



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Thoughts and Prayers / Week 2

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

SERIES BOTTOM LINE

What would you say if you knew Jesus was actually listening?

GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students see the importance of the posture of their heart in prayer and to give them a framework to use when they pray.

WEEK 2 BOTTOM LINE

Find your way to pray.

SCRIPTURE

- Matthew 6:9-13 NIV

TEACHING SLIDES

All scripture, bottom lines, and teaching points that are bolded in this script are also provided as slides in your weekly "Teaching" folder.

OPTIONAL VIDEOS

*OPTIONAL MEDIA for this week available for purchase through the XP3 HS Media Package:

- Thoughts and Prayers – Week 2 Countdown (10 minutes)
- Anterior Cingulate Video (for the interactive)
- Anterior Cingulate Images (for the interactive)
- Thoughts and Prayers – Week 2 Teaching Video

TEACHING OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

- **[INTERACTIVE]:** See Communicator Guide for detailed instructions.
- While it's cool to know some science about prayer, isn't it true that the idea of prayer can be kind of intimidating?
- Something about that can make prayer feel difficult or easy to get wrong. For a long time, that was how I felt about prayer—like I was going to be put on the spot and told to pray out loud at a moment when the stakes were high and that I would not get it right.

TENSION

- ...I also want you to know I've found something that has helped me a ton when it comes to trying to pray. It could help you, too. The whole idea begins with one of these: an old phone.
- **[INTERACTIVE]:** See Communicator Guide for detailed instructions.
- Most people treat prayer like a landline. We only use it to do one thing: the "help me" prayer.
- I want you to see prayer like a smartphone—like there is SO MUCH more prayer can do, and you'll enjoy it more that way.
- **What if we are missing out because we only treat prayer this one way?**
- But, where do we start? How do we treat prayer like something more? What other ways can we pray besides asking for help?

TRUTH

- I want to look at something Jesus said about prayer in the most famous message he ever gave, called The Sermon on the Mount. In this passage, Jesus is telling us how to pray. He starts by saying:
 - *"This, then, is how you should pray:
"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one."
(Matthew 6:9-13 NIV).*
- ...It's important to note that before Jesus shared this prayer, He pointed out some other things about praying while He was giving His sermon. He encouraged us to...
 - **Be real.**
 - **Be honest.**
 - **Be consistent.**
- You see, **Jesus gave us this prayer to not only show us the heart He wants us to have behind our prayers, but to give us an idea of the *how*.**
- And, it all boils down to three simple words:
 - **1. Thanks.**
 - **2. Please.**
 - **3. Sorry.**
- Tell God what you're thankful for. Then, express your needs to God. Finally, let God know what you're sorry about and where you need forgiveness.
- See, here's the thing we really want you to understand about prayer: **Prayer isn't about the words you say, but the way you pray.**

APPLICATION

- Whether you pray a lot or a little, whether it is a frustrating experience or a confusing one, whether it intimidates you or seems like something you can do, remember, you have a way forward.
- **[BOTTOM LINE]: FIND YOUR WAY TO PRAY.**
 - **1. Thanks.**
 - **2. Please.**
 - **3. Sorry.**
 - **4. Wow!**
 - **5. Huh?**
- No matter how you practice praying, no matter what form it takes, the best thing you can decide to do is this: **Commit to it.**
- Even if it's just two minutes on the way to school or five minutes before bed, commit to giving prayer a try this week, to trying to **find your way to pray.**

LANDING

- One of the things that can make the process of learning prayer so much easier is knowing you aren't alone in trying to figure it out.
- Which is why small groups are so important.



TEACHING SCRIPT

Thoughts and Prayers / Week 2

[PRELUDE](#) [SOCIAL](#) [WORSHIP](#) [STORY](#) [GROUPS](#) [HOME](#)

WEEK 2 BOTTOM LINE

Find your way to pray.

INTRODUCTION

3 - 4 MINUTES

Hey everybody! We're in the final week of our series called Thoughts and Prayers. We've been talking about the thoughts we all have about...you guessed it, prayer. And before we jump in today, I want to start by taking a look at where thoughts and prayers start. Brace yourself...I love some science and it's coming your way.



INTERACTIVE

[OPTIONAL MEDIA](#) available for purchase through the [XP3HS Media Package](#):

[Thoughts and Prayers Week 2 – “Anterior Cingulate Video”](#)

[Thoughts and Prayers Week 2 – “Anterior Cingulate Images”](#)

Communicator note: *This is where you'll display an image to show students what part of the brain prayer affects.*

Did you know that there's a part of your brain that actually shapes your experience with God? That means that your experiences with God can actually play a part in shaping your brain! Crazy, right?

Now get ready for a big word. Well, it's actually two words that I had to look up to know how to pronounce. That part of your brain is called the Anterior Cingulate *[NOTE: It's pronounced an-TEER-ee-or SIN-gew-let]. [Display the image of the brain.]* I know this sounds like something a wrestler would wear but it's actually a part of the brain. When that part of your brain is strong and built up, it helps you understand and experience God as a close, personal, and compassionate God. In other words, it helps you really experience the way God knows and cares about you.

And, here's something fascinating. The brain you're born with is not the one you always have. Your anterior cingulate doesn't just stay the same over time. You can literally grow it. Recently, scientists discovered that the number one way to grow the strength of your Anterior Cingulate *[motion to the image of the brain]* is through a daily practice of prayer. When you give just ten

minutes a day to prayer, you're exercising that part of your brain in the same way you exercise a muscle. The more you do it, the more that part of your brain grows and the stronger it gets. ¹

Maybe you've heard someone say that prayer can change us. Well, this is literally how prayer changes the shape of your brain! *[Stop displaying the brain image.]*

While it's cool to know some science about prayer, isn't it true that the idea of prayer can be kind of intimidating? Prayer is one of the main ways we connect with God. Like, actually God. So, no pressure, right? Something about that can make prayer feel difficult or easy to get wrong. For a long time, that was how I felt about prayer—like I was going to be put on the spot and told to pray out loud at a moment when the stakes were high and that I would not get it right.

TENSION

6 MINUTES

OR maybe your story is you've tried to pray, even for five minutes and it just seems like an eternity. Some schools even have that quick "moment of silence" in the morning when you're supposed to try to make yourself pray but by the time you come up with something to say, it's already over. Or maybe you've tried to pray before you go to sleep, but your mind wanders. If that's you, I totally get it, but I also want you to know I've found something that has helped me a ton when it comes to trying to pray. It could help you, too. The whole idea begins with one of these: an old phone.



Communicator note: *This is where you'll display an old land line phone that also has a cord.*

Ok, you probably didn't have *this* kind of phone in mind, right? How many of you have ever seen one of these before? Maybe your grandparents have one. I can't believe these things used to be normal—like you couldn't *leave the* room or do anything else while talking on the phone. You were literally tied to the wall. If you're thinking, "that sounds awful," you're right. Sure, talking on the phone was still possible back in the day, but nothing else was because a landline can only do ONE thing—phone calls. You could receive a call or you could make a call, but that's it.

And, most people treat prayer like a landline. We only use it to do one thing: the "help me" prayer.

You know the ones. The "here's what I want, could you help me get it?" prayers. Or the "fix my situation" prayers. The "if you get me out of this one, I'll never do it again, please just help" prayers. You might not even consider yourself religious and have maybe caught yourself letting out a "Help!" in a moment of unexpected danger.

This is landline prayer, because it's only about one thing—what God can do for us, and, listen, everybody has said this kind of prayer. You don't even have to be a Christian to pray those kinds of prayers. You just have to be in some kind of trouble. Oh, don't get me wrong; God can handle all of our desperate cries for help. God's cool with your cries for rescue. God's not mad being approached this way, but that is just one way to see prayer.

¹ Newberg, Andrew B., and Mark Robert Waldman. *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist*. Ballantine Books, 2010.

(Hold up a smart phone). Now, how many of you have seen of these before? You may have one in your pocket. If you treated this phone (smartphone) the same way you treat this phone (land line) you wouldn't getting the most out of it, right? I mean, a smart phone CAN make a phone call, but it would be a total waste if that was the only way you used it! Why only use it for one thing when you can use it as a phone, a camera, a way to text, to order food, to search the internet, to watch videos, play games, and get directions, all right here?

If I were to ask you which one is better—a landline or a smartphone—it'd be easy, right? The same is true of prayer. I want you to see prayer like a smartphone—like there is SO MUCH more prayer can do, and you'll enjoy it more that way.

Of course, if you don't know how to use a smartphone, it doesn't matter what it's capable of, does it? Even though there's more available, you'll never experience it. The same is true for prayer.

What if we are missing out because we only treat prayer this one way?

My siblings and I recently purchased an iPhone for my 87-year-old grandma. Have you ever given an electronic device to someone who has literally never had one? It makes you feel like a genius, doesn't it? "This is how you turn it on," and she's like, "Oh wow, how did you know that?" "I'm just that good."

Today my grandma is great at making phone calls on her new phone. All she has to do is hit numbers, but it seems like there's always some kind of training to figure out something else. She wanted to know how to do *the* Instagram, send the text messages, and take the pictures. That's it. I was trying to get her to do Instagram, FaceTime, visit the app store, and play Fruit Ninja 2, and she was like, "You can chop fruit with this thing?" So, I just stopped. It was too much. She was overwhelmed because she grew up with a landline where she just made calls. But you and I know that there is so much more to do on a smart phone than what my 87-year-old-grandma knows. It's really more than a phone.

Prayer is the same way. It's more than just our emergency go-to, but if that is all we have ever used it for, we may be missing out. But, where do we start? How do we treat prayer like something more? What other ways can we pray besides asking for help?

TRUTH

4 MINUTES

I want to look at something Jesus said about prayer in the most famous message He ever gave, called The Sermon on the Mount. In this passage, Jesus is telling us how to pray. He starts by saying:

*"This, then, is how you should pray:
'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'"*
(Matthew 6:9-13 NIV).

Now, some of you may have heard this before. It's called the Lord's Prayer (or the "Our Father") and Christians all over the world have memorized it and pray it on a regular basis. The thing that makes it so cool is that Jesus Himself is literally telling us how to pray.

We don't have to guess. Jesus gives us the HOW, but before we break down those verses, it's important to note that before Jesus shared this prayer, He pointed out some other things about praying while He was giving His sermon. He encouraged us to **be real**—to avoid praying for the sake of impressing other people. Then, He encouraged us to **be honest**—like we talked about last week. God already knows how we feel before we say it, so why not be honest about it when we pray? Finally, He encouraged us to **be consistent**—to not just pray once and walk away, but to make it a part of our lives.

Be real. Be honest. Be consistent. That's the heart Jesus wants us to have behind our prayers, and that's what He showed us in The Lord's Prayer.

You see, **Jesus gave us this prayer to not only show us the heart He wants us to have behind our prayers, but to give us an idea of the how.** When we're not sure what to say, or if we're doing it wrong, or how we're supposed to start, Jesus gave us this prayer to be the answer.

And, it all boils down to three simple words:

1. Thanks

2. Please

3. Sorry

Jesus began The Lord's Prayer by speaking words of thanks, by talking about God's greatness and showing His gratitude for how holy and awesome God is. Then, He laid His requests before God, asking God to do things like provide and forgive. Finally, He took a moment to ask for God's forgiveness, to confess—or own up to—any mistakes or wrongs, and ask God to forgive Him for those things. Of course, Jesus was perfect and without sin, but He was giving us an example of how to include this same "sorry" in our own prayers when we feel we've messed up.

Thanks. Please. Sorry. It's as simple as that.

Some days, those may be the only words you have to pray. Other days, you may have more words than just those three to tell God. And, while there's really not a formula for "doing prayer right," you might start by using those three words kind of like an outline. Tell God what you're thankful for. Then, express your needs to God. Finally, let God know what you're sorry about and where you need forgiveness.

Listen, this is just a starting place. The more you pray, the more comfortable you'll become with prayer. The more comfortable you become, the more you may have to say because you are connecting more with God; you are building a friendship, a relationship. If you just want to tell God about your day, or the person you wish would notice you in your Geometry class, or how annoying your little brother is, God wants to hear it. God is for you and loves you, and nothing you want to talk about is off limits with God. God wants to know you and God wants to give you direction in life. So, keep the conversation going.

See, here's the thing we really want you to understand about prayer: **Prayer isn't about the words you say, but the way you pray.** And Jesus has told us how.

APPLICATION

3 MINUTES

Whether you pray a lot or a little, whether it is a frustrating experience or a confusing one, whether it intimidates you or seems like something you can't do, remember, you have a way forward. And, God is more interested in connecting with you than making sure you are saying things the "right" way. So, as you think about trying prayer for the first time, or trying prayer in a new way, think about trying some of these things, because the point is for you to

Find your way to pray.

1. **Thanks.** This comes right from the passage we read from Matthew. If you aren't sure of what to pray, think of all the things you can be grateful for. Think big things like the planet and small things like passing a test. Just training your brain to see things that are good all around you, will change the way you see and experience the world and God.
2. **Please.** Asking God for help comes naturally for some of us, and for others of us it can be hard. But, learning to take all the things you are fearful of or worry about to God shows a level of trust. It shows we consider God safe enough to handle the things that feel overwhelming, and that will make us connect with God even more
3. **Sorry.** Telling God, we are sorry for something is another way to pray. This is a big deal, because it helps us to become more aware of the choices we make. We can be more intentional in our decisions and learn to see what choices were hurtful or unhelpful. Telling God, we are sorry also gives us a chance to experience God's mercy, God's forgiveness, and God's never-ending love as well. When we make a habit out of acknowledging where we have gotten things wrong, we are connecting with a God Who accepts us no matter what.

Want to take it further? The next two aren't ways Jesus mentioned specifically, but are good words that have helped me to connect with God.

4. **Wow!** Sometimes, we see or experience something that just makes us feel like saying, "Wow!" We don't even necessarily have words besides that to put around it; it's just the experience of being in awe, surprised, or amazed at what we see or feel in the world around us. We can pray "wow!" by listening to a song that makes us feel close to God, by going for a walk, or just sitting in the quiet and taking some deep breaths. Connection with God doesn't have to be saying or asking anything. It can be recognizing the bigness of God.
5. **Huh?** Finally, we can connect with God by bringing God our questions. Anything that feels confusing or doesn't make sense—whether that's a relative who is sick and not getting better, or why we feel like we don't have a friend who really gets us, or why understanding calculus feels like an impossibility—God can take it. Honesty with our questions, and taking the time to really figure out what it is that confuses us as we bring it to God in prayer is helpful for us. When we put words around what we are questioning it gives us clarity, helps us connect to God, and helps us learn more about God's character.

No matter how you practice praying, no matter what form it takes, the best thing you can decide to do is this: **Commit to it.** So, this week, try making that commitment. Even if it's just two minutes on the way to school or five minutes before bed, commit to giving prayer a try this week, to trying to find your way to pray. I think as you do, you'll be surprised how quickly your connection to God grows.

LANDING

1 MINUTE

One of the things that can make the process of learning prayer so much easier is knowing you aren't alone in trying to figure it out. Everyone is doing what they can to find the way that works for them. Which is why small groups are so important. You can be surrounded by people who are trying to figure it out like you are and encourage one another to remember that there is a God who listens and that God is accessible to all of us. As you head to your group today, think about your answer to this question this question: **If you were sure God was listening, what would you say?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS
