

Background Information

Prayer is a beautifully messy part of the life of faith. Praying as a group, we might get tripped up by the language and patterns of words not our own. Praying alone, we might fall into praying for what we think we need rather than what God longs to give us. So we pray as a community learning the language of faith and being continually invited into ways to speak our deepest longings to God. Each moment of prayer is a little sabbath within our ordinary routine, a moment for rest and reconciliation with God.

As Lutherans, we are offered the gift of Martin Luther's daily prayers 500 years after he wrote them we sometimes miss that these prayers were revolutionary for the church of Luther's day. At this time the prayers of priests, monks, and nuns were considered somehow holier than the prayers of common folk. Luther rejected this idea, focusing his prayer guides, not on monastic settings but on ordinary life. Prayer is for everyone, so his prayers were oriented around things everyone does waking, eating and sleeping. This was a huge turnaround.

Find Luther's Prayers in your Small Catechism and read them through. Luther's daily prayers reflect and rely on the Lord's prayer. In both, we do the following:

- Give thanks and praise to God
- Confess our need for God, the source of all we need
- Ask for forgiveness
- Ask for our daily
- Ask for protection from evil
- Offer ourselves for God's work

Luther's prayers invite us into the practice and pattern of prayer, giving us a form and a language to continue our own prayer lives in a multitude of ways.

Here's what you need to know

Prayer is a call for radical transformation. Luther's prayers don't ask for what we want but for what we need. We ask for a spirit of gratitude, for forgiveness, for daily bread, for protection from evil, and for help surrendering ourselves to God. This is radical! It's far more than a Christian wish list. It's the life of faith lived out, the reliance on God's grace put into practice. But prayer isn't a demand. Daily prayers don't make you more righteous or more saved. God Grant sauce abundant grace because God loves us 1st and it's in joyful response to god's love that we begin the practice of prayer

Like the Lord's prayer, Luther's prayers function as a language lab for speaking faithfully to and about God. We first learn the basics of the language as babies, and if we learn a foreign language as children or adults, we begin with the initial building blocks of words in conversation. In the same way, Luther's prayers teach us how to shape our words so that we truly rely on God. When we practice these prayers, they actually shape our thinking and our understanding of the world, helping us become more fluent in the language of faith.

Prayer takes practice. The radical transformation of the Christian life doesn't just happen to us. Like learning to play an instrument, prayer allows us to practice some relatively simple parts until more complex structures come easily to us. Like a musical scale upon which all music is built, prayer helps us gain a kind of conversational memory that is put to use throughout our lives. When life puts us at a loss, these words bubble up from inside of us to bring us peace.

Prayer goes two ways. Daily prayers, such as those Luther wrote, are our words to God. But prayer is meant to be a channel of communication, awakening us to God's presence in our lives and in the world. The

language of prayer can become a new set of glasses, opening our eyes to the work of God and our calling in that work.

The mechanics of prayer. Some people insist on a posture for prayer, such as kneeling. Some people insist on a particular place for prayer (Matthew 6:6). Some require folded hands, just so. Some insist that there is a particular pattern to prayer. We will discuss all this in class, but be thinking about it this week.

Essay Questions

Write 150 words per each assignment below:

Answer the following:

- 1) Do you pray? Tell me about when you pray (i.e., morning, meals, bedtime, as a family, individually, etc.) Are your prayers memorized prayers at the table or at bedtime? Do you pray at meals in restaurants? Are you embarrassed to pray out loud? In public? Do your friends know you pray?

Answer one of the following two:

- 2) Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. What do you imagine it looks like to pray without ceasing? When would it be difficult to rejoice?
- 3) Read Matthew 6:9-13. You may recall our class session on the Lord's Prayer. How does the Lord's Prayer help us pray as we should?

Answer two of the following three:

- 4) List as many of the times that we pray during a worship service. What does this say about our worship practice?
- 5) Speaking of the Prayer of the Day that we use in worship, why is important to know that we share these prayers with people around the world throughout the history of the Church.

- 6) Jesus taught his disciples to pray, and he also went off alone and prayed by himself. Which is easier – community prayer or individual prayer? Why do you prefer the one you do?