

Junior Soldiers

Unit 7 : Lesson 7



Prayer is important!

PURPOSE : For the children to understand that praying is an important part of being a follower of Jesus, and to explore a little about what prayer is and how we communicate with God.

'Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere.'

Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)

Consider & Prepare

Read:

Ephesians 6:18

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Luke 11:1

This lesson focuses on the importance of prayer to someone who is a follower of Jesus and is designed to go hand in hand with the next lesson that focuses on the importance of the Bible. Praying and reading the Bible are important disciplines that help us connect with God, which is why they are included as key sections within each level of the Junior Soldiers' passports. It would be ideal to use some time in each of these lessons to intentionally support and encourage your children who are Junior Soldiers to continue working through these sections in their passports.

It would also be good to refresh yourself with previous lessons that have focused on prayer, including:

Unit 3: Lesson 7 – Talking to God (Adoration and Thanksgiving)

Unit 3: Lesson 8 – Talking to God about myself and others

Unit 6: Lesson 2 – Prayer Walk

Clearly, God values and encourages the prayers of His children, no matter what their age. Josiah became king as an eight-year old boy. In 2 Kings 23:25, Scripture says of him: 'Neither before or after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart, and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.'

If God values the prayers of children, why are they in the back room watching videos and playing games while the adults are doing the work of prayer in the church? This communicates to the adults that children are 'not ready to pray' and communicates to the children that they have to wait until they're an adult before they can pray.

We don't want to rob our children of their rightful heritage as potential prayer warriors. An example of this can be found in Matthew 21:15–16: 'But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David",

they were indignant. “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, ‘From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise’?””

If we will let them, our young people will teach us how to worship God! Seeking the face of God is not reserved only for those who have age or experience in the body of Christ, it is for all of God’s children.

If we choose not to include children in ‘big people’ prayer activities until they’ve come of age, we are opting to raise up a generation of dysfunctional pray-ers! Do you remember how you learned to pray? Most of us learned by example. Those who have vibrant prayer lives today most likely received encouragement and were given much opportunity to pray. That’s how prayer lives grow and expand.

It intrigues me that young infants can communicate so well, even before their ability to form words has developed. They know how to ask, and believe that they will receive what they ask for. Children can approach their developing prayer life in the same way—talking to God as they can best do, knowing that God will understand and care for them. Children pray from trusting hearts and have a natural ability to cry out to Jesus from a very early age.



What you will need:

For ‘Connecting In’

- Post-it notes with the names of celebrities or cartoon characters written on them (ensure that the personalities you choose are ones that the children in your group would be familiar with).
- Some props that hang on a wall (e.g. picture frame, calendar, clock etc.)
- Plaster of Paris
- A bucket
- A spoon
- Small disposable plates
- Paint
- Permanent markers
- Taboo game cards and timer (optional)

For ‘The Main Thing’

- Props to help tell story (paper, block of wood, wooden toy car, racing start flag etc.)
- Paper and pens
- Bibles

For ‘Home & Beyond’

- Print off a Home & Beyond card for each child.

Connecting In

Who Am I...

This game is adapted from the popular game ‘Celebrity Heads’. Depending on the size of your group, you might like to play the traditional game where you choose three volunteers to come out the front and ask questions to the whole group. The activity below is focused on working in pairs.

For this activity you will need some post-it notes with the names of celebrities or cartoon characters written on them (ensure that the personalities you choose are ones that the children are familiar with). In partners, children find a space in the room and you go around and put one of the post-it notes on one

partner from each group, being careful not to let them see which character they are. Their job is to then guess who they are, but the catch is that their partner can only answer 'yes' or 'no'. For example questions need to be phrased like: 'Am I male?' or 'Am I on TV?' etc. Once the children have guessed who they are, they can then swap roles using a new character for the next round. You might like to throw in a few 'local' celebrities, like the corps officer or one of the Junior Soldiers' leaders.

Link: Today we have played a fun guessing game trying to work out who we were.

- I wonder what you found challenging about this game?
- Is there anything that might make this game easier?

In order to get help from your partner in working out who you were, you had to say things a certain way. You were limited in how you could ask questions in order to get only a 'yes' or 'no' answer. It's a little bit tricky when you can only ask things in a particular way.

I wonder if you might sometimes feel a bit like this with your friends and family. Sometimes you might feel that you have to be careful in what you say to certain people, or some friends might not want you to talk about how you are feeling about something, or you might really want to talk with someone in your family but you have to wait until they stop talking on the phone or playing on the computer.

Today we are going to talk about something really exciting...there is someone you can talk to about anything and you can say it in any way you like and at any time you like and He is never, ever too busy to listen to you. God! In the game we played we were restricted in what we could say/ask but when we pray to God we don't have to follow a set pattern—we get to talk with Him about anything.

(Alternatively, if you are familiar with it, the game 'Taboo' is a great resource to illustrate this link. It is a guessing game that also limits what players can say. Visit <http://ingilizceogretmenligi.com/games/board-games/319-english-taboo-cards.html> to print out some kids Taboo cards if you don't have access to the board game.)

Prayer Reminder...

For this activity you will need things that hang on a wall (e.g. picture frame, calendar, clock etc.), plaster of Paris, a bucket, a spoon, small disposable plates, paint and permanent markers. Prior to the lesson, mix up a fairly thick mix of plaster of Paris and put it into the plastic disposable plates.

Hold up the things you would hang on a wall as you talk about their purposes with the children.

- I wonder why you think we might hang things on our walls.
- What are some things that you have hanging on your bedroom walls?
- Today we are going to make something that you might like to hang on your wall at home to remind you of the importance of talking with God.

When the plaster of Paris has partially set (*if you make the mixture fairly thick and on a hot day it should only take 1/2 hour or so*) get the children to put their hand prints in it. When it has fully dried, it can be painted with thin paint and then you can write on an appropriate message such as: 'Prayer - Anywhere, Anytime, Anything.' You could put a paper clip in the mix while it is drying so it can be hung up or put on a display stand for children to keep, reminding them about taking the time to pray.

Link: We have a range of things hanging on our walls, things that remind us of fun memories, special times and people and sometimes even messages, quotes or inspirational messages we want to remember (*you might like to hold up some of the props again that you bought in for the beginning of this section*). Praying is something we might forget to do: we can get busy doing lots of other things and forget to talk to God. Prayer—talking with God—is so important for people who say they are followers of God. Today we have made something to hang on our wall, something to remind us to talk to God, because he loves us and wants to hear from us just like any of our other friends.



The Main Thing

Anytime, anywhere, anything...

One of the really special things about being one of God's children is that you can talk to God at anytime, anywhere and about anything. In fact, God loves it when his children talk to him. And the best thing about talking to God is that you don't have to wait until you get home from school, you don't need a phone or computer to contact him, you don't need to wait until he is finished talking with someone else, you don't need to be careful about what you say, and you're never on a time limit. Talking to God, as most of you would be aware, is called prayer.

Sometimes when we think about prayer or talking to God we think about a certain time of the day that we might pray, for example, when we get up in the morning or perhaps before we go to bed each night. We might think of a particular place that we hear about people praying, like at Junior Soldiers, church or beside your bed. We even have prayers that we might say or use everyday like a rhyming grace prayer or a prayer that you say before going to sleep.

I want you to think for a moment about a family member or friend you are close to. Now imagine...you wake up in the morning and all you say to that person for the whole day is, 'Thank you for my breakfast', 'Thank you for my lunch', 'Thank you for my dinner', 'Thank you for a good day, and please help me to sleep well and could you please make my Nana well.'

- I wonder what would happen to your friendship.
- How do you think that person might feel? I wonder how you would feel?
- Would this be enough to communicate your love and friendship?

God doesn't want to hear from us just every now and then. He doesn't want to hear from you only when things are going bad. He doesn't want to hear from you only at meal times. These things are all important but are only a part of being friends with God. He made you and he loves you and wants to be your closest friend. Think about your closest friend—this is someone you usually want to hang out with and don't really want them to go home at the end of the day.

That is what God wants with you: he wants you to communicate with him like he is your closest friend—anywhere, anytime and about anything.

And don't worry about how significant or insignificant your prayer is, God won't laugh at you or ignore you for saying a silly prayer or a boring prayer or a prayer about something that may not be world news—God just wants to be part of your life.

Here is a story about someone who prayed because they needed some help with something...

God Answers a Surprise Prayer Request...

Use props (paper, block of wood, wooden toy car, racing start flag etc.) to help you tell the following story.

There was a boy called Gilbert. He was eight years old and had been in Scouts only a short time. During one of his meetings, he was handed a sheet of paper, a block of wood, and four tires and told to return home and give all of it to his dad.

That was not an easy task for Gilbert to do. Dad was not receptive to doing things with his son. But Gilbert tried. Dad read the paper and scoffed at the idea of making a pine wood derby car with his young, eager son. The block of wood remained untouched as the weeks passed.

Finally, Mum stepped in to see if she could figure this all out. The project began. Having no carpentry skills, she decided it would be best if she simply read the directions and let Gilbert do the work. And he did. She read aloud the measurements, the rules of what they could do and what they couldn't do.

Within days, Gilbert's block of wood was turning into a pine wood derby car. A little lopsided, but looking great (at least through the eyes of Mum). Gilbert had not seen any of the other kids' cars and was feeling pretty proud of his, named 'Blue Lightning'; it was the pride that comes with knowing you did something on your own.

Then the big night came. With his pine wood derby car in his hand, they headed to the big race.



Once there, Gilbert's pride turned to humility. His car was obviously the only car made entirely on his own. All the other cars were a father-son partnership, with cool paint jobs and sleek body styles made for speed. To add to the humility, Gilbert was the only boy without a man at his side. A couple of the boys who were from single parent homes at least had an uncle or grandfather by their side, Gilbert had his mum.

As the race began, it was done in elimination fashion. You kept racing as long as you were the winner. One by one, the cars raced down the finely sanded ramp. Finally, it was between Gilbert and the sleekest, fastest looking car there. As the last race was about to begin, the wide eyed, shy eight-year-old asked if they could stop the race for a minute, because he wanted to pray. The race stopped. Gilbert went down on his knees, clutching his funny looking block of wood between his hands. With a wrinkled brow, he set to talk with God. He prayed desperately for a very long minute-and-a-half. Then he stood, with a smile on his face and announced, 'Okay, I am ready.'

→ What do you think he prayed for?

As the crowd cheered, a boy named Tommy stood with his father as their car sped down the ramp. Gilbert stood, watching his block of wood wobble down the ramp with surprisingly great speed and rushed over the finish line a fraction of a second before Tommy's car.

Gilbert leapt into the air with a loud 'Thank you' as the crowd roared in approval. The Scout Master came up to Gilbert with microphone in hand and asked the obvious question, 'So, you prayed to win, huh, Gilbert?'

To which Gilbert answered, 'Oh, no. It wouldn't be fair to ask God to help you beat someone else. I just asked God to make it so that I didn't cry when I lost.'

Gilbert didn't ask God to win the race; he didn't ask God to fix the outcome; Gilbert asked God to give him strength in the outcome. When Gilbert first saw the other cars, he didn't cry out to God, 'Not fair, they had a father's help.'

No, he went to his heavenly Father for strength. Perhaps we spend too much of our prayer time asking God to make us number one, or too much time asking God to remove us from the struggle, when we should be seeking God's strength to get through the struggle. Remember in Philippians 4:13 it says: 'I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.'

Gilbert never doubted that God would answer his prayer request. He didn't pray to win and, maybe, hurt someone else; he prayed that God would supply the grace to lose with dignity. Gilbert, by stopping the race to speak to his heavenly Father, also showed the crowd that he wasn't there without a 'dad'.

Explore Scripture together...

For this activity it would be good to have the children split into three groups and then have each group look up one of the following references. You might like to get them to write their verse out. They could then write some of their answers to the discussion questions around it and share their thoughts with the whole group at the end.

- Thessalonians 5:17
 - Phillipians 4:6
 - Ephesians 6:18
- What does God says about prayer?
- Why do you think God says these things?
- What do you like about what you have read?
- Are there any questions you have from these verses?

'Never stop praying' and 'pray at all times' don't mean that we spend our whole day focused on God. We can talk to God and listen to God while we are doing other things. It's a bit like breathing. You need to breathe all the time. You can't stop breathing. Breathing is just a natural part of your life—praying can be, too.



Tying In

In the promise that Junior Soldiers sign when they are enrolled, it says: 'I promise to pray'. I wonder why you think this is included in the Junior Soldiers promise.

Praying is an important part of being a follower of Jesus, just like talking to a friend or family member is important. God doesn't want us to talk to Him because we have to or just because we want something from Him. He wants us to talk to Him because we love and want to be close to Him and share our lives with Him.

- What are some things you talk about with those closest to you? (e.g. *sad times, worries, exciting news, achievement, ask for advice*)
- What things do you share with God at the moment?
- What areas of your life/day might you not be including Him in at the moment?
- What are some different ways we can talk to God? (*Make a list together.*)
- How do you think you could remind yourself to talk to God throughout your day? (*It would be good to give some ideas of what prayer in different places and situations looks like for you and how you remember to talk to God throughout your day. For example, 'When someone asks me to pray for them or I think about someone I would like to pray for, I write a reminder on a bright coloured sticky note and put it on my desk at home or work to help me remember to pray for that person.'*)



You might like to choose a prayer activity from the following suggestions or think of your own. You might even like to have a range of activities listed for the children to choose from.

Group the children according to their current Passport type (i.e. Bronze, Silver, Gold, Crest) and have them choose a 'Corporate' prayer activity to complete together.

Encourage the children to use this time to complete one of their 'Personal' prayer options.

Have children take turns praying for each other in pairs.

Have the children make a prayer rock. Print the attached poem out. You can add a mosaic for children to colour (just lines around the border). After reading the poem, the children wrap the poem around the rock.

Home & Beyond

Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards attached. The children might like to keep these in their journals or notebook where they could write or stick the challenges, reflect, answer questions or complete activities each week.

OR

You could print a photo of each child and get them to add details about themselves (e.g. what grade they are in, hobbies, family members, etc). Laminate the cards and then put them all in a basket. Have each child draw one out to take home and stick up so that they can remember to pray for that person this time around.

***'Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere.'
Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)***

Your 'Home & Beyond' card has been left blank for you to write one or two ways you would like to pray this week. Don't forget to check out the 'Prayer' section in your Junior Soldier Passport, too. You might like to place this card somewhere to remind you of how you are going to pray this week. You might like to share the ways you have been talking to God next time we meet.

