

PRAYING
BY
NUMBER

**20 Creative
Prayer Lessons
& Activities**

VOLUME ONE

PHYLLIS VOS WEZEMAN

Dedication

To Sr. Elaine DesRosiers ...

... an answer to prayer! PVW

Acknowledgment

Thanks to Jude Dennis Fournier for collaborating on the lessons and activities in the book, *Praying by Number*.

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Jude and Phyllis thrive on finding unique bakeries, coffeeshops, and dessert cafes – purely as settings for planning projects!

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Overview

Prayer is _____. Fill in the blank. This timeless, yet timely, question has been pondered by teachers and students throughout the ages. And, this seemingly simple statement has been completed with answers ranging from a single word to multiple volumes. Webster defines prayer as “the act of praying; an entreaty, supplication; a humble request, as to God; any set formula for this.” Commentators and theologians call prayer communicating with God, opening one’s life to God, engaging oneself in the purposes of God, and total immersion in the holy presence of God.

Prayer is a vital part of the Christian life. Therefore, it is a subject worth studying. We learn about prayer in many ways. By turning to Scripture, we discover how people in the Old Testament and the New Testament talked with and listened to God. We glean insight into prayer by reading stories of the saints, and we gain instruction about prayer from people of faith today. Perhaps our best guide to learning what prayer is, however, is to actually pray. And, that’s what this book provides—twenty prayer opportunities for classes at church and school and for families at home. All lessons are designed to help participants explore and experience various aspects of and approaches to prayer.

This book furnishes twenty lessons based on the topic of prayer. Instruction takes place through participation as students explore and experience inviting, informing, and inspiring activities that are used to impart information and ideas. As a unique feature and a fresh approach, each lesson involves a number, from one to twenty, that becomes the focus for the experience.

Methods used to teach the subject matter incorporate architecture, art, banners/textiles, cartoons, creative writing, dance, drama, games, music, photography, puppetry, and storytelling.

Provided in an easy-to-use format, each lesson is organized into three parts:

- **Goal** states the purpose of the activity,
- **Gather** lists the materials required and suggests steps for advance preparation,
- **Guide** contains complete directions for accomplishing the task.

Prayer is for people of all ages—children, youth, and adults. While these designs are intended for young people in classroom settings, they may be easily adapted for use in small and large group worship, education, outreach, and nurture opportunities. They are ideal for parochial school programs, Sunday school classes, worship centers, children’s church, vacation bible school, mid-week ministries, kids' clubs, intergenerational events, before and after school care programs, youth groups, retreats, confirmation classes, family devotions, home schooling, and more.

As you use this resource, may you be as eager and as open as Jesus’ disciples were when they pleaded, “Teach us to pray.” As teachers and students prepare and participate in activities, may your prayer life be enriched by discovering—or re-discovering—ways to talk with and to listen to God. As you carry the information and insight from the classroom to the world, may the power of prayer be reflected in your daily life.

1 God

Goal

To involve participants in a letter writing project to be used in a “first day” prayer service, as a way to emphasize the theme “One God.”

Gather

- › Bible
- › Candle
- › Envelopes, one per person
- › Equipment to play music
- › Matches
- › Paper, preferably stationary
- › Pencils
- › Pens
- › Recording of tranquil music
- › Stickers

Guide

On the first day of a new year, month, liturgical season (such as Lent or Advent), or significant event, like the start of school, lead the group in a creative writing activity and prayer ritual involving the theme “One God.”

Begin by reading Exodus 20:3: “You shall have no other gods before me.” Ask the students to name the portion of Scripture in which this text is found. The passage is commonly called “The Ten Commandments.” Challenge a volunteer to identify the number of the commandment that was just recited. After someone answers “number one,” explain that this law is so significant that God put it first on the list. Invite a student to summarize the meaning of the commandment in a simple phrase or sentence such as “One God”!

In Biblical times, many people prayed to idols, or “gods,” of wood or stone. They thought these objects had great power and could hear their prayers. We know that a god of wood or stone has no power, can never answer prayer, and could certainly never love anyone. But God, with a capital G, can do all these things, for the Lord is the one true God, the only God. Only God can hear us and help us when we pray. Only God loves and sustains us.

Unfortunately, people sometimes have a hard time remembering and believing this simple truth. People create idols, or their own gods, every day. Modern day idols include things like clothes, hobbies, bikes, cars, super stars, and more. An idol is something that’s worshipped or revered—often more than the true and only God. Take time to think about idols or gods that may be part of life. Are things like being on the soccer team, attending music concerts, or buying the best bike on the top of the list? Are they more important than God?

›

First days mark new beginnings. They offer a time to focus on our relationship with God, and with God's only begotten Son, Jesus. Invite the students to write a letter, in their own words, highlighting the theme "One God." These letters, to be addressed to God, are to contain promises to be kept during a designated period, such as a season, month, or year.

Ideas should center on ways the participants will put God first in their lives. Give the students an opportunity to formulate thoughts and feelings. Share examples of promises such as "I promise to spend more time reading the Bible than playing video games," or "I promise to give some of my allowance to help someone else."

Encourage the young people to be honest and to write about tangible topics such as school, family, and friends, as well as intangible ideas like joy and pain. Distribute paper and pencils and guide the group as they compose their letters.

Once the letters are written, invite the learners to sit in a circle. Light the candle and play tranquil background music. Ask the class to share the letters as a group prayer. State that each person, in turn, will have the opportunity to read her or his letter. Since the contents may be very personal, assure the group that they may read their letters out loud or silently. After everyone has had an occasion to share, conclude the ritual with a prayer asking for God's help in keeping the promises.

At the end of the prayer service distribute envelopes, stickers, and pens. Ask the students to address the envelopes to themselves, put the note inside, and seal the letter with a sticker. Collect the projects. Near the end of the designated time period, mail the letters to the participants as a reminder to live a life that honors the one true God.

2 Prayer Partners

Goal

By painting a mandala, participants will explore two parts of prayer and will covenant (agree or commit) with another person, and with God, to become prayer partners.

Gather

- › Bible
- › Bible dictionary or concordance
- › Containers for water
- › Equipment to play music
- › Paint brushes
- › Paint, watercolors
- › Paper for watercolor painting
- › Recording of nature music

Guide

Hold up a Bible and ask the students to name its two main parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. State that in each section of Scripture, God provides instruction on prayer. Offer two examples, one from each portion of the Bible. Use an Old Testament reference from one of the Psalms (e.g. Psalm 34:1-15) and a New Testament quotation like Matthew 21:22, or look up the word “prayer” in a concordance or Bible dictionary to find additional verses.

Next, ask the group how the number two is connected to the theme of prayer. Prayer is a two-way conversation between a person and God. Prayer involves two parts—talking and listening. Prayer can also include two people, called *prayer partners*, who commit to pray together for a specific period of time.

To make this theme meaningful for the students, explain that each person will pick a prayer partner and will make a promise to pray for and with that person for a designated period of time. Prayer partners make a covenant, or agreement, to give each other support and care. Relate examples from Scripture and from real life of this type of bond. Share the Old Testament story of Moses and Aaron’s partnership (Exodus 4:14-16), and relate the New Testament account of the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-56). Explain to the young people that partnership can mean different things. There can be a partnership with God or there can be a partnership with another person to God.



If time allows, discuss listening and talking as an important part of any relationship. Ask the group questions like:

When was a time you really listened to what another person had to say?

What good came out of listening to another?

When was a time when someone really listened to you?

How did the two people benefit from the exchange?

Allow students the opportunity to share their experiences with the group.

Organize the group into pairs. Tell each pair that they will become prayer partners. Explain again that in this type of relationship each person will promise to pray for and with the other individual for a specific period of time, such as a month or a year.

As a way to seal this covenant, invite the partners to paint a mandala together. A mandala is an expression of what an individual feels on the inside while the painting is being created. Explain that both people paint at the same time; however, they do not talk to each other. The painting can be abstract or real, with both individuals contributing to the finished product.

Distribute one set of water color paints, two brushes, and one piece of water color paper to each set of prayer partners. Once the materials are dispensed, tell the participants to sit quietly with their partners. Play calm, relaxing music and invite the pairs to begin painting whatever comes to their minds. Allow time for work to take place. When all groups have finished, display the artwork for everyone to enjoy.

Conclude the session by suggesting additional opportunities to nurture the prayer partner relationship, together or apart. Partners may agree to pray for each other every morning or evening. They may also arrange to meet at a specific time each week to share joys and concerns.

SAMPLE - DO NOT

3 Trinity

Goal

To propose concrete examples of the concept of the Trinity and to construct a triptych to be used as the focal point of a personal worship center.

Gather

- ▶ Construction paper or poster board, 12" x 18"
- ▶ Examples of "three-in-one" such as apple, cube, shamrock, triangle, water
- ▶ Glue
- ▶ Greeting cards or magazines, recycled (optional)
- ▶ Paper, foil wrapping (optional)
- ▶ Picture of leader or participant
- ▶ Resource sheets:
 - ▶ "Triptych Instructions"
 - ▶ "Three-in-One Symbols"
 - ▶ "Glory Be"
- ▶ Scissors
- ▶ Trims such as braid, cording, and rick-rack (optional)

Advance Preparation

- ▶ Prepare patterns for arched panels.

Guide

Apple. Cube. Shamrock. Triangle. Water. Show the participants examples of these items and ask the group to name what they have in common. Explain that each object is three-in-one. It has three parts, and yet it is one thing. Use a cube to illustrate that our world is three-dimensional—containing height, width, and depth.

Explain that while we cannot possibly ever know all there is to know about God, Christians believe that God has three ways to help us understand the Love and Light and Energy God brings to earth. We call this the Trinity, or the three-in-one concept of God: God as Father or Creator of life, God as Jesus or Redeemer of life, and God as Spirit or Sustainer of life. Explain further that this does not mean we worship three Gods, but that the Trinity is a mystery we accept by faith and understand by experience.

Invite everyone to sing or to look at the words of the "Glory Be." This song represents one of the oldest Christian expressions of the understanding of God. Explore the words as an affirmation that God is with us in all ways: as the One who creates and gives us life, as the One who saves us from our faults and sins, and as the One who is ever present with us and gives us power to live in service of God's world. God has always been and will always be whole and complete, and when we look to God in worship, that wholeness heals our brokenness and makes us one with God and each other.

If possible, hold up a picture of one of the leaders or participants. Explain that a person can be thought of as a father/mother, as a son/daughter, or as a brother/sister, yet he or she is still the same person. It just depends on the relationship being expressed. In the same way, we have different relationships with God. Encourage listeners not to worry if seeing God as three persons, yet as one God, seems confusing. Explain that they are going to participate in an activity to make the message seem more clear.



Tell the participants that they are going to make a triptych, or three-fold display, that is an ancient Christian art form. The triptych was used to display three pictures or images about God or Jesus or the disciples, and to remind people of the Trinity. Each picture or image would be displayed in a separate arched panel, yet the three panels were connected.

First share the ideas to explain the Trinity, then invite participants to use those images or images of their own design to create a triptych celebrating the three-in-one concept of God.

There are many possible ways to make the idea of the Trinity seem easier to grasp. Relate as many as possible, then allow learners to use those or to develop their own to design their triptychs. Demonstrate or explain each of the following:

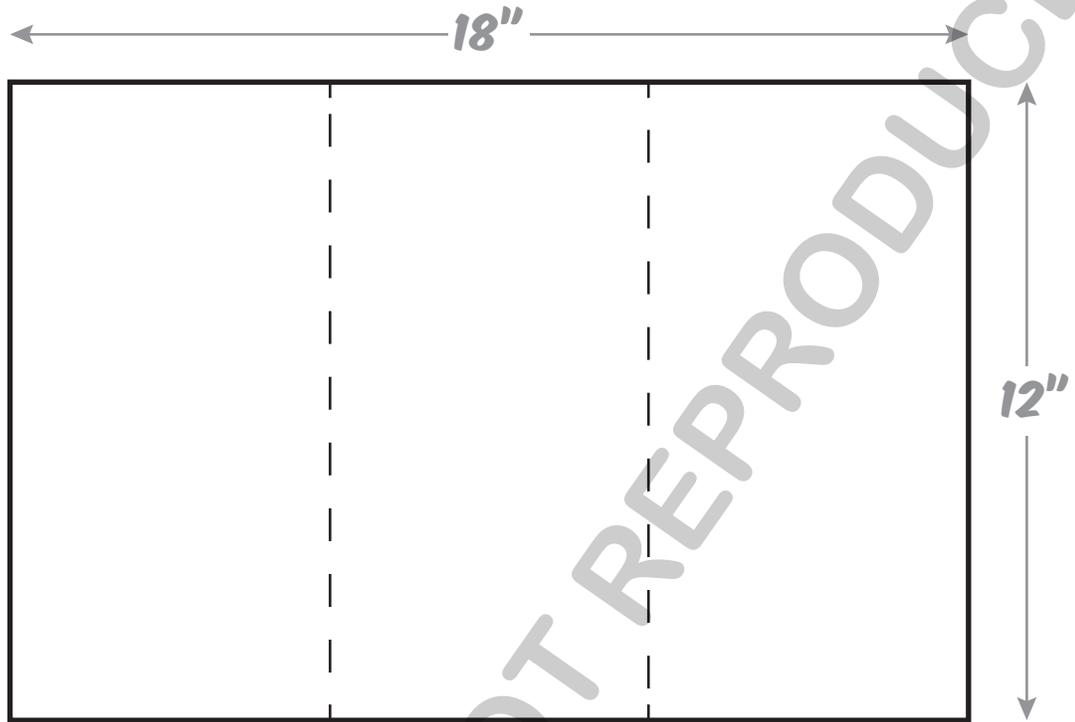
- ▶ **Apple.** An apple represents the Trinity in that it has three parts: the outer layer or skin, the sweet fruit, and the inner core containing the seeds.
- ▶ **Fleur-de-lis.** From French royalty comes this symbol also used as a sign of the Trinity, three flower petals, yet one flower. An iris could be used as the same symbol.
- ▶ **Pottery.** A clay pot is an earthen vessel like human beings—a trinity created by the potter's skilled hands, the wet clay, and the power of the turning wheel.
- ▶ **Shamrock.** Legend says that Saint Patrick explained the Trinity by using the three-leafed shamrock of Ireland, pointing out that it is one plant with one stem, yet it has three separate leaves.
- ▶ **Triangle.** While it is one distinct shape, a triangle is made of three sides.
- ▶ **Water** is two parts hydrogen and one-part oxygen, yet that same chemical substance can be experienced in its liquid form, or as a solid called ice, or as a vapor known as steam.

Allow the participants to choose a symbol or symbols to place on their triptych. They may separate one symbol into its parts and draw them on the different panels, or put a separate symbol on each. Another possibility would be to cut pictures from magazines or use old greeting cards to find symbols to glue on each panel. They may want to write a phrase on each panel suggesting the Trinity, such as the words to the "Glory Be," or a prayer such as "In the name of the Father who created us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who lives in us." Or they may use a different prepositional phrase for each panel: "From the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit."

Demonstrate the process for constructing the triptych. Fold 12" by 18" poster board or construction paper into thirds across the width. Trace a pattern to create simple arches at the top of each panel. All three sections can be the same size or the center panel can be left taller. Adding gold foil paper for a background or trimming with cord, braid, or rick-rack will add an elegant touch to the triptych. Add the chosen design to each of the three panels. Once the design is complete, tell the learners to display the triptych as the focal point of a personal worship center for use throughout the entire year.

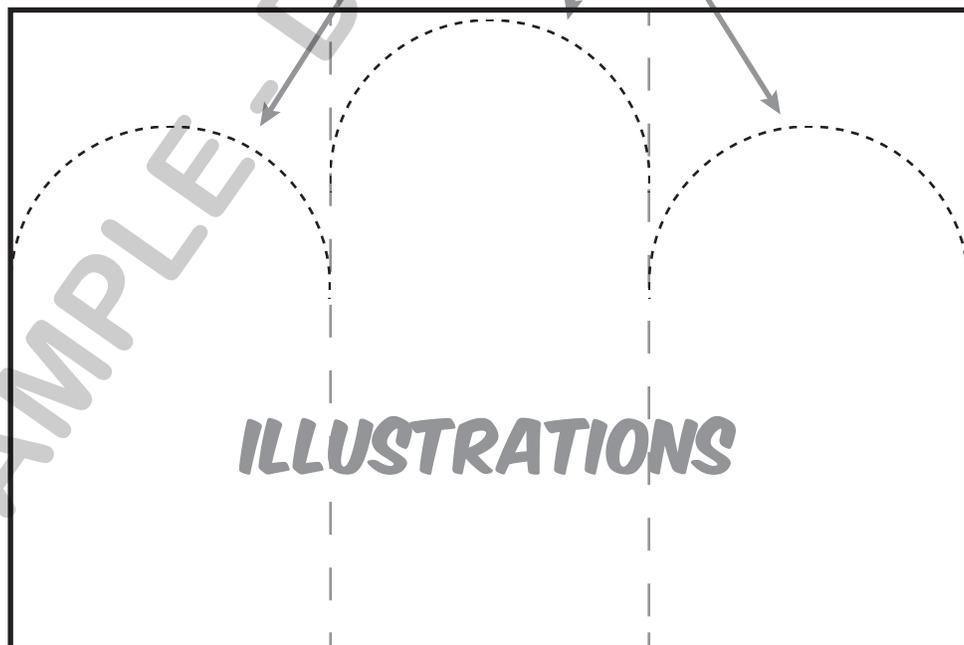
Note: Throughout this activity, be aware that many churches are making the effort to avoid using only male images to represent God. Use wording or language that reflects the tradition and teaching of the participants. However, the opportunity should be found to explain that God is not male or female, but the creator of both. We use words like "father" because we understand God as our loving parent, the sender of all good gifts. Many cultures represent earth as our mother (as St. Francis did), although the Holy Spirit seems to represent many of the mothering or nurturing qualities of God.

Tryptych Instructions



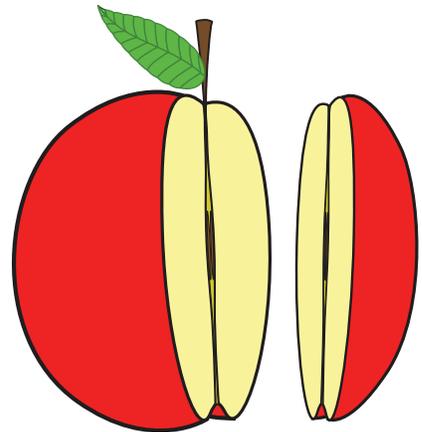
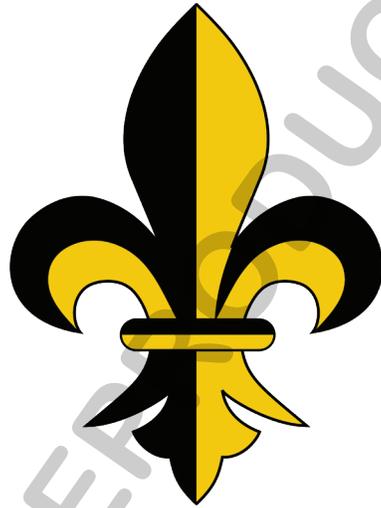
FOLD

TRACE & CUT



ILLUSTRATIONS

“Three-in-One” Symbols



Glory Be

*Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning,
is now,
and ever shall be,
world without end.*

Amen!

SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE

4 Parts of Prayer

Goal

To explore four basic parts of prayer—adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication—and to construct “prayer steps” as a guide for using this formula.

Gather

- ▶ Book(s) of devotions or prayers
- ▶ Chalkboard and chalk, newsprint and markers, or laptop and screen
- ▶ Dictionary
- ▶ Hymnal
- ▶ Markers
- ▶ Paper, construction
- ▶ Paper, scrap
- ▶ Pencils

Guide

Although there are many ways to create a prayer, learning a helpful formula or the basic parts or steps of prayer can be a useful guideline for students.

Begin by writing “Four _____” on a chalkboard or a sheet of newsprint. As the students arrive, have them guess, or print, possible words that could fill the blank. Of course, the answers could be four seasons, four directions, or the four evangelists. Explain that the actual answer that fits with this activity is “parts” or “steps”. During this lesson the pupils will discover that there are four important parts, or steps, to every prayer.

Prayer is the way we talk to God. Sometimes a prayer can be one word, lots of words, or just a feeling in the heart. To help in conversing with God, it is useful to learn that there are four important parts of prayer:

- ▶ **Adoration** - praising God for God’s greatness
- ▶ **Confession** - telling God about something that was not following God’s laws
- ▶ **Thanksgiving** - thanking God for love and for gifts
- ▶ **Supplication** - asking for God’s help or guidance

Organize the students into four groups and assign each cluster one part of prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. Supply the teams with resource materials, such as books of prayer, hymnals, Bibles, and dictionaries. Also provide scrap paper and pencils or pens. Direct the students to look up their assigned prayer words in the dictionary and to write definitions on the scrap paper. Instruct the learners to skim through the books to find examples of prayers that fit their respective category. Suggest checking hymnals to find songs with the “prayer” words as themes and reading the words to the hymns.



Also recommend that the groups look up specific Psalms:

- ▶ Adoration: Psalm 95:1-7
- ▶ Confession: Psalm 32:1-7
- ▶ Thanksgiving: Psalm 100
- ▶ Supplication: Psalm 70:1-3,5

After a designated time, ask each group to share their discoveries about the meaning of their word and specific examples of this type of prayer.

Tell the students that they will be constructing a tool to help them use the four parts of this prayer formula: A-C-T-S. Demonstrate the procedure for creating the prayer steps. Choose a favorite color of construction paper. Fold it the short way into half, then fourths, then eighths. Open the

paper and refold it on the same creases to form steps or a fan. On the bottom step, print the word "Adoration," and on the section above it write comments to demonstrate praise for God. On the next step, print "Confession," then above it enter something you need to tell God. Print "Thanksgiving" on the third step and on the section above, list reasons to be thankful. The last step is "Supplication" and the strip above can include anything for which you need God's help.

Provide the supplies and guide the students as they create their prayer steps.

Suggest that the students fold up their papers and use the craft as a bookmark. They could also stand the steps on a desk or dresser. Remind them that anytime they wish to talk to God, they can use the prayer step idea.

