

## LESSON 7: Prayer Is Listening



REFERENCE

Page 166 [KNOWLEDGE,  
UNDERSTANDING & INSIGHT]



### WHAT YOU NEED

- (1)(2) CD/tape Player & CD/tape or poem
- (3) Objects from Nature
- (5) LSM: 'Prayer is Listening'

### AIMS

- To help learners understand that prayer is not only talking, but listening too
- To help learners develop the ability to listen to God

### OUTCOMES

- KUI Learners understand that prayer includes listening as well as talking to God.
- SKL Learners develop their listening skills.

### TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson aims to help learners understand that prayer involves both talking and listening. Remind them that in Grade 9 they 'listened' to God speaking to them through Scripture. Keep the first listening exercises as brief as possible. The exercise of listening to a song could be replaced by listening to a short poem. The main part of the lesson is listening to the objects from nature; so if your time is limited, use only one of the listening exercises before the main part. This lesson is based on Richard Reichert. 1975. 'What Did He Say?' in *Simulation Games for Religious Education*. Winona: St Mary's Press, p 64-67.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### I Listening to Words

- i Begin the lesson by telling the learners that you are going to test their listening skills. Use the tape or CD player or poem for this session on listening.
- ii Choose any word from the song or poem you would like learners to keep track of in order to find out how many times it occurs in the song or poem.
- iii Inform them that as the song is playing or as you are reading the poem they are to keep track of the number of times the word "the" (or any other frequently used word or two words) occurs in the song or poem. They are to do this in silence without consulting a classmate. Note that it is important for you as a teacher to have listened to the song before the lesson or read the poem.
- iv As soon as the learners are clear about what is expected of them, play the song. As the song is playing, tell them to write down on a blank sheet the number of times they heard the word.
- v Play the song a second time or read the poem again, giving them the chance to double check.
- vi After the second playing or reading, ask them to write down their final answer.

- vii Invite a few of them to give the results of the listening exercise. Compare these with the exact number which you determined by checking a written copy of the words or by having listened to it yourself prior to the lesson.
- viii Comment appropriately on how many were correct, incorrect, changed their answers and so on.

## 2 Listening to Moods and Attitudes

- i Tell the learners that in this section of the lesson you are going to test their listening skills on another level.
- ii Ask them to listen to the same song again or read the same poem to attempt to determine the predominant mood or attitude of the writer of the song or poem you have chosen, i.e. what he /she is trying to say most of all.
- iii Play the song and ask the learners to jot down their opinions as it plays. Or read the poem and as you are reading the poem ask the learners to jot down their opinions.
- iv Ask for their conclusions and allow a little time for discussion.

## 3 Listening to Objects

- i Tell the learners that in this section you are going to help them understand that God speaks to us in many ways, especially through his own creation.
- ii Pass out the objects from nature, which you have collected before this lesson.
- iii Tell the learners to 'listen' to it in silence; by touching it, looking at it, smelling it, tasting it, and in other ways examining it. Emphasise that all the time they are to ask themselves what God is saying about himself by having created this object. (Note that it is absolutely necessary to encourage a silent, prayerful attitude during this form of listening and allow them sufficient time to become reflective.)

## 4 Feedback

Ask for reactions using some of the following questions:

- For you, what does God say most loudly by means of this object?
- Did you feel foolish 'listening' to the object? How do you feel now? Is it really that foolish?
- Can you think of any other objects from nature that seem to speak loudly about God? What do they say? Do you take much time to listen to them?
- What is really involved in this kind of listening? What are some of the things that could prevent us from listening in this way?
- Do you think it is safe to describe what we have been doing as a form of prayer? If this is prayer, do you think it is important or one you could learn to enjoy?
- If we truly listen to one another, can we say it is like praying to one another? What would happen to relationships if people learned to 'pray' to each other in this way?
- Do you think that God can speak to us through other people? How real is it to say that by listening to others – parents, friends, teachers, even strangers – we will often be listening to and praying to God?

## 5 Reflective Reading

- i Provide each learner with the Lesson Materials page 'Prayer is Listening'.
- ii Ask them to read it individually.
- iii Invite them to comment on what they have just read.

## 6 Conclusion

Suggest that the learners try to practice 'prayer as listening' before the next lesson. Ask them to be attentive to the ways that God may be speaking to them, and to what God might be saying.

## OTHER IDEAS

### 7 Listening to Jesus' Message

- i Read Luke 15: 11- 32 – the parable of the Prodigal Son.
- ii Tell the learners that as you read, their task is to determine how many distinct persons are mentioned in the parable.
- iii Ask for results and compare them to the actual number (five). Make comments about the accuracy and the difficulty of listening even though we are attentive.
- iv Re-read the parable asking the learners to listen now for the message that Jesus, the teller of the story, wanted to get across. (He was stressing the narrow-mindedness of the elder son more than the sin of the younger son, and the mercy and compassion of the Father.)
- v Conclude with some comment or discussion on how important it is to listen attentively to what others are saying, and especially God.

### MATERIALS

#### LEARNERS

- Michael Burke. 1991. 'Things that block prayer' 132 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p 133
- CIE. 2005. 'Prayer is Listening'



## Lesson Materials



### Prayer Is Listening

God speaks to us in many ways

- through Scripture, especially through the person of Jesus
- through the Church – its beliefs and actions, and the lives of its members past and present
- through all people – their goodness, wisdom, encouragement, and concern
- through the events of our lives
- through nature which God has made

Prayer is the expression of a love-relationship

- wanting to be-with
- wanting to read letters from
- wanting to do things together
- wanting to listen to
- wanting to share with, to talk to

Prayer is a decision

- especially when we feel dry and unable, we can still decide to pray
- to try to pray, is praying

The signs of true prayer are:

- sincerity
- devotion
- confidence
- perseverance
- frequency

The basic blocks to our listening to God are our own problems

- negative emotions: anger and fear (we cannot pray with closed fists, only with open hands)
- poor self-image: "I'm not good enough to pray"
- false God-image: not seeing God as "Abba" (= 'Daddy')
- superiority/pride: "I don't really need God"
- time: "I'm too busy to pray"
- distraction: "I'm too preoccupied to pray"
- indiscipline: "I don't often *feel* like praying"

(Michael Burke. 1991. 'Things that block prayer' 132 in *Connections*. Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p 133)

## LESSON 8: Centering Prayer



REFERENCE

Page 166 [KUI], 168 [EXP]



### WHAT YOU NEED

- (2) TSM: 'Doodle Prayer'
- (3) Sweets
- (3) CD Player & CD
- (3) Stick of Incense & matches
- (3) TSM: 'Centering Prayer'

### AIMS

- To help learners understand that their centre is a meeting place with God, and to open them to experiencing such a meeting

### OUTCOMES

- KUI Learners understand that God dwells at the centre of their being.
- EXP Learners exercise getting in touch with God-at-their-centre

### TEACHER'S NOTE

There are two parts to this lesson. In the first part learners experience 'doodling' (casual abstract scribbling) and they interpret their 'doodles' as prayer. In the second part, centering prayer, the learners sit quietly and seek God at their centre. Explain at the end of the lesson that these are two very different ways of praying. If your learners are comfortable with long periods of silence, or if time is very limited, the 'doodle' prayer section could be left out. The music you play during the centering experience should be quiet instrumental music that learners cannot hum along with – i.e. music probably not known to them. Many teachers of prayer recommend that one sits with the back straight (to ensure oxygen-flow), head tilted slightly forward, eyes closed or softly 'fixed' on a single point of focus, shoulders relaxed, legs uncrossed, and generally relaxed, but not too relaxed. However, you may decide to allow the learners this opportunity to try out different postures. Many children prefer sitting on the floor rather than in an upright position in a chair.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### 1 Introduction

Recall, with the help of the learners, that you have been working with various approaches to, and forms of, prayer – for instance, 'listening prayer' and 'breathing prayer'. In this lesson they will explore further forms.

#### 2 Doodle Prayer

If you have decided to do this activity with the class, then follow the process on the Lesson Materials page 'Doodle Prayer'. You could use this exercise as a starter.

#### 3 Centering

Let the learners know that they will be entering a time of meditation called centering prayer. They may have experienced this kind of prayer before. However, in 'centering prayer' each participant looks inside themselves for that 'centre', 'core', 'point' at which they are able to recognise themselves as being made in the image of God. Suggest that it is there that

practitioners of centering prayer look for the indwelling of God. You will find the meditation on the Lesson Materials page 'Centering Prayer'

#### 4 Conclusion

If you were able to do both prayer types with your class, ask the learners to comment on their experiences with them:

- How did you find the two different prayer types?
- Which one can you relate to most easily and why?

Invite the learners to practice these prayer forms, particularly the one they found most difficult, and to note their experiences with them.

### OTHER IDEAS

#### 5 History and Practice

You may want to explore with the learners some of the history and practice of centering prayer. Here is an excerpt from the Wikipedia website:

Centering prayer is a popular method of contemplative prayer, placing a strong emphasis on interior quiet and the experience of God's presence. Though most authors trace its roots to the contemplative prayer of the Desert Fathers of early Christian monasticism of the 300s, to the *Lectio Divina* tradition of Benedictine monasticism, and to works like *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the writings of St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, its origins as part of the "Centering Prayer" movement in modern Catholicism and Christianity can be traced to several books published by three Trappist monks of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts in the 1970s: Fr. William Meninger, Fr. M. Basil Pennington and Abbot Thomas Keating.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centering\\_prayer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centering_prayer)

### MATERIALS

#### TEACHER

- Betsy Caprio. 1973. 'Doodle Prayer' in *Experiments in Prayer*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, p 88-90
- Dominic Baldwin. 1987. 'Centring' from *In Touch*. Hilton: Order of Preachers, p 62-65 (adapted and abridged)



## Lesson Materials



### Doodle Prayer

"Does anyone here doodle? . . . What does that mean? . . .

"Right. It's when you draw aimlessly, often while you're thinking about something else, or while you're talking on the phone. With your pencil and paper, try some doodling now. Don't try to draw a picture, just whatever comes to you in the way of designs or scribbles. . . .

*(Allow a couple of minutes, encourage class to keep at it. You doodle too.)*

"Next, I'm going to put some doodles on the board, and the funny thing about these doodles is that they can be 'triggers' for prayers. They started out as scribbles, and then took shape as prayer-reminders in someone's mind. See who can be the first to think up a prayer for this doodle  
*(Draw this on the board.)*

"What does that seem to suggest? . . .

*(a knot, a tangle)*



"And how about a prayer based on it? . . .

*(If you just get ideas, collect them, and ask if anyone can shape them into a prayer. You may have to come up with something like "Lord, sometimes I feel like I'm tied in a knot. When that happens, please help me to remember you.")*

'And here's another one. See who can think up a prayer from this doodle. . . .

*(on the board)*

Has anyone an idea? . . .

*(Possibly, "God, I'm going around in circles. Can you straighten me out?")*



"And here's a final doodle. Who can make up a prayer from this? ...



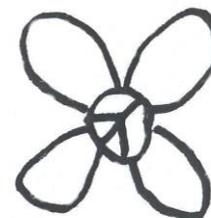
What does that suggest? . . . *(a wall, a fortress)*

Anyone for a prayer?

*(Such as "Father, you're the wall of strength in our lives. Please don't let us forget that." Of course, these doodles could suggest several other prayers as well, any of which you'll happily accept.)*

"Now, look at the papers you doodled on. What do you see in your doodles that might lead to a prayer idea? . . . Whoever finds something can come up and draw it on the board. We'll see if we can guess what you have in mind...

*(Reluctance may mean students are afraid they'll have to vocalize a prayer if they come up. You can assure them they need only share their doodles and ideas that you will provide the prayer if no one else wants to. Be sure to stop before each prayer to ask the class to pray with the pray-er.)*



"Why don't you all try this at home, and if you come up with anything good, bring it in for all of us?"

## Lesson Materials



### Centering Prayer

Distribute the sweets, and invite the learners to 'centre-down'. Switch on the quiet music to play quietly in the background. Then, lead the learners in the following meditation:

- Sit comfortably and quietly with your eyes closed and relax while you concentrate on the music ...
- Imagine God is calling: "Where are you?" ... You answer: "Here I am" ... You are the temple – the sanctuary – of God. Here (wherever it might be) is where you are IN TOUCH with God ...
- Become aware of your body ... your feet ... your legs ... your lower body ... your torso ... your arms ... your neck ... your head ... touch your head and face ... feel your ears ... eye ... nose ... mouth ... run your hands over your body repeating in you mind "Yahweh you have prepared a body for me" (Ps 40:6) ... Remain with this for a while reflecting on it.
- Now imagine your favourite rainbow colour ... imagine your body is filled with this colour, repeating in your mind as you do "Lord, that I might see" (Mark 10:15) ...
- Take your sweet and eat it slowly saying as you do: "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (Ps. 34:8) ... Remain with this for a while ...
- Become aware of the sounds around you and listen for a while to the music, repeating as you do: "Lord, your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:9) ...

*[Light the incense and give it a moment to diffuse through the air.]*

- Breathe in the scent of the incense, praying in your mind as you do: "Lord, may my prayer rise like incense before you" (Ps 141:2) ... Remain with this for a while ...
- Try to move into yourself ... to find your center is to find yourself – that point where you reach the 'nothingness' that is you and the 'all' that is God ... No matter how unworthy or inadequate you may feel, we have God's assurance, as he assured Moses, "I shall be with you" (Exodus 3:12) ...
- God has chosen you ... To be in touch with your centre is to be in touch with God's dwelling place. For God, the Word, became flesh and lived among us. God has entered our lives – our very flesh ...: "he will make his home among them; they shall be his people and he shall be their God; his name is God-with-them" (Rev. 21:4) ... Remain with God-within for a while ... Slowly become aware of your surroundings ... Open your eyes when you are ready.

## LESSON 9: Body Prayer



REFERENCE

Page 167 [SKL], 168 [EXP]



### WHAT YOU NEED

- (1) Suitable space

### AIMS

- To help learners discover how to put their bodies at the service of prayer

### OUTCOMES

- SKL Learners are able to pray with their bodies.

### TEACHER'S NOTE

In this activity learners will need the space and sufficient privacy to use bodily gestures as a way of expressing prayer. Thus, it is best done in a space large enough for the learners to stand in an 'outward-facing circle', with sufficient space between learners to accommodate arm movements – perhaps outdoors on a playing field. The activity could be preceded – or followed – with some discussion around the role of gesture in various religions. Perhaps some learners might be willing to explain and demonstrate – or even teach – some of these gestures or movements to the class.

Many learners may feel very uncomfortable doing this. But encourage all of them to participate as fully as they are able, and remind them that the outward-facing circle, together with a suggestion to close their eyes and to focus on their own movement, will give them sufficient private space to participate in the activity. You can lead the activity from the centre of the circle, but be sure to speak loudly and clearly enough for all to hear. If you can, participate in the exercise even as you lead it.

### LESSON OUTLINE

#### I Introduction

- i Take the learners to a space large enough to allow the learners to form an outward-facing circle.
- ii Explain to the learners that they are going to take part in a body prayer exercise; they are going to try to pray with their whole bodies much in the same way that liturgical dancers do. They should take this prayer seriously, concentrating on their own involvement and ignoring their classmates.
- iii If you have liturgical dancers in the group, ask one or two to give the class a brief demonstration of the gesture for "*I love you, God*" and "*Please forgive me*" etc. You might extend this to include some discussion and demonstration of gesture in two or three religions.

## 2 Body Prayer

- i Ask learners to spread out (preferably using an outward circle), to stand erect, to close their eyes and to become aware of their breathing. Use a breath-awareness activity to settle them.
- ii Then, introduce the body-prayer on these lines:
  - I will lead you in one form of body prayer, which invites us to express our offering of ourselves to God. We shall repeat this prayer-pattern 3 times. Then, I will name a sentiment (such as love, contrition, or thanks...) and we will try to express it, using whatever gestures or movements are most appropriate for us. We will repeat this for several sentiments. Finally, I will ask you to return to the position that this exercise begins with – the one I'm going to ask you to assume now.
  - Stand erect with your hands hanging at your side and your head bowed ... feel the warm sun ... the wind/breeze ... through your clothes ... on your skin ... become aware that you are in the presence of God ...
  - Very slowly raise your arms till they are stretched out in front of you, your arms parallel to the floor ... gently turn your hands so that your palms are facing upwards ... Now, slowly raise your head so that you are looking up at the sky (heaven) ... Slowly open your eyes ... gaze up at God in adoration ... hold this position for a while, then return to your original posture ...
  - *[Pause for a moment ... and then repeat the whole form twice more. You may need to remind the learners to focus on their movements, and to try to keep their minds clear of words.]*
  - Now, use your body express to God how much you love God ... Make your gestures very slowly ... be fully aware of your movements ... make sure that the movements and gestures express your sentiment ...
  - Use your body to ask God to forgive you or heal you emotionally ...
  - Use your body to express to God any other sentiment that you feel a need to express ...
  - Use your body to express to God how thankful you are for all God's blessings ...
  - Return to your original position, slowly lift your head and open your eyes ...
- iii Ask the learners to return to the classroom, or to gather in front of you. You might all sit down to briefly discuss this experience of prayer.

(Anthony De Mello. 1978. Exercise 9: 'Body Prayer' in *Sadhana: A Way to God*. Anand, India, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, p 37-41- adapted)

## 3 Conclusion

Ask the learners to evaluate this prayer experience. You can use the following questions to assist the learners in doing the evaluation:

- Did you feel like you were really praying?
- Was it very difficult /easy and why /not?
- How easy /difficult was it to ignore your classmates?
- Would a different setting make it easier? Where? Why?

Conclude the lesson by inviting the learners to practice this type of body prayer on their own and to reflect on their experience with this method.

## OTHER IDEAS

### 4 Exploring Forms of 'Body-prayer'

Invite the parish liturgical dance teacher to introduce the class to 'dance-prayer'. Or a Hindu or Buddhist parent might be willing to teach the learners one or two meditation postures and the

## GRADE 10 Prayer

significance of hand positions, for instance. A Hindu parent, with the help of some learners, may also be willing to teach the class a simple form of liturgical dance, one practiced by the community during worship at the temple on a particular occasion of celebration. You might also remind Catholic learners of the various gestures (genuflection, the sign of the cross, the signing that signals 'May the words of God be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart', and so on) used during worship. Explore which of these, if any, Christians from other churches might use. Extend this to include gestures and movements used in other religious traditions – the way a Jewish wife and mother will welcome the Sabbath into her home before the Sabbath meal, for instance. Or explore the postures that people of (any) faith typically assume for prayer.

### **MATERIALS**

- There are no further materials provided for this lesson.

