

Lord teach us to pray. *Seven sessions on learning to pray with the heart of Jesus.*

Note: these lessons are taken with the help of Martin Luther's Small Catechism and Mike Breen's work from the book, *Building a Discipling Culture*.

Lesson one: What is the Lord's Prayer?

Appetizer: As people come in, hand out pieces of paper, pencils and perhaps crayons. Give them a moment to simply write or draw whatever it is they are thinking and feeling that day. They may wish to approach this like a journal or they may wish to draw a picture. Either way, give them a moment to do this.

Digest: How long has it been since you have had a chance to be creative? Was this a difficult exercise for you? Was this difficult when you were a child? Why do you suppose it is harder to be creative as you get older?

As we begin our study on the Lord's prayer, we are going to begin by thinking about the character of God. The very first image we see if God is God as Creator. God has made us in God's image and thus we too are creators. This will be a time of creativity and energy. We invite you to restore that sense of creative in your heart as we asked for God's character to be alive in us.

Prayer: Holy God, with a word you created the universe. You have shaped each of us in your image and made us your children. Give us hearts to understand and pray for your character to be alive in us. Make us creative, loving, holy, and good. We pray this in your name. Amen

The Salad: Read Luke 11: 1-4 aloud. Now, have someone else share this story in his or her own words.

- What do you think the disciples were interested in?
- How might Jesus have been praying so that they would want to pray with the same heart as Christ?
- Do you think they were asking for what words they should pray with?
- Why do you think the disciples wanted to pray like Jesus?

Digest: The disciples knew how to pray. They were good Jewish kids. It was not as if they had never pray before. But there was something about the way Jesus prayed that made them want to pray like him. So when they asked Jesus how to pray, they're not asking about the words they are supposed to say, they're asking about praying with the same heart of Jesus. They want to know what the rabbi prays for, so that they can pray for the same. Let's take a look at what Jesus prayed for and what he is teaching us is on his heart.

Main Course: Look again at the Lord's prayer. What do you think is important to Jesus? What seem to be the themes of this prayer?

Digest: Luther breaks the prayer down into 7 petitions. Each petition (definition: something you ask for) has a different focus on what Jesus is asking us to ponder in our prayer life. During our study, we will look at each petition, not to simply pray as memorization, but to ask Jesus to shape our prayer so we may pray for the same.

Dessert: *Hallowed be THY name?* Something that needs to be addressed is the old English version of this prayer that persists in our church. Clearly Jesus did not pray in old English.

- Why do you think we continue to pray the Lord's prayer in Old English?
- Why is it important that we pray in old English?
- Do you think praying in old English helps us?
- In what ways might help? In what ways praying old English might harm our prayer life?
- In what ways does it not help?

Digest: We are not here to tell you that we have to pray in regular English, but we should be aware that praying in Old English is a hold out that is not so much about Jesus as it is about being white Europeans. No other Christians would pray using older language. Do consider perhaps using regular vernacular, just like Jesus did, in order to address God not as someone who deserves special language but as one who was intimate to us and knows us.

Sending: This week, pray the Lord's prayer every day, maybe 4 or 5 times a day, in the morning, at meals, whenever. Try using different words or maybe just the contemporary version of the prayer to see if it makes you think about the prayer differently. Come back next week and share your experience.

Pray the Lord's prayer together.

Lesson 2, The First Petition: Our Father in heaven, Your name is holy.

Purpose: The first petition is looking at God's character. In this petition we want to discover who God is and who the God is that we are inviting into our prayer.

Appetizer: Question: Do you like your name? What do you like about your name? Where did you get your name? Share with the group how your family chose your name for you.

Digest: Names are important. When we say certain names we react differently. Names can actually represent the person. Today we will be talking about the name of God, asking for it to be holy to us as well. (Luther's Small Catechism)

Prayer: Lord, your name is holy, and we dare to call out to you. Help us to see your character as we pray. Help us to honor you and your name. Amen.

Salad: Read Luke 11:1-4 again. What is the character that Jesus is bringing into this prayer? Why is it important to Jesus that we recognize God as *Father* in this prayer?

Process: Note: Jesus says *our* father, not *my* father. When Jesus invites us to pray to the father Jesus invites us not to pray to his father but the father that belongs to all of us. This is *our* father. This is more than teaching us words, but trying to instruct something to the disciples about the character and nature of God's relationship with us. In this case, Jesus chose to use "Our Father" not because it is the best way to talk to God, but to invoke the character of God that would be helpful and instructive to the disciples at that time.

In this prayer Jesus is inviting us to see this prayer as more than the title for God, but invoking the character of God into our prayer to perhaps remind us or instruct us in whom we pray to. This means we may call God Father, but this is not the only thing we call God.

Main Course: In the first petition, Jesus is reminding us God's name is holy. Read Exodus 3: 13-15.

- What does God say as God's name?
- What does this mean to you?
- What does this say about who God is?

Luther writes; *"God's name is indeed holy in itself; but we pray in this petition that it may become holy among us also."*

Digest: The first petition is asking us to remember God's name is Holy and asking for us to keep it holy as well. It also reminds us who God is. In Exodus, God reveals God's name as "I Am." In Hebrew, this is "YHWH" often pronounced as Yahweh (YAH- way). This name was considered so holy people were not allowed to speak it. Instead they would say "Lord" (Adonai in Hebrew). But in the prayer, Jesus calls God Father, and thus makes God intimate and close. But Jesus also reminds us that God is holy, and the name that represents God is thus holy. We should remember that Jesus teaches us that this holy God has a holy name, but we know God in many ways.

Dessert: When we pray, perhaps we are invited as Jesus was to invoke the character of God in our prayer. Let's practice what this means:

Imagine you are visiting a sick friend and you want to remember the character of God in your prayer as Jesus did.

- What are attributes of God you might invoke in a prayer of healing? (healing God, comforting parent, God who is with us, etc.)
- If this is difficult, try beginning a prayer with “God you are..” How might you declare this in your prayer with a sick friend? (God you are healer, God you are strong when we are weak, God you are life, etc.)

Let's try other situations:

- What sort of attributes would you invoke if you were praying for someone who was depressed?
- What attributes might you invoke if you were praying with someone who is confused?
- What character of God might you draw into the prayer with someone who is celebrating?

Sending: This week as you pray, consider the God you are praying to you and the character of that God in your prayer. This alone can be your prayer. You might begin "God you are..." and then list as many characteristics of God that you desire to understand and to know more fully in your day.

Close with the Lord's Prayer.

Lesson 3: The Second and Third Petition, Your Kingdom Come, Your will be done (God's Kingdom)

Purpose: The first petition is looking at God's kingdom. In this petition we are remembering the will and reign of God, so that we pray for God's will and not (just) our own.

Appetizer: As you gather, begin with this question: what is something you had to do this week you did want to do because someone asked you to do it?

Digest: Sometimes we don't get to do what we want. We are asked by a friend, a boss, a family member, a colleague to do something we may wish we could say no. But we do it, not because we want to, but because we want to help or maybe because we don't have a choice. Today we talk about the will of God and glimpsing heaven on earth.

Prayer: Holy One, we desire your way and not only ours. We confess we can be very selfish and want what we want and often we do not even stop to ask what is your will. Tune our hearts to yours again today. Align us to your heartbeat for the world so we can glimpse a little heaven in our daily lives. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

Salad: When you imagine a kingdom, what does that look like in your mind? Crowns and thrones? Jousting and castles?

Digest: It is easy for us to think of a kingdom as a PLACE. But in this prayer, the kingdom is not to be thought of as a noun but rather *a way*. We are not asking for a place to come, but for God to rule, as a monarch would rule, a queen or king. Perhaps a better translation is "May your reign come".

How does a monarch rule? Do you vote for a king or queen?

Digest: In the US, we are very used to thinking our opinion matters and we can vote the way we feel. This is not how a monarchy rules. What they say goes! To be ruled doesn't necessarily mean we have God do our bidding but rather we are called to follow the will of God. Just like a parent sometimes answers their child's complaint with "Because I said so!", we also have a God who doesn't not always ask us but rather tells us God's desire.

Main Course: Finish this statement: "God, in your kingdom there is..."

(Option 1: Discussion)- When you pray, do you pray for a glimpse of this kingdom to be present? What does the kingdom of God look like in your eyes? What would be attributes of the kingdom of God? (no sickness, the poor are rich, people love each other, no violence, etc. etc.)

(Option 2: Color) Draw a picture of God's kingdom on earth. What does that look like? Share the pictures with the group.

Digest: We know what God's kingdom looks like. Something IN us knows God's will. When we ask for God's kingdom to come and for earth to look like heaven, we have a picture of this already in our heads. This is the imprint God made in us at our creation, a part of our own being that understands the heart of God.

In the Small Catechism, Luther writes: "*The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also.*"

Digest: Luther says we do not need to ask for God's kingdom to come, it comes whether we want it or not! So why do you think we pray for God's kingdom to come?

Dessert: When you are praying, what sort of Kingdom-like outcome are you praying for? What would the "Rule of God" look like in this situation? When we ask for "God's will" to be done, what does this look like?

Digest: We ask for God's will and hope to be present and visible in this life. Sometimes, we think the bad, the horrible, the atrocious are somehow a part of God's will. Rather, God works not BY the bad things, but God's will is enacted when bad things are transformed by God. (Chaos to creation, Slavery to freedom, sickness to healing, cross to resurrection). So when we ask for God's will to be done, we are not asking for bad things to happen, we are asking for God to do what God does, step into our messes and make miracles.

Sending: This week, look for glimpses of God's kingdom, of messes becoming miracles. Pray "God, in your kingdom there is..." and use this to focus on the present and coming kingdom.

Lesson 4: The Fourth Petition, Give us today our daily bread

Purpose: The first petition is looking at God's provision. In this petition we are bold to ask God for what we need today, whether that is physical or spiritual mana.

Appetizer: Bake some bread to bring to class this day. Perhaps have an olive oil dip, or maybe just butter, or find some other way the class can nosh on bread. Discuss: What's your favorite kind of bread? What is your favorite way to eat bread?

Digest: Bread is a staple of the world. Bread is found in nearly every culture on earth. What makes bread so important is the way it is easily cultivated, made, and transported. From Naan bread in India, to pita bread in the middle east to Injera in Africa, people have depended on bread to eat and survive. Today, we talk about our "Daily bread" and why Jesus is praying for "bread".

Prayer: Jesus, you have fed your people with bread. You broke bread with sinners and tax collectors like us, and you even broke the bread of the covenant with your people. Help us to seek our daily bread, looking for what we need this day to feed and nourish us in mind, body, and soul. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Salad: Open your bibles to Exodus 4: 4-5, 13-21, 31. Someone read the selections aloud. Someone else tell the same story in their own words. What is the flaky substance that God provided the Israelites called? How long did it last?

Digest: Think through the peculiarities of the manna. No one got more than they needed. It didn't last more than a day. It spoiled and disappeared if it was hoarded. This was bread not meant to last more than a day, meant to keep them going, but it also was designed to make the people trust God that more would come tomorrow. They could not store it. They had to hope that God would provide bread daily.

Main Course: In Luther's explanation of the Fourth Petition, his hope is that we recognize our daily bread, to know and receive it as it is given. Open your bibles to John 6. Read aloud John 6: 1-14.

- What happens here? What were the people fed? What does this say about Jesus?

Read John 6: 25-35

- What are the people looking for from Jesus? Are they looking for a free meal? Are they looking for real food? What do you think they are seeking? How do you think they will respond?

Read John 6: 41-51

Digest: We all would like a free meal, but Jesus is offering us much more than a hand out. Jesus gives his very self for the sake of the world. This is the bread of life; to seek Christ and his teaching, for in this will we find life. When we learn from Jesus, we are eating true bread for our day.

Luther writes: *"Everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as meat, drink, clothing, shoes, house, homestead, field, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful magistrates, good government,*

good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”

Digest: Luther only begins to name all the things to seek and be thankful for. What other things might you add to this list of “daily bread”?

Dessert: Try this exercise:

- Think of something you wish to pray for. This can be big or small. **(for example, we will use “peace”.)** Write this down on a sheet of paper.
- Now, make a list under this of things related to this you may be seeking. **(using the example peace we might say, less busyness, more quiet time, a time to apologize, lower frustration, more patience).**
- Now, looking at this list, which thing do you need today, right now? What is the daily meal you need to help with the greater prayer request? What on that list do you REALLY need? **(take more time with kids, a reminder to breathe deep, will to stop and be for a few moments this day)**

Digest: When we pray, we can get caught asking for the big or the ambiguous and miss perhaps the thing we really need. It is easy to pray for peace, but our daily bread may be simply more patience with a friend or coworker. This may be the daily bread that guides us into the peace we desire.

Sending: This week, use this exercise by saying “TODAY I need...” and ask God what bread you need to eat just for today, to recognize and receive the bread Christ offers.

Close by praying the Lord’s Prayer.

Lesson 5: The Fifth Petition, Forgive us our sins as we forgive

Purpose: The first petition is looking at God's forgiveness. In this petition we are called to confess, but also take on the character of God in forgiving others.

Appetizer: When was the last time you said “I am sorry” to someone, no matter how big or small? When was the last time someone apologized to you? How did it feel to ask forgiveness? What did it feel like to be forgiven?

Digest: Today, we boldly ask 2 things, to be forgiven, then to forgive in the same measure that we have been forgiven. This is frightening prospect! So let's dive in.

Prayer: God of Grace, you are love and you love your children. Your steadfast love is eternal. We praise you for loving and forgiving us for all the ways we fall short. We ask for the courage to forgive as we have been forgiven. Help us reflect your grace in our lives. Praise you, Lord! Amen.

Salad: Open your bibles to Matthew 18: 21-22. Read this text aloud.

- Why do you think Peter mentions 7 times? Why 7?
- Why does Jesus respond with 77?
- What do you think Jesus means by this?

Digest: Jesus speaks of forgiving 77 times. We should not take this literally, but rather an emphasis that we are to forgive over and over. 7 is considered a number of completeness in this culture. Peter asking 7 times was not about keeping track, but rather saying “should I forgive completely?” By responding saying 77 times, Jesus doubles down on the completeness of our forgiveness. It is an emphatic, YES! Forgive utterly and completely.

Main Course: Read Matthew 18:23-35. Someone else tell the story in his or her own words.

- What does the story tell you about the character of the king? What can you learn about how the king cares for those in his kingdom?
- What does the story tell you about the character of the slave? What does the slave do that is so offensive?
- What does this tell you about the king's desire for the slave?
- A little deeper: If this tells you something about the character of the king, is this about what the slave did or didn't do, or is it about character?

Digest: It is easy to turn forgiveness about “doing”. But more than work, we are to learn from the King about adopting the character of Christ. Christ embodies forgiveness, literally when you look at the cross. Maybe the king is not offended because the slave didn't forgive, but rather he didn't follow the model of the king, the character of the king. When we forgive, we literally embody God's will in our lives, reflecting the character of God. Forgiveness is a proclamation about God's love.

Read: Luther says in his small catechism “*We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor deny such petitions on account of them; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them; but that He would grant them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much, and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. So will we verily, on our part, also heartily forgive and also readily do good to those who sin against us.*”

Luther points us to “give the same grace we receive.”

Digest: We are worthy of nothing, but receive everything. How could we not respond with the same grace we have been given. There is a Buddhist “blessing” that is also very dangerous: *May you receive the grace you give*. On the surface this seems like a kind word. But it can also be interpreted toward the one who is not gracious or kind, that they receive the same for themselves. Basically, it is encouraging us to do unto others, to walk in their shoes, to remember our own forgiveness and seek not only to forgive, but to embody this in our own character.

Dessert: *Write a letter.* In this last exercise, we will take a few minutes to write a letter. There is someone you need to ask forgiveness from or that you need to offer forgiveness to. You know who they are. Up to now, you may have just not asked yet. For whatever reason, you simply have not extended that forgiveness or asked. We will take these last few minutes to write a letter to that person. They may not even be alive, but the activity is what is important. Write the letter and be honest. You will not share these or read them aloud (Unless you want to.)

Digest: Often it is the long-waiting forgiveness that is hardest. Be courageous. Extend grace or receive grace. This is the character of Christ.

Sending: This week, carry your letter with you and use it as a reminder to pray “Forgive me for... and help me to forgive the same.” Consider sending your letter. Perhaps go ahead and send it. Maybe new avenues of grace and forgiveness will open to you.

Close by praying the Lord’s Prayer.

Lesson 6: The Sixth Petition, Lead Us

Purpose: The first petition is looking at God's leadership. In this petition we boldly ask for God's leadership, even if it means into a wilderness or especially to the cross.

Appetizer: Think of someone whom you think is a great leader (You're not allowed to say Jesus.) What qualities do they possess? How do they care for their followers? What do they do that makes them a good leader?

Digest: A wise person once said, "A good leader makes you want what they want." When we think of Jesus, we see a Jesus who cut such a compelling vision of the Kingdom of God that people dropped everything to follow. We ask for God to lead us in the same way, that we would want what God wants.

Prayer: God, you are ever before us, ever leading us into wildernesses and promised lands, into deep valleys and across level plains. Lead us in our study today. Teach us to follow. We humbly pray this, Amen.

Salad: Let's play a quick version of Simon says. (You can do this seated if you'd like, but have one person lead by saying, "Simon Says" and then "touch your head", "clap your hands", "make a face", or whatever you wish the class to do. Try to trick them by not saying "Simon says" and if they do it anyway, they are out)

Digest: It is easy to get into a pattern and miss the instruction to wait for Simon to say. Perhaps there is something here we can ponder when it comes to God's leadership. Are we following what God says? How do we know what God says? What if it sounds weird? How do we know? Leadership is asking us to want what Jesus wants. So let's take a look.

Main Course: Open your bibles to Numbers 14:1-9. Read this aloud. Have someone tell the story again in their own words.

- What are the people rebelling against?
- What are they frustrated with?
- Would you rather be hungry and dying but free in the desert or have a full belly but slaves in Egypt? Which would you pick?

Digest: It is easier to cry out save us than it is to know what this means for the reality of the people. The people cried out in slavery for the Lord to freed them, but they expected only streets paved with gold on the other side. Little did they know they were being led into a wilderness. But it was in the wilderness the people truly began to understand to worship, know, and trust the Lord. They needed the wilderness; they just didn't know it yet. When we say lead us, we are to understand that this means lead us into the hard things and the difficult times.

Luther says, "*God, indeed, tempts no one; but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us, nor seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and gain the victory.*"

Digest: We say in the Sixth Petition, deliver us from evil, or save us from the time of trial, we do not mean that God would do this and we are to convince otherwise. The construct of the Greek is to be taken a little facetiously. Instead, we are to understand God would

never do this. We pray that we would be led not by our bellies like the Israelites but perhaps rather by God, trusting that God will care for us along the way.

Dessert: Remember the game, “Simon says”, we will do this again as a reflective exercise. We do not intend you to respond, but to simply listen and pray and process. Close your eyes and listen to these commands of Jesus, and consider how you are being led.

Jesus says, “Love your enemy.”

Jesus says, “Forgive 70 times 7”

Jesus says, “Do not worry”

Jesus says, “Let your light shine before others”

Jesus says, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

Jesus says, “You who are without sin may throw the first stone.”

Jesus says, “Do not judge, or you will be judged”

Jesus says, “Come, pick up your cross and follow me.”

Digest: We hear the words of Jesus, but do we hear them as a call to action? Jesus is commanding us, leading us, and asking us to follow, even to the cross. Jesus asks us to pray for God’s leadership, and we should be very careful, because God just may lead us!

Sending: This week, pray “Lead me to...” and see what places God is sending you to see, learn, grow and serve.

Close by praying the Lord’s Prayer.

Lesson 7: The Seventh Petition, Save Us

Purpose: The first petition is looking at God's protection. In this petition we pray for God's strength to surround us.

Appetizer: Share with your neighbor: Were you afraid of anything as a child? The dark? Dogs? Water? Brussel sprouts? How did you get over your fear (or DID you get over your fear?)

Digest: As a child, things scared us. For many of us, we grew up and past these fears. Sometimes they stay with us. When we pray to God, we are free to pray for God's protection from the dark, snakes, dogs, and maybe even big things like violence and sickness.

Prayer: Strong and mighty God, we are often afraid. We need your comfort and strength, your eternal protection. Be with us in this lesson as we pray for your help and strength.

Salad: Open your bibles to Psalm 24. Read this aloud. After reading it, take 5 minutes and write this again in your own words. Read these aloud for one another.

Digest: We think of God as strong and mighty. In this Psalm, the king is reminded that he is not the king of glory, that title and all victory belongs to God. We too can be reminded that God is strong, not us. When we lean in and depend on God for our strength, we find new hope and life.

Main Course: Now turn to Psalm 23. We've all heard this Psalm, frequently at funerals. As we read this psalm aloud, try to hear with new ears. Is there a phrase that hits you in a new way? Is there a word that was unexpected? Read the psalm.

- What is God doing with the psalmist?
- What sort of things is God doing? What active verbs go with God?
- Is God avoiding trouble? What does God do?

Digest: We've read this psalm many times, but we have to be reminded that God does not lead us around the valley, but rather walks with us through the valley. God's strength is not a strength in avoidance of troubles, but a strength that protects like a rod and a staff, that provides like a feast in front of our troubles, till our cups overflow with support.

Luther says, "*We pray in this petition, as in a summary, that our Father in heaven would deliver us from all manner of evil, of body and soul, property and honor, and at last, when our last hour shall come, grant us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself into heaven.*"

Digest: We often think when bad happens that God has not protected us. Instead, God's protection according to Luther is deliverance. When we encounter trouble, God is with us to carry and walk with us, delivering with us, walking beside us. And even if death should take us, it is not the end. We are protected by a God that even death cannot hold.

Dessert: Have you ever heard, "God has a plan" when bad things happen to us? What do you think a person means by this? What is God's plan? Is it to make bad things happen to us to test us? If not, what is God's plan?

Digest: It is a theology of glory, a theology that does not honor the cross that wants to say God does bad things to us as a part of God's plan. But Luther trumpets the theology of the cross. God does not do bad things to us, but God DOES have a plan. It is not to help us avoid bad things, but to walk with us through the valley, through suffering, to new life. This is the whole point of the cross. God doesn't avoid death; God transforms it into something wholly (holy?) other. We receive grace and life when we think we have pain and death. God's protection is about walking with, not walking around.

Sending: The rhythm of prayer Jesus sets before is thus breaks down as thus:

God's Character: *God you are...*

God's Kingdom: *In your kingdom there is...*

God's Provision: *So today, I need...*

God's Forgiveness: *Forgive me for...*

God's Leadership: *Lead me to...*

God's Protection: *Save me from...*

When we pray this rhythm, this is the heart and character of Christ. For instance, if one were praying for a friend who was having trouble at work, the prayer might sound:

*God, you love to work. You made the world, and you remake every day (**Character**). You have invited us to be fruitful and given us a desire to be productive, just like you. (**Kingdom**) Give my friend joy in her work today, a renewed sense of patience, fruitfulness and focus. (**Provision**) Forgive us when our own stuff gets in the way of getting work done. And help us to forgive others when they cause us to stumble. (**Forgiveness**) Lead us to better ways in the work place, to help this become a place not just for work but also for joy in our work. (**Leadership**) Save us from cynicism, bitterness, and frustration that can easily take root. (**Protection**) We pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Take this rhythm with you this week. Try out this pattern of prayer. See how it focuses your prayer life and guides you in the steps toward greater understanding. Rather than trying to think about what you should pray for, listen to Jesus as he guides us to pray for God's Character, Kingdom, Provision, Forgiveness, Leadership, and Protection.

Close by having the leader open the table to prayer. They will simply say each petition then allow space for people to chime in with an answer.

Leader:

Hear us as we pray God. For God you are... (Let people share aloud or in their heart)

IN your kingdom there is... (Let people share aloud or in their heart)

Forgive us for... (Let people share aloud or in their heart)

Today we need... (Let people share aloud or in their heart)

Lead us to... (Let people share aloud or in their heart)

Protect us from... (Let people share aloud or in their heart)

For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen.