

# Reasons to Pray

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**Session 1: Prayer pleases God**

**Series: Reasons to Pray**

**Themes: prayer, God's love**

**Bible Passage: Psalm 86:6-17; 1 Timothy 2:1-3**

**Suggested age group: 11-14's**

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## Way In 1 – Back drawing

*Time: 5 mins*

*Bible knowledge: n/a*

1. Pupils work in pairs, one being an 'artist' and sitting behind the other.
2. The artist is given a short list of simple items and shapes (i.e. heart, star, face, etc.) that s/he will then use a finger to trace one at a time onto the other person's back. Each drawing can be repeated only once.
3. The object is for the partner to identify as many of the shapes as possible.
4. Discuss the sense of achievement felt by both partners when communication was achieved.

## Way In 2 – Prayer Questionnaire

*Time: 10 mins*

*Bible knowledge: limited*

*With: resource sheet 1 'Prayer Questionnaire' (one per person), pens*

1. Give each person a copy of the resource sheet. Ask them to complete the questionnaire, either in pairs or small groups.
2. Discuss the opinions together, gaining a feel for where your group might be in their attitudes to prayer.
3. Ask pupils why Christians place so much value on prayer, particularly when we believe that God knows everything and that he already has plans in place. Comment that this series will be looking at three reasons to pray.

## Connecting 1 – Why pray, reason 1

*Time: 5 mins*

*Bible knowledge: limited*

*With: a Bible or a copy of 1 Timothy 2:1-3*

1. Explain that the letter of Timothy was written from an older Christian, Paul, to his young friend Timothy, giving him instructions on how to live a Christian way of life.
2. Read the verses, asking pupils to listen and tell you what reason Paul gives for telling Timothy to pray. (There are two reasons given in the passage – that we may live peaceful and quiet lives, and because it pleases God our Saviour.)
3. Ask pupils how they think our prayers can please God. Is he happy with any prayer, even when we don't get the words right, or when we ask for the wrong things?
4. Comment that
  - just as a father loves to hear from his child, whether their communication is toddler babble, teenage text language, or elegant prose, so God loves to hear from us
  - prayer is not just about us talking to God, it is also us making ourselves available to listen to God
  - prayer is an opportunity to deepen the relationship between us and God.

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## Connecting 2 – Talking to God

**Time:** 15 mins

**Bible knowledge:** limited

**With:** copies of resource sheet 2 'Psalm 86:6-17, card, coloured pens

1. Tell the group that you are going to look together at the lyrics of a prayer written as a song.
2. Read Psalm 86:6-17
3. Give out copies of resource sheet 2, asking pupils to get into groups of three or four.
4. Ask them to look through the Psalm, underlining in different colours:
  - o phrases that tell God how great he is
  - o phrases acknowledging that we have done wrong and need forgiving
  - o phrases asking God for help, and
  - o phrases thanking God for the good things we have.
5. Ask each group to select one phrase from the Psalm that they could express to God as an honest statement from their group.
6. The selected phrase should be written in large letters in the middle of a sheet of card, then decorated.

## Responding 1 – Prayer challenge - Five

**Time:** 5 mins

**Bible knowledge:** limited

**With:** copies of 5 leaflet (kids) downloaded from <http://www.suscotland.org.uk/pray/resources> or tel. 0141 352 7632, email [pray@suscotland.org.uk](mailto:pray@suscotland.org.uk) to order printed copies.

1. Since prayer pleases God, we want to take up the challenge to pray!
2. Give out 5 leaflet, explaining to the pupils that this is a challenge for the next 5 weeks – to pray for 5 people, for 5 minutes (a minute each), for at least 5 days each week and to see what God will do.
3. Allow the pupils time to fill in the names of the people they want to pray for on their own leaflets.
4. Read through the verses on the leaflet, encouraging them to take up the challenge.

## Responding 2 – Imagining God's Presence

**Time:** 5 mins

**Bible knowledge:** limited

1. Everyone in silence, with eyes shut, imagines God sitting on a chair the other side of the room.
2. People may find it helpful to hold their hands on their laps cupped open.
3. The leader explains,
  - 'He is assuring you that he loves you, he wants the very best for you, you are special to him, you need not be afraid.
  - In the silence, receive God's love, ask him to tell you what he wants to say to you, and to show you what he wants you to do for him.
  - Every time something distracts you, or a worry about yourself comes into your head, imagine yourself getting up, carrying the worry to God, leaving it in his lap, and going back to your seat without it.'
4. Continue in silence for three or four minutes.

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## Resource Sheet 1 – Prayer Questionnaire

**Find a partner and work through the questions together, discussing your choices as you do so.**

1. I pray to God
  - Very occasionally
  - Once a week
  - Daily
  - Frequently during the day
  
2. I pray out of a sense of
  - Crisis
  - Habit
  - Thankfulness
  - Need
  
3. God seems light years away and silent
  - Always
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never
  
4. God responds to prayer
  - Always
  - Often
  - Sometimes
  - Never
  
5. Prayer benefits
  - God
  - Me
  - Others I pray for
  - The world

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## Resource Sheet 2 – Psalm 86:6-17

Look through the Psalm, underlining in different colours:

- phrases that tell God how great he is
- phrases acknowledging that we have done wrong and need forgiving
- phrases asking God for help, and
- phrases thanking God for the good things we have.

LORD, hear my prayer,  
and listen when I ask for mercy.  
I call to you in times of trouble,  
because you will answer me.

Lord, there is no god like you  
and no works like yours.  
Lord, all the nations you have made  
will come and worship you.  
They will honour you.

You are great and you do miracles.  
Only you are God.

LORD, teach me what you want me to do,  
and I will live by your truth.  
Teach me to respect you completely.  
Lord, my God, I will praise you with all my heart,  
and I will honour your name forever.  
You have great love for me.  
You have saved me from death.

God, proud people are attacking me;  
a gang of cruel people is trying to kill me.  
They do not respect you.  
But, Lord, you are a God who shows mercy and  
is kind.

You don't become angry quickly.  
You have great love and faithfulness.  
Turn to me and have mercy.  
Give me, your servant, strength.  
Save me, the son of your female servant.  
Show me a sign of your goodness.

When my enemies look, they will be  
ashamed.  
You, LORD, have helped me and comforted  
me.

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edition) text used with  
permission from  
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**Session 2: Prayer benefits us**

**Series: Reasons to Pray**

**Themes: prayer, God's love**

**Bible Passage: James 5:13-18; Matthew 7:9-11**

**Suggested age group: 11-14's**

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## Way In 1 – Building blind

*Time: 5 mins*

*Bible knowledge: n/a*

*With: lego bricks or other construction pieces*

1. Pupils work in pairs or triplets, one being the leader and the other(s) being 'builders'.
2. The leader has sight of a simple structure (made of lego bricks, or similar items), but the builders do not. Each group also has a box of building materials identical to those used to make the hidden structure.
3. Without touching the original structure, or handling the bricks in the builders' box, the leader must give instructions to enable the builders to build an identical structure.
4. In order to complete the task, the builders have to listen carefully to the leader's instructions, and to question the leader where they are unsure about the way ahead.

(If you do not have building bricks, this activity would work equally well with a drawing, seen by one person and hidden to the others. The person who sees the drawing has to give instructions to enable the others to draw the same picture, eg a house with a chimney, four windows, curtains, front door, garden with fence.)

## Way In 2 – Idea shower

*Time: 10 mins*

*Bible knowledge: limited*

*With: white board or flip chart, pens*

1. With the whole group together, ask everyone to think of all the different ways of praying they know.
2. They should call out their ideas one at a time, while someone notes them on flipchart or whiteboard.
3. The list could include: kneeling, sitting, standing, on your own, in a group, singing, silent, spoken, read from a book, saying thank you, saying sorry, asking God for something, etc.

## Connecting 1 – Why pray, reason 2

*Time: 5 mins*

*Bible knowledge: limited*

*With: Bibles or copies of resource sheet 1 – Why pray Bible readings*

1. Ask pupils if they can remember the first reason to pray, covered last week – because prayer pleases God.
2. The second reason to pray is that God gave us prayer for our benefit.
3. Give out copies of resource sheet 1, 'Why pray Bible readings', asking pupils to read through James 5:13-18.
4. Ask when James says that we should pray? (Note that it is when we are in trouble, when we are happy, when we need things, when we have done something wrong – in other words, anytime.) Ask what the benefits of prayer are. Have any pupils tried praying in any of these circumstances? What were the results?

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5. People sometimes give up praying because it seems that God does not answer – ask whether pupils have ever felt like that.
6. Read Matthew 7:9-11 together.
7. Ask whether these verses give us any clues as to why it might seem that God has not answered a prayer.
8. Comment that God will give us what best fits his perfect plan – sometimes that is what we ask for and sometimes not. He will not give us anything that will harm us, or be second best, even if we ask for it.

## Connecting 2 – Promises about prayer

*Time: 5 mins*

*Bible knowledge: limited*

*With: copies of resource sheet 2 'Promises about prayer', scissors*

1. Give out copies of resource sheet 2 'Promises about prayer'.
2. Together read through all the promises on the sheet. Comment that these are just a small selection of the promises God gives about prayer.
3. In twos or threes, ask pupils to read through the promises again and then to select the one that means the most to them, and to tell the others in their group why.
4. Ask each pupil to cut out and keep their favourite promise.

## Responding 1 – Prayer challenge - Five

*Time: 5 mins*

*Bible knowledge: limited*

*With: extra copies of 5 leaflets, personal story*

1. Ask how they are getting on with the '5 challenge'. Give leaflets to any who weren't there the previous week. Have they seen any answers to their prayer yet?
2. Check what they are praying for. Are they praying too generally, eg "God bless John?" What specific thing does that person need prayer for? Share the kind of thing you pray for as a leader when praying for your family and friends.
3. Encourage the pupils to keep praying for their 5 friends, for 5 minutes on 5 days of the week.

## Responding 2 – Prayer Cards

*Time: 5 mins*

*Bible knowledge: limited*

*With: copies of resource sheet 2 'Prayer cards', cut up into individual cards, enough for one each, pens, laminator*

1. Give everyone a card on which is written:
  - God, I need ...
  - God, the world needs ...
  - God, I'm sorry that ...
  - God, thanks that ...
2. Encourage pupils to complete the sentences honestly.
3. Assure them that God has seen what they have written or thought and that he will answer in the way which will ultimately be best for them.
4. If possible, put the promise selected in 'Connecting 2' back to back with pupil's prayer card and laminate.

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## **Responding 3 – Praying for the group**

*Time: 5 mins*

*Bible knowledge: limited*

1. In groups of about 6, stand in a circle, arms around each others' shoulders, rugby scrum style.
2. Give each group member the opportunity to ask for pray for any particular needs they may have. If they do not want to share anything too personal, perhaps they could ask that God would bless them, that he would be with them in difficult times, that he would help them make a difficult decision, etc.
3. In this position, pray for the group and the particular needs of the members in it. Each person could pray silently for the person on either side of them, then give the opportunity for those who want to pray out loud in their group to do so.

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## Resource Sheet 1 – Why pray Bible readings

### James 5:13-18

Anyone who is having troubles should pray.

Anyone who is happy should sing praises.

Anyone who is sick should call the church's elders. They should pray for and pour oil on the person in the name of the Lord. And the prayer that is said with faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will heal that person.

And if the person has sinned, the sins will be forgiven. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so God can heal you.

When a believing person prays, great things happen. Elijah was a human being just like us. He prayed that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years! Then Elijah prayed again, and the rain came down from the sky, and the land produced crops again.

### Matthew 7:9-11

If your children ask for bread, which of you would give them a stone? Or if your children ask for a fish, would you give them a snake? Even though you are bad, you know how to give good gifts to your children. How much more your heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him!

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## Resource Sheet 2 – Promises about Prayer

### Proverbs 15:29

The Lord does not listen to the wicked, but he hears the prayers of those who do right.

### Matthew 7:7

Ask, and God will give to you. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will open for you.

### Matthew 18:19-20

I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about something and pray for it, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. This is true because if two or three people come together in my name, I am there with them.

### John 14:13

If you ask for anything in my name, I will do it for you so that the Father's glory will be shown through the Son.

### Philippians 4:6-7

Do not worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks. And God's peace, which is so great we cannot understand it, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

### James 1:5

If any of you needs wisdom, you should ask God for it. He is generous to everyone and will give you wisdom without criticizing you.

### James 5:16

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so God can heal you. When a believing person prays, great things happen.

### 1 John 5:14-15

If we ask God for anything that agrees with what he wants, he hears us. If we know he hears us every time we ask him, we know we have what we ask from him.

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## Resource Sheet 3 – Prayer Cards

God, I need ...

God, the world needs ...

God, I'm sorry that ...

God, thanks that ...

God, I need ...

God, the world needs ...

God, I'm sorry that ...

God, thanks that ...

God, I need ...

God, the world needs ...

God, I'm sorry that ...

God, thanks that ...

God, I need ...

God, the world needs ...

God, I'm sorry that ...

God, thanks that ...

God, I need ...

God, the world needs ...

God, I'm sorry that ...

God, thanks that ...

God, I need ...

God, the world needs ...

God, I'm sorry that ...

God, thanks that ...

God, I need ...

God, the world needs ...

God, I'm sorry that ...

God, thanks that ...

God, I need ...

God, the world needs ...

God, I'm sorry that ...

God, thanks that ...

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**Session 3: Prayer changes the world**

**Series: Reasons to Pray**

**Themes: prayer, God's love**

**Bible Passage: Nehemiah 1:1 – 2:9**

**Suggested age group: 11-14's**

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## Way In 1 – Arm wrestling

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: n/a

1. Have an arm wrestling competition
2. Discuss who was the most powerful
3. In what ways, other than physical strength, can power be shown?

## Way In 2 – Possible or Impossible

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

With: list of things that might be possible or impossible

1. Label different areas of the room 'possible', 'impossible' and 'not sure'.
2. Ask pupils to stand in area of room that represents what they think in response to each of your statements.
3. Read the statements, pausing after each one to ask pupils to justify their positions.
4. Use statements such as:
  - Score 18 'holes in one' during a single round of golf
  - Fold a piece of paper in half 10 times
  - Live on Mars
  - Britain to win Eurovision
  - Bring someone back from the dead
  - One person to change the world

## Connecting 1 – Why pray, reason 3

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

1. Ask pupils what reasons for prayer have been thought about on the previous weeks.
2. Today we are going to think about prayer as a force to change the world.
3. Ask pupils whether they think prayer can make a difference to:
  - Global warming
  - Oppressive governments
  - People being bullied for their faith in school
  - Families where unfair things happen
  - Destruction of the rain forest
  - Churches that seem dead and lifeless
4. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, it says:

I tell you to pray for all people, asking God for what they need and being thankful to him.<sup>2</sup> Pray for rulers and for all who have authority so that we can have quiet and peaceful lives full of worship and respect for God.<sup>3</sup> This is good, and it pleases God our Saviour,<sup>4</sup> who wants all people to be saved and to know the truth.

Ask: In the light of these verses, what sorts of things should we be praying about? Do you think God would ask us to do that, if he could not answer?

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## Connecting 2 – Nehemiah’s story

Time: 15 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

With: Bibles or copies of resource sheet 2 ‘Nehemiah’,

1. Nehemiah was one of many Jewish people who had been taken captive by the Babylonians when they attacked Jerusalem in 605 BC. He was now a powerless slave in the Babylonian king’s palace, and Jerusalem, God’s holy city, was lying in ruins.
2. Read the story from Nehemiah 1:1 – 2:9, or resource sheet 1, using different readers to be Nehemiah’s narration, Nehemiah’s spoken words, the Jews and the king (printed in different colours on the resource sheet.)
3. Discuss together:
  - Why did the Jews’ news upset Nehemiah so much?
  - What choices did Nehemiah have?
  - Who did he go to for help? (Comment that although he went to the king, he turned first to God.)
  - Did Nehemiah pray just once? (It was several months between hearing from the Jews before he spoke to the king, so we can assume he prayed often during that period. He also prayed again in the king’s presence)
  - Why do you think the king gave Nehemiah not only permission to go, but also resources and men to help him?
  - In what ways did Nehemiah’s prayer change the world?

## Responding 1 – Prayer challenge - Five

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

With: extra copies of 5 leaflet downloaded from <http://www.suscotland.org.uk/pray/resources>; notebook

1. Remind pupils of the prayer challenge to pray for others. Give leaflets to any who weren’t there the previous week.
2. Ask how they are getting on with the ‘5 challenge’. Have they seen any answers to their prayer yet? (If so, take note and email [pray@suscotland.org.uk](mailto:pray@suscotland.org.uk) to share the story!)
3. Remind them of the teaching point, that prayer can change situations – and that Nehemiah persisted and persevered in prayer. It took months to see an answer.
4. Either put them into pairs, asking them to pray together for the people on their 5 leaflet, OR play some quiet music, ask them to find a spot in the room where they can be quiet and concentrate (possibly facing a wall!) and pray silently in their heads.
5. Encourage the pupils to keep praying for their 5 friends, for 5 minutes on 5 days of the week.
6. Remember to check in 2 weeks time to see if prayers have been answered.

## Responding 2 – Newspaper headlines

Time: 5 mins

Bible knowledge: limited

With: newspapers, scissors

1. With pupils in groups of 3 or 4, give each group a recent newspaper and some scissors.
2. Ask them to go through the paper, cutting out headlines and photographs which represent major concerns in the world which they want God to put right.
3. As they do so, they should talk about what God might want them to do in personal response to these situations.

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## Resource Sheet 1 – Nehemiah

### Nehemiah's Prayer

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, I, Nehemiah, was in the capital city of Susa.<sup>2</sup> One of my brothers named Hanani came with some other men from Judah. I asked them about Jerusalem and the Jewish people who lived through the captivity.

<sup>3</sup> They answered me, "Those who are left from the captivity are back in Judah, but they are in much trouble and are full of shame. The wall around Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned."

<sup>4</sup> When I heard these things, I sat down and cried for several days. I was sad and fasted. I prayed to the God of heaven, <sup>5</sup> "LORD, God of heaven, you are the great God who is to be respected. You are loyal, and you keep your agreement with those who love you and obey your commands.<sup>6</sup> Look and listen carefully. Hear the prayer that I, your servant, am praying to you day and night for your servants, the Israelites. I confess the sins we Israelites have done against you. My father's family and I have sinned against you.<sup>7</sup> We have been wicked toward you and have not obeyed the commands, rules, and laws you gave your servant Moses.

<sup>8</sup> "Remember what you taught your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations.'<sup>9</sup> But if you return to me and obey my commands, I will gather your people from the far ends of the earth. And I will bring them from captivity to where I have chosen to be worshiped.'

<sup>10</sup> "They are your servants and your people, whom you have saved with your great strength and power.<sup>11</sup> Lord, listen carefully to the prayer of your servant and the prayers of your servants who love to honor you. Give me, your servant, success today; allow this king to show kindness to me."

I was the one who served wine to the king.

### Nehemiah Is Sent to Jerusalem

<sup>1</sup> It was the month of Nisan in the twentieth year Artaxerxes was king. He wanted some wine, so I took some and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before.<sup>2</sup> So the king said, "Why does your face look sad even though you are not sick? Your heart must be sad."

Then I was very afraid.<sup>3</sup> I said to the king, "May the king live forever! My face is sad because the city where my ancestors are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire."

<sup>4</sup> Then the king said to me, "What do you want?"

First I prayed to the God of heaven.<sup>5</sup> Then I answered the king, "If you are willing and if I have pleased you, send me to the city in Judah where my ancestors are buried so I can rebuild it."

<sup>6</sup> The queen was sitting next to the king. He asked me, "How long will your trip take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me, so I set a time.

<sup>7</sup> I also said to him, "If you are willing, give me letters for the governors of Trans-Euphrates. Tell them to let me pass safely through their lands on my way to Judah.<sup>8</sup> And may I have a letter for Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, telling him to give me timber? I will need it to make boards for the gates of the palace, which is by the Temple, and for the city wall, and for the house in which I will live." So the king gave me the letters, because God was showing kindness to me.<sup>9</sup> Then I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and soldiers on horses with me.