Jesus calls on us to offer in prayer.

Begin your time by exploring the differences between the pronouns *I/me/mine* and *we/us/our*. Offer a few sentences using these pronouns. After you say each, ask the children who the

sentence is about. For instance, you could say, “I feel sleepy this morning” and the children will say that you (the speaker) are the focus of the sentence. As you use the plural pronouns (we/us/our), try to incorporate a variety of situations. Some sentences should focus on a set of people who are easily identifiable (we are at church right now) and some should be about less distinct group (we attended the July 4 parade). Conclude this part of the lesson by noting that the singular pronoun (*I/me/mine*) is always very clear. The person speaking is the focus of the statement. However, when we use plural first-person pronouns (*we/us/our*), we may be talking about a clearly defined group of people, a group that is not as easily identifiable, or a group we never met.

EXPLORE

Read aloud Luke 11:1-4 and 5-13. We are only talking about the first few verses as they discuss the Lord’s Prayer. Tell your children that the story they will hear comes from Luke’s Gospel. It is very short, but it contains a very important lesson that Jesus taught his disciples. Remind the children that Jesus often told stories to his disciples in response to questions they asked. Sometimes the disciples had to really think about the story to discover the lessons Jesus was teaching them. Other times, he would offer clear directions, like today. Jesus is straightforward. Have the children note what things Jesus tells them to pray about.

Read Luke 11:1-4 and then ask the children to recount what Jesus tells the disciples to pray for. Make a list. Record each item, be sure to include the pronouns used (i.e. “Your kingdom come”) Complete the list and circle the pronouns. Ask who is referred to in each part of the prayer. Who is the “you” in hallowed? Whose “kingdom” are they praying to come? Whose “daily bread” and “sins to be forgiven” are they asking for when they pray? Note that the first part of the prayer is about God. Jesus tells the disciples to ask for God to be honored and for

God's kingdom to be brought about. Then, the prayer focuses on the needs of the people. The disciples are asking for bread and forgiveness for themselves, but they are asking on behalf of ALL God's children. They are focusing their prayer not just on their own needs. They are asking God for the same thing for everyone.

We say this prayer every time we worship. Maybe other times too! Some families use the Lord's Prayer before a meal, or in private prayer. Continue the discussion by asking each to wonder about how the items in the prayer came to be. How does God's kingdom come to earth? How are people given their daily bread? How are sins forgiven? Help them notice that the prayer is really calling on us to PARTNER with God to make sure all God's people are cared for. With God, all that is in the prayer will come to be.

Help the gathered connect what they have learned to their own lives. Ask them to select one or two of the parts of the prayer that feel important. For instance, they may say that forgiveness OR daily bread are key. After choosing a part of the prayer, have them make a list of ways the church community can PARTNER with God to make their prayers a reality. Post them.

ACTIVITY

Ask the youngsters to make a poster that will teach others about this action. Put onto the fridge so others can see. The group can create a list of actions to include in the weekly newsletter.

ADULTS

Jesus' reflections on prayer in this passage point beyond techniques, forms and styles. There are no magic formulas, no right words. When it comes to prayer it's not so much a matter of what and how and when. Rather, it's about who and why.

The "who" is each of us and all of us and God. Prayer binds each of us and all of us closer to God.

Why do we pray? We pray to God because God is the one from whom all blessings flow. We pray to God because all that we are and all that we have comes from God's hand. We pray to God because in life and in death we belong to God.

So when we gather for worship, our service is filled with prayers: a prayer of confession as we acknowledge our need for God's mercy, a prayer for illumination as we seek the Spirit's help in understanding the ancient words of Scripture; a prayer of invocation that the preacher's words might be vessels of good news; a prayer of intercession for the world and for all who suffer in body, mind, and spirit; the Lord's Prayer, using the words Jesus taught; a prayer of thanksgiving offering our gratitude to God; and sacramental prayers on the first Sunday of the month inviting the Spirit to move through the water and the bread and the cup to seal us in the promises of the gospel. In addition to all these spoken prayers in our worship, there

are the prayers offered in observed silences plus all those prayers offered in the quiet of our hearts.

In prayer after prayer, these themes are reinforced: God is the one from whom all blessings flow; God is the source of all that we have and all that we are; God is the one to whom we belong in life and in death. The words change, but these themes persist. Over time, we become more and more aware of them and we are shaped by them and our prayers are deepened. When it comes to prayer, the who and the why matter the most.

And that's all fine, right? Especially in a pretty room where we put on our church clothes and church faces. It's all fine. But what do you do when you pray day after day and nothing seems to happen? What do you do when you pray and your friends pray and your church prays and your friends' churches pray, and the illness persists or the injustice prevails or the condition worsens? Doesn't Jesus say right here that "Everyone who asks receives and everyone who searches finds and for everyone who knocks the door will be open?" (Luke 11:10). Yet we have all known people and quite likely we are people who have not always received what we asked for, nor have we always found what we've been seeking, nor has the door always been opened for us, in spite of our persistent knocking. Carter's words have been our words, "I pray and I pray, but I guess God's not listening."

I believe God does listen. Surely, that is the witness of Scripture. Faithfully, consistently, lovingly, mercifully and graciously, God hears our prayers. Our pleas, our complaints, our questions, our laments, our praises, our thanksgivings and our sighs too deep for words – God hears all of that.

Prayer is not about getting what we want when we want it. Prayer is about learning to trust God; it's about growing in relationship with God by voicing the cares of our hearts and sharing with God the joys and sorrows of our lives. Prayer is not the clenched fist demanding that our will be done; it is the open hand receiving God's provisions for this day. Prayer is the means by which we acknowledge that God is God and we are not.

“I won't stop praying. I won't stop hoping. I don't know what else to do but hope that God has all this worked out.”

Hoping, praying – these are the marks of our lives as God's people. Hoping, praying – it's how we live, it's how we grow.

For reflection:

1. How has your understanding of prayer changed over the years? What have you learned about prayer? What do you continue to wonder about?

2. Are there modes or means of prayer that are particularly meaningful for you?
3. What are the words or phrases in the Lord's Prayer that especially resonate for you?