



LifeLight

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:4

Prayer

LEADERS GUIDE



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3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
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Manufactured in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11

Contents

Introducing the LifeLight Program		5
Session 1—Lecture Leader	Prayer's True Foundation	8
Session 2—Lecture Leader	Prayer's Liturgical Shape	12
Session 3—Lecture Leader	Prayer's True Power	17
Session 4—Lecture Leader	Prayer's Outcome: Thy Will Be Done	22
Session 5—Lecture Leader	Prayer's Nourishment for the Traveler	26
Session 6—Lecture Leader	Prayer's Reliance on Forgiveness	30
Session 7—Lecture Leader	Prayer's Battle against Our Enemies	35
Session 8—Lecture Leader	Prayer's Final Goal	39
Session 9—Lecture Leader	Amen: The Last Word?	44
.....		
Session 1—Small-Group Leader	Prayer's True Foundation	51
Session 2—Small-Group Leader	Prayer's Liturgical Shape	55
Session 3—Small-Group Leader	Prayer's True Power	59
Session 4—Small-Group Leader	Prayer's Outcome: Thy Will Be Done	63
Session 5—Small-Group Leader	Prayer's Nourishment for the Traveler	67
Session 6—Small-Group Leader	Prayer's Reliance on Forgiveness	71
Session 7—Small-Group Leader	Prayer's Battle against Our Enemies	75
Session 8—Small-Group Leader	Prayer's Final Goal	79
Session 9—Small-Group Leader	Amen: The Last Word?	83

Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership-team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership-team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (*optional*)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (**Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 8.**) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;

- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion leaders meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (*optional; the director may fill this role*)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership-team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (**Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 51.**) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than twelve participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (**see p. 51**);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;
- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;

- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week's work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week's lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week's assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of twelve or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week's study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lecture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business

may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). Those congregations may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study and Worship

Resources

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxx-cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Concordia Self-Study Bible, New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

The Concordia Organist. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). A 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.

Every Voice a Song Pipe Organ Accompaniment for 180 Hymns and Liturgy. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-1565). Use this music CD for worship hymn accompaniment.

Prayer's True Foundation

Selected Passages

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

Prayer is a common spiritual topic these days. Prayer is best seen primarily as a God-given gift bestowed upon the baptized Christian, and not a mere legalistic duty by which we can get what we want out of God. Jesus' own example provides us a valuable window into what He intends for our life of prayer.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. learn the baptismal ground and wellspring of prayer;
2. recognize prayer as a gift and privilege rooted in God's command; and
3. find the scriptural basis for confidence when they pray to the heavenly Father.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 51.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on p. 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the privilege of prayer. We dare to approach Your holy throne only because of Your command, promise, and encouragement. You have washed us in Holy Baptism, making us Your true children, conformed to the image of Your own dear Son. Grant us confident faith so that we may pray in Christ's name and fulfill our holy calling. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

1 Baptismal Foundation (Galatians 3:23–29; Hebrews 10:19–22)

You have embarked on a study of prayer. The journey will cover a good amount of familiar ground, because prayer is not just for the advanced, well-studied Christian. Right from the very beginning, a believer is taught by God's Word to pray. On the box of a board game called *Othello* is its simple slogan: "A minute to learn . . . a lifetime to master." While it may seem true that prayer is also an easy-to-learn skill, we find out early on that it is always a gift of God, a high privilege that is noble in its simplicity and all-encompassing as it penetrates into our life. The more you study it from God's Word, the more you realize how much you have to learn about prayer and how to pray. It truly takes a lifetime to master!

Prayer touches on every other topic of theology, but most especially does it rely on, and flow from, the doctrine of justification, which is the center of the Christian faith. This doctrine can be simply stated as this: God gives grace, blessings, and forgiveness to us all because of Jesus Christ and nothing else. Baptism is not an addendum to our justification. Instead, one's Baptism is the divinely bestowed moment when grace, blessings, and forgiveness become the certain possession of the lost and condemned person. This blessed sacrament also grants to the new believer the privilege to call upon the Lord in prayer. The washing of water and the Holy Spirit bestows an inheritance going back to Abraham, no matter whether you are Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female.

Here's how it does that: at Baptism, the triune name of God was placed upon you, along with all the mighty works and promises that He attaches to His name. You put on Christ as a garment, as Paul teaches (Galatians 3:27), and prayer is part of what you're getting all "dressed up" for. As you pray, the hand of the saving faith that has been created in your heart by the Holy Spirit takes hold of all the blessings and gifts that your Father gives to you through His Son. The regular practice of prayer puts all of the realities inherent in Baptism to work in your everyday life. Martin Luther was known to emphasize the present tense rather than the past when speaking of this sacrament: not "I *was* baptized," but instead, "I *am* baptized into Christ!"

So a Bible study on the topic of prayer will look in many respects like a study that covers sanctification, the Christian life, or the believer's journey this side of heaven—a journey guided by the instruction, forgiveness, and encouragement of the Lord. And since Baptism is where He not only got that all started for you, but also where He renews that love and forgiveness each day, it is fitting that Baptism would also be the beginning of prayer, as well as its constant fountain. Whether we've done it all our lives or are only recently getting back into the practice, through prayer we respond to the encouragement given us in Hebrews (10:22) that says, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean . . . and our bodies washed with pure water."

2 Joining the Royal Priesthood (1 Peter 1:3–9; 2:9; Exodus 19:5–6)

As we look a little closer into the privilege of prayer that is granted to us in Baptism, we find that this privilege indicates a new identity that we have received. Once, we were far away, separated from Christ and strangers to His promises. Now we have been brought near by His blood. That blood accomplished more for us than wiping our slate of sins clean; it also conferred upon us, in a certain manner of speaking, an ordination.

This "ordination," however, is different from the particular ceremony that publicly affirms a divine call and places a qualified man into the Office of the Holy Ministry. This "ordination" is intended for all people whom the Lord will call to faith in Christ, male or female, declaring the baptized to be a member of a royal priesthood. This new identity of the Christian as a priest is a significant part of the inheritance of which Paul spoke in Galatians 3. The Baptism liturgy (see *LSB*, p. 268) includes a part just before the signing of the cross where

the pastor asks for the name of the person about to be baptized. The pastor does not ask this because he has forgotten the name and needs a reminder; no, this ceremony is meant to explain what Baptism does for us. Our old identity, in which we were sold into slavery to sin, no longer defines us, for we have been transferred from the realm of darkness into the light of Christ.

You may be familiar with the biblical phrase "born again." Jesus used these words when He was explaining Baptism to Nicodemus in John 3, and it is the term that Peter writes in the opening words to his first epistle: (1:3) "He (the Father) has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus." Our Savior told the incredulous Nicodemus that he must experience this new birth in order to be saved; Peter emphasizes that it is totally the merciful work of God, completed in full for all people because Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead, and this birth is accomplished in the Christian as a gift of the Holy Spirit in Baptism. The "again" in "born again" is the Greek word *anōthen*, which can also be translated "from above." Thus, the new birth is a new identity that comes to us from above, that is, solely from God Himself, without a prior requirement placed on us.

Along with the new identity comes a new calling, a holy vocation that befits the Christian as a royal priest. What did priests do in the Old Testament? They offered the sacrifices that the Lord specified; they interceded with God for the sake of His people; they were the go-betweens, possessing direct access to the throne of grace, which is the specific, promised location of almighty God's merciful presence. Of course, only one, the high priest, could once a year, on the Day of Atonement, walk between the overlapped curtains and sprinkle the blood on the cover of the ark, or mercy seat. But as Hebrews teaches, Christ has now done that task in full reality, achieving full atonement for all people, with no further need for repetition, and has bestowed His priestly go-between role upon all baptized believers, who are His priests. The sacrifices we offer do not involve animals; instead, we offer our very lives in service to Christ in our neighbor, and that includes praying for their every need, commending them directly to our heavenly Father.

3 Example of John and Jesus (Luke 11:1; John 3:25–31)

John the Baptist had a supporting role leading up to the grand entrance of the main character, Jesus the promised Messiah, the long-awaited Savior. He takes center stage in the season of Advent, complete in his signature

costume of camel's hair and also in his eccentric diet of locusts and wild honey. Before they even hear a word, John's audience is captivated! Then he begins to speak his message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Thus he fulfills Isaiah's prophecy that refers to him as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'"

There are several things John did in his ministry to prepare God's people for the Christ. First among them, of course, would be his baptizing. The hearers confessed their sins and received forgiveness in and with the water applied by John's hand. When he told the crowds (including those whom he called a "brood of vipers") to produce fruit in keeping with repentance, he also instructed them as to their various life vocations. Depending on their calling, their new life of faith would take shape in a way that was tailor-made to the specific people whom they would serve or over whom God gave them authority. Tax collectors received a different answer to the question "What shall we do?" than did soldiers. John would make it clear that mercy toward one's neighbor is the ethos of one who is baptized for repentance, waiting for the coming of Christ.

But there is one other notable thing that John the Baptist taught people, presumably also in preparation for Jesus' coming. It is revealed by one of Jesus' disciples, who up to this point must have observed Him keeping a regular prayer practice. He finally gathered enough courage to ask the Lord to teach them to pray, and he pointed out specifically that he would like to learn how to pray "as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1). The Bible is silent on the exact form and content of John's prayer instructions, but there may be a point to that. Perhaps that's in line with John's own statements: "(His) sandals I am not worthy to carry" (Matthew 3:11) and "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

John had taught his disciples to pray because prayer is built on God's gift of Baptism, and it grows from the life journey of repentance that Baptism initiates. Jesus taught His disciples to pray not simply because they watched and followed His example, and not because one of them pestered Him to do it. Rather, prayer to God the Father is a privilege unique to Jesus, and it was His good pleasure to share that privilege with us.

4 The Command to Pray (Psalm 50:14–15; Matthew 6:5–8; Luke 18:1–8)

"Is it a sin if we do not pray?" I was caught flat-footed one Sunday morning with that question, just as the

Divine Service was about to begin. There was no time for me to get out a good answer right then and there. I did not know from what perspective this question was asked. To me, it plopped in my lap right out of the blue.

Perhaps the sticky word in that question is "sin." When you talk about sin, you talk about the Law. You talk about punishments for breaking God's commandments. You depict the Lord acting in His "alien work," with His gavel raised, ready to hand down a relentless punishment. In dealing with the Law, there is no room to consider a loving, heavenly Father. That's part of the reason why I choked on that question.

How can threats, punishments, and condemnations be attached to a gift as precious as prayer? Wouldn't it be better to encourage people to pray by emphasizing its blessings, rather than by cajoling them with a negative attitude, raising the specter of sin if Christians don't do their duty? When a Christian prays, he is certainly not performing a work that saves him or improves his standing before God. A quick glance at Reformation history should render that fact unmistakable. Given what we've studied so far about prayer, it would be far better to consider it in light of the Gospel. Yet we hear about God's command to pray. What do we make of that?

Consider how Scripture answers this fundamental question in connection with the divine institution of Baptism. Christ Himself gave the command, (Matthew 28:19) "Go . . . make disciples . . . [by] baptizing." He laid out the simple fact that "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). When Paul was converted, he recalled Ananias linking together the commands to be baptized and to pray: (Acts 22:16) "Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name." These words may sound like a demand is being placed on us, until you hear the benefits of Baptism: "born of water and the Spirit"; "washing of regeneration"; "He saved us"; "He chose us"; "you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"; "this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God"; "the promise is for you and for your children . . . everyone whom the Lord our God calls" (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 1:4; Acts 2:38; Ephesians 2:8; Acts 2:39). Baptism is all about receiving a gift *passively*, without any prior works or requirements. Prayer, likewise, can be approached in the same way.

The command to pray is not to place another impossible burden on the Christian's shoulders; it is rather the other way around: it's God at work, setting up His divinely ordained avenue to cast our burdens on Him. His command is in place to ensure that prayer as His gift

to us will not ever be taken away. The hammer comes down not on us, but on the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, the enemies who do not want us to pray and who do not want God's will to be done. "Call upon Me in the day of trouble"; "ask, and you will receive"; "intercessions . . . be made for all people"; "pray without ceasing"; "let your requests be made known to God"; "come to Me . . . and I will give you rest" (Psalm 50:15; John 16:24; 1 Timothy 2:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Philippians 4:6; Matthew 11:28). These are all commands, but they are rich in the Gospel. Just as the command to baptize is a command to let the Good News of salvation be personally applied to people young or old, whether they look like you or not, so prayer is commanded to remove all doubt that your loving, heavenly Father would love for you to talk to Him at any time.

Is it a sin to spit in God's face and say that He can have His blessing because we want nothing of it? Absolutely—that's an expression of utter unbelief, just as it would be a sin to despise Baptism. Then in that case, the Law must condemn. But if you were given a million-dollar check, after you recover from fainting would you make a big deal about how you had to sign that check and how much of an effort it was to obey the bank's requirement and scribble your name on the back? Of course not! How much sillier it is to talk about the extent of our obedience when it comes to the infinitely valuable gift of prayer!

5 God's Promise to Hear (Luke 11:9–13; Psalm 91; Philippians 4:19)

It's pretty common knowledge all around Protestant Christianity that we don't pray to the saints. What some people are surprised to hear is that the reason that saints are not invoked has to do with more than just idolatry. It's pretty easy to draw the line from "You shall have no other gods" to rule out the act of prayer to anyone but the Holy Trinity. We should obey this commandment with all our heart so we do not bring the Lord's just judgment on our heads. But that's only the Law reason why we don't pray to the saints. In true Lutheran fashion, we must also see what the Gospel has to say about it.

The Augsburg Confession of 1530 says it very well: "Our churches teach that the history of saints may be set before us so that we may follow the example of their faith and good works, according to our calling. . . . But the Scriptures do not teach that we are to call on the saints or to ask the saints for help. Scripture sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Atoning Sacrifice,

High Priest, and Intercessor [1 Timothy 2:5–6]. He is to be prayed to. He has promised that He will hear our prayer" (XXI 1–3 in *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, second edition [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006]).

The point here is this: God has provided a great and all-encompassing promise to hear and answer prayer. Prayer to Him is so all-sufficient that one does not need to look to saints or any other source for help and comfort. The Christian finds all he needs in Jesus Christ the Savior and in everything that He has done for us. Our heavenly Father is pleased to hear His children call upon Him, and He will deliver according to His rich promises.

Jesus argues from the lesser to the greater in Luke 11:11–13: "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent . . . ? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" We earthly parents couldn't presume to love our children to a greater extent than God the Father does; in comparison to His perfect holiness, we are nothing but evil. Yet we still obey our God-given instinct to give good things to our little ones, and that assures us that He will respond to our prayers with all the more love and compassion. We are confident He truly will supply our every need according to His riches in glory in Christ.

Conclusion

Prayer is based on Baptism. It is a gift bestowed along with all the other privileges that are granted to the Christian as a royal priest. The Lord's command to pray is best understood as an act of grace coupled with His promise to hear our prayer.

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 2.

Prayer's Liturgical Shape

Selected Passages

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

This lesson will explore the rich treasure that a liturgical heritage brings to prayer. From psalms to catechism to the Sunday Divine Service and the seasons of the Church Year, we have a wealth of material from which we can construct our own daily prayer routine.

Objectives

That participants, led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word, will

1. analyze and employ the historic liturgy's collect structure;
2. utilize the Psalter for prayer's structure and content; and
3. construct a daily prayer practice that stems from the Church's worship life together.

Note for the small-group leaders: Lesson notes and other materials you will need begin on page 55.

For the Lecture Leader

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Service Book* or *Lutheran Worship* (refer to hymnal index). (Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *The Concordia Organist*. All the initial worship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on p. 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

O Holy Spirit, You call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the Church, keeping us united in the faith. Grant that the words You teach us in worship would guide our prayers wherever we may be, for we acknowledge by faith that these are the divine words of life. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

1 Prayers at Church: Collects (Psalm 122; Acts 2:42; Ephesians 5:19–20)

The faithful heart rejoices to set foot in the Lord's house of worship. Whether it is the Hebrew pilgrim of ancient days making the yearly ascent to the holy temple in Jerusalem or our congregation's newest member, each one declares his or her inmost song in the words of Psalm 122: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!'" And what is it that makes you glad? More than the friends, the coffee, the donuts, or even the great hymns, there is Almighty God, the One who gathers you together as His Church to receive blessings from His shining face.

After Peter gave his sermon at Pentecost in the second chapter of Acts, Luke describes a busy, active Church, with believers going about the activities commanded them by their Lord. "The prayers" in Acts 2:42 suggest certain learned prayers or petitions. The Psalms themselves had been used for centuries even prior to this point, and other liturgical recitations are evident among the earliest Christians. For instance, consider Philippians 2:6–11 or 1 Timothy 3:16 (some say these are creedal fragments; others believe they were early hymns or even possibly the "spiritual songs" mentioned in Ephesians 5:19). Then as now, prayers were not only private moments with God, using words that come spontaneously from the heart (you may have heard of the Latin term *ex corde*), but the prayers were also finely crafted liturgical gems offered by the congregation in public worship.

A specific form of structured prayer that is used in the Divine Service and at other times of public congrega-

tional gathering is called the collect (KAH-lekt). The Collect for the Day is the prayer that was designed to fit with the Propers, that is, the Scripture readings and other variable portions of the service that are assigned by the Church Year calendar or lectionary for each particular Sunday or festival day. True to its name, this liturgical prayer in a way “collects” together in one central idea all the themes, emphases, and divine gifts that the Scripture readings are proclaiming that day, and then makes a request of the Lord on the basis of that one main point. Take notice of the Collect for the Day, and you might receive significant assistance in retaining something truly meaningful that you can take home with you after church.

When you hear the pastor pray a collect on behalf of all (and when praying along with him, of course), listen for the five distinct elements found in collects: [*this may be written on a board, if available*]

1. **God’s Name**—a scriptural name that God has ascribed to Himself and bids us to use when we call upon Him in prayer. Most collects are prayed to the Father. However, since in the Trinity no person is greater or less than another, addressing a prayer to the Son, the Holy Spirit, or God in His triune nature is also appropriate.
2. **Reason**—a scriptural promise or deed that the Lord has provided us as a rationale for us to approach Him in this particular prayer. This part of the collect format teaches us very clearly that we ask for what He has already provided or guaranteed, and it strengthens the Christian’s confidence to stand before His throne.
3. **Petition**—the request that is clearly stated as the heart of the collect. Since the collect is drawn from Scripture, this request is in accord with God’s will rather than our own.
4. **Result**—related to the last two elements, this is sometimes introduced with “so that . . .” It says what we can expect will happen when our heavenly Father performs that for which the petition asks. Sometimes the reason or result elements are left implied in the collect.
5. **Termination**—a conclusion to the prayer, often using the words “through Jesus Christ our Lord,” which recalls the promise of Jesus in John 16:23. The “full termination” of a collect is an ascription of praise to Christ, who, following His resurrection, lives and reigns now and forever as one God together with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

2 The Church Year and Prayer (Psalm 77:10–15; Deuteronomy 5:15; Matthew 12:6–8)

The Church’s yearly liturgical cycle has Sunday as its most basic building block. Called the “first day of the week” in the Easter Gospel narratives, Sunday serves as a continuing weekly proclamation of the resurrection of our Lord, no matter what time of the year it is. The Third Commandment may say “Remember the Sabbath day,” but its meaning in the Catechism clarifies that no day of worship is absolutely required, but rather that we hold God’s Word sacred and not despise the preaching of the Gospel. That being said, there are still very good reasons why Sunday should retain its traditional, honored place as the day of Christ’s visit among us in Word and Sacrament.

As mentioned earlier, for each Sunday, the liturgical schedule of readings, or lectionary, gives specific readings from the Psalms, another Old Testament book, an Epistle, and one of the four Gospel books. The last selection is given a certain prominence in the Sunday Divine Service in that the Holy Gospel consists of words spoken from the mouth of Jesus Christ Himself, or a narrative describing one of the events in His incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection that has been handed down to us by those whom the Holy Spirit inspired. The theme that is drawn from these Scripture readings sets the tone not only for the Sunday service but also for the devotional and prayer life of God’s people as they go forth during the rest of the week to their homes and vocations.

The weekly rhythm of Sundays receives further shape and direction when combined with the various Church Year seasons. The central themes of Christ’s person and work, namely His incarnation, death, and resurrection, are highlighted in the two highest festival seasons of the year, Christmas and Easter. I say they are festival *seasons* because it takes more than a single observance to get in all that the corresponding theme has to offer. Prayers of the faithful can include the specific emphases that are brought forward by the different seasons and their lectionary readings. Here is where the Collect for the Day that is particular to each Sunday and festival day in the Church Year can be quite practical: this portion of the Divine Service liturgy conveniently supplies that theme upon which other prayers may be built.

The Christmas and Epiphany seasons link the great miracle of the Word made flesh to His continuing life in and

with the Church, all the while heralding the continual spread of the Gospel to all nations. In the Easter season, the focus is on the hidden glory of our Lord's crucifixion, His magnificent triumph over death, and the promise of our own resurrection of the flesh on the Last Day. Advent and Lent each serve in their own unique ways as penitential seasons in which we prepare for the joyous upcoming feast with a time of intense study of God's Word, confession of our sin, and prayer. The Pentecost season, or Time of the Church, is designed for the Christian to draw strength from both the person and work of Jesus for a life of faith and prayer. There are countless occasions and opportunities to pray, thanks to the variety of the whole counsel of God that is preached during the seasons of the Church Year.

3 Psalms—the Bible's Prayers (Psalm 98:1–3; Colossians 3:16)

The apostle Paul literally commands the indwelling of the Word of Christ among the Christians in Colossae. Together with the necessary teaching and admonishing in all wisdom, he is eager to include singing God's Word in three distinct forms as the desired outward signs of its taking up residence in the believers' hearts. And of those three forms of singing mentioned, the Psalms take first place. As the Bible's own collection of prayers, the Psalter (or Book of Psalms) should receive special consideration as we consider in depth the topic of prayer. Whether you sing or chant a psalm following an intricate tune, speak it back and forth to one another, or silently pray and meditate on just a few of its words, these inspired prayers will prove their value to you over and over, no matter what your age, mood, background, or experience in faith may be.

The Psalms are poetry, and the main feature that most of them possess is a kind of "rhyme." But rather than matching sounds like the poetry to which we are typically accustomed, these divinely inspired masterpieces employ a rhyming of ideas known as parallelism. One line expresses a thought, and the next line repeats that same thought in similar or inverted words. Or it might strengthen or extend the thought; or even state an opposite or inverse thought than that of the preceding line. Other psalms, most notably Psalm 136, have a constantly repeating response line that is sung in a back-and-forth (or antiphonal) fashion. Parallelism is the perfect format for scriptural poetry because, as author C. S. Lewis pointed out, this feature does not drop out once you translate the psalm into another language. They may have originated in Hebrew, but the Psalms

keep their basic literary feature intact, no matter what language is used when they are prayed. Take a look at Psalm 98, for instance, and see how in verse 2 the second line repeats and expands upon the first.

When using psalms for meditation and prayer, in addition to noting the parallel thoughts, you could also look for various genres, or types, of psalms and how they were employed in the prayers and worship of ancient Israel. Psalms of praise, such as 148, are joyful songs to the Lord for certain works that He has done. There are also worship or liturgy psalms, such as 24, and the "Songs of Ascents" (120–134), which bring the faithful confession of God's people together over many centuries. The psalms of lament, such as 77, are valuable prayers that the Christian may pray when oppressed by trials and the cross. A little stronger still are a few psalms of imprecation, most notably 137, which may make us squirm a little when we hear them today, but are probably best explained in light of Romans 12:19: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Psalms of comfort, such as the popular Twenty-third Psalm, encourage us to rest secure in the everlasting peace of Christ, our Savior. There are also psalms that are appropriate for morning (5), evening (141), and personal confession (51). You may find other suggestions in your devotional materials for psalms to sing and pray; or, just as well, you could work your way through all 150 of them!

For millennia, the Psalms have been the prayers of God's people in all situations, the pinnacle of sacred poetry, and the faithful companion for the distraught when all other words had seemed worthless. Your Lord has preserved for you an inestimable treasure, found right in the middle of your Bible!

4 Using the Bible and the Catechism for Prayer (2 Timothy 3:14–17; Psalm 119:164)

Prayer is talking to God. No doubt you've heard that. But it may surprise you that God's chosen means of talking to us can easily be neglected when it comes to prayer. We have already found that prayer has its foundation in the promises of God our heavenly Father, and that our motivation to pray is born from our status in His kingdom as baptized royal priests. There is nowhere else that we can find these promises tied to the mighty acts of God for us than in the Scriptures. The psalmist writes that he praises the Lord seven times a day (119:164), not because it is a drudgery, or on account of some requirement laid upon him, but because he has discovered within God's "righteous rules" the precious

Gospel that gives him life, salvation, and comfort.

So, since the Bible is sufficient and profitable so that we may be “competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17), which would include prayer, what role would the Catechism play? The Catechism simply teaches Scripture according to Scripture. It repeats for us what the Bible itself considers to be its most significant and foundational teachings. The explanations of main parts such as the Ten Commandments and the Creed are just as useful to induce prayer as the meanings of the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. Luther himself admitted to praying the Catechism, studying it, and repeating it word for word just like a child, along with psalms and well-known verses that he could recite by heart. So that’s why confirmation class had all that memorization—it is intended as a prayer resource!

Martin Luther was no disconnected, ivory-tower-style theologian. He genuinely loved the people who heard his teaching and instruction. In an excellent tract written by Luther as a response to a request by none other than his barber, “Master” Peter Beskendorf, the great reformer explained in detail how he disciplined himself to pray while studying Scripture. (This tract can be found in *Luther’s Works*, the American Edition, vol. 43, pp. 193–211.) You can’t help but smile when reading how Luther connects the concentration that is necessary for a barber to cut hair to the same close attention that is needed while praying.

In this letter to Master Peter, Luther begins with the Catechism, picking out one specific point that it teaches and then building a four-stranded prayer upon it. He first asks, What does this piece of scriptural truth teach me? Then he offers thanks to God for His gifts that are inherent in this truth. Following that, he says, the Christian ought to confess his sin of unbelief in thoughts, words, or deeds in relation to the topic at hand. Luther’s fourth strand of prayer is to offer a request to the Lord based on that teaching.

Taking the example of the Fourth Commandment, we begin Luther’s four strands by noting that we are taught in this part of the Catechism to honor our father and mother. Specifically, we could meditate on the word *honor* as an additional requirement to simple obedience. We then thank God for the gift of parents and authorities and the high honor we have to be graced with such a blessing from His hand. As a confession, we could pour out before the Lord that we have taken our parents for granted or despised them so that they were dishonored by what we did or neglected to do. Confi-

dent in our heavenly Father’s forgiveness freely given in Christ, we would then, in the fourth strand, offer our request that God would help us keep this commandment in the various ways through which we can demonstrate honor to the authorities the Lord has placed over us. Since Luther’s time, there has emerged a very close parallel prayer structure to this, using the widely-known acronym ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Whichever order you choose, with a little practice, you could begin with the Catechism and easily move to any article of doctrine that you find in the Bible.

5 Putting Together a Daily Prayer Discipline (2 Samuel 24:24–25; Daniel 6:10; Jude 20–21)

All right. You can talk until you’re blue in the face about how important prayer is, and you can discuss several ideas and forms for prayer. But in the end, it gets down to this: how do I get started, and how do I keep going in the exercise of prayer in my life? Whatever devotional resource that you consult, the important thing to look for first is a lectionary that is easy to follow. The Scripture readings, whether they skip around or go straight through the books in order, should incorporate a balance of books from different parts of the Bible. Don’t forget to include the Psalter, with all the various prayers and praises that you can find there.

Another important matter is choosing a time to pray. It may be first thing in the morning, or just before bed, but it needs to be made a part of your regular routine, unique to yourself. Distractions, even cultural “staples” like television and the Internet, must be minimized. Don’t be afraid to build up slowly your time allotted, or to try various strategies and resources, as long as you are directed to the Shepherd’s green pastures and cool-water springs of His Word. One time you could devote your time to a simple reading and prayer by yourself, as Jesus suggests in Matthew 6:6. Another time, you might find it more appropriate to sing a hymn with your family and review with them in prayer and mutual confession and consolation the activities of the day.

You could review other parts of the Sunday liturgy, such as the Collect for the Day or the special petitions of the Prayer of the Church; include in your own prayers the people whose needs are brought before the Lord at your congregation’s altar. When another Sunday approaches, you could prepare by reading the Scripture lessons that will shape the theme of that Divine Service. Choose something to do and stick to it for a while, to

see how it works. Should you keep a journal? Perhaps, and it's worth trying out for yourself, but if writing is not a particular gift of yours, the rigor may discourage rather than invigorate, which is its true intent. Just like putting together an exercise routine, a prayer discipline takes work, but it's worth it. Keep in mind Luther's advice that to prepare for an especially busy day, one must pray more rather than less, and realize that, since we often have the opposite inclination, we must have plenty more to learn about in the realm of prayer discipline.

Conclusion

The liturgical resources for prayer are endless and can seem a little daunting. The Psalms, Catechism, and Scripture readings from the Church Year lectionary serve as excellent starting points. Various suggested structures for prayer abound, but we looked in depth at two tried-and-true possibilities. [*Perhaps you could share with your group some ideas for prayer that you have found helpful.*]

Concluding Activities

Conclude the session with an appropriate prayer and distribute the study leaflet for week 3.