

Approaches to Prayer

There is a wide variety of ways to pray in the Sabbath School class, and prayer can be a very active and interactive way to learn. Here are just a few approaches, but you should always be seeking ways to add to this list.

Lightning Prayer: Participants contribute a single sentence whenever it occurs to them. A variation of this is to limit the participation to one word: “thanks,” a person’s name, “help,” a personally significant date, “joy,”—God knows what is meant by the word.

Thank-you Notes: Distribute thank-you notes and have class members write down as many things as they can think of for which they are thankful. Close with a prayer of thanks for all the blessings that we receive from God.

Imaginary Partners: Ask participants to join hands and have them imagine that the person whose hand they are holding is a homeless person, the President of the United States, Saddam Hussein, etc. As you name each imaginary person, have the participants offer a prayer for each. Close by having them pray as they imagine that they are holding Jesus’ hand.

Prayer Lists: List requests and praises on paper or orally. Then pray about them. Explain that simply talking about these can be a form of prayer in itself.

Celebration: Share good things as praise to God.

Partners: Pray in partners, sharing praise and concerns and then praying for one another.

Secret Partners: Have each person in the group draw from a hat a name of someone else in the group to pray for. After a predetermined period of time, plan some kind of event or party in which the names of secret partners are revealed.

Prayer Tree: When needs arise during the week, each student calls another until all are praying.

Prayer in the Hat: Write prayer requests on papers and place them in a hat or box. Take turns drawing from the hat and praying for that need. This allows the anonymity that encourages honesty.

Notes to God: Because some Sabbath School class

members find it easier to write notes than to speak out, guide them to write a note to God.

Dialogue: Guide Sabbath School class members to write a prayer dialogue beginning with their words and writing what they think God says back or write a dialogue between God and a Bible character.

Listening: Because prayer includes listening, guide participants to write one prayer entirely from God to them.

Headline Prayers: Record an evening newscast on videotape and play the tape for the class, stopping at the end of each segment for the class to have time to pray for the issue or person mentioned in it. Newspaper clippings can be used for the same purpose. Have someone summarize an article and then have prayer for the person or issue mentioned.

What’s Cooking: Have participants pair off with someone they don’t know, introduce themselves to one another, and share a blessing they have received in the past year and a challenge they will face in the coming year. Then have them pray for God’s leading as they face their challenges.

Thanksgiving Grab Bag: Place in a bag a variety of small, everyday objects (e.g., fork, pencil, watch, key, etc.). Have each participant take one object from the bag and think of one thing that his or her object suggests for which to be thankful to God. Encourage the group to go beyond the obvious. After opening a prayer, have each thank God for something his or her object suggests.

Alphabet Soup: Call out a letter of the alphabet. As people in the group think of an attribute or aspect of God’s nature beginning with that letter, have them say the word or phrase and then briefly praise God for that character quality. For example, if you say “T,” a group member might respond with “Trustworthy: Lord thank You that I can trust You.” Another says,

“Tenderness: God, I praise You for Your tender loving care.” To keep things moving, the leader mentions another letter frequently.

The Name Above All Names: Compile a list of the different forms of the name *Jehovah* and what they mean. Hand out copies to the group and ask them to spend a few minutes meditating on the names. Invite each member to share a name that is particularly meaningful to him or her and to turn it into a short prayer. The person praying might say, “Father, You are *Jehovah-Jireh*, the Lord who provides. Thank You for providing me with a person to talk to this week when I was lonely but too afraid to admit it.” (One source for a list of the names of God is *The Hallelujah Factor* by Jack Taylor, Broadman Press).

Sign-In Requests: A sign-in system can help the group spend less time explaining prayer needs and more time praying. Have a sheet of paper ready and ask members to write down their requests as they arrive or before the meeting begins. During prayer time, read each item aloud and ask someone to pray about it.

Prayer Shuffle: A variation on the sign-in sheet is to have members note requests on index cards. If you have many needs to pray for, organize into groups of three. Shuffle the cards and hand out a few to each group.

Musical Transitions: Use music to lead the group through several prayer transitions. Use a worship song to lead the group into adoration, another to set the stage for a time of silent confession, another to lead into thanksgiving, and yet another to prepare the group to bring their requests before God.

Prayer Posture: Vary your prayer posture. Kneel, stand in a circle and hold hands, raise hands in praise, etc.

Extended Time for Prayer: Provide for prayer activities that extend longer than is usually dedicated to such, maybe as much as half the time allotted for the class or every four or five meetings.

Prayer Vigil: Cover a crisis with continuous prayer. If someone is facing a difficult meeting or exploratory surgery or a critical exam, have group members sign

up to pray for half-hour intervals (or ten minutes, etc.) during the critical time.

Spontaneous Prayer: Sometimes, when someone in a group brings up a need but doesn't necessarily ask for prayer, stop right then and there and ask, “Who will pray for that?” This encourages the idea that prayer should be a response to needs, not just a scheduled activity.

Prayer Calendars: At the beginning of each month, pass around a master calendar on which group members may write down important events (birthdays, anniversaries, tests, medical appointments, interviews, etc.). Make copies of the calendars for everyone in the group so they can pray for these events on the appropriate day.

Prayer Groupings: Create four banners or posters, each to include one of the following: finances, relationships, time/stress, faith/relationship with God. Place them on the four walls or corners of the room. Have participants stand before the banner/poster that addresses their needs for prayer. Have them then pray in each group for one another's needs.

Prayer Banners: Place a large cloth banner (or other piece of cloth on a wall. Have participants write creative expressions of their needs (in phrases, symbols, etc.) on the banner, and have someone offer a prayer for the needs expressed by the phrases and symbols.

Prayer Planes: Give each participant a sheet of paper, have him or her write a prayer request and then fold the request into a paper airplane. On a given signal, have the group launch their airplanes into the air, pick up the one that is nearest to each, unfold the airplane, and silently pray for the request on it.

Sources: Karen Dockrey, *The Youth Worker's Guide to Creative Bible Study* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1991); Lois Keffer, ed., *Creative Worship Ideas* (Loveland, Colo.: Group Publishing, 1993); Deena Davis, ed. Discipleship Journal's *101 Best Small-Group Ideas* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress Publishing, 1996); Greg McKinnon, *Helping Youth Pray* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997); -----, *Innovative Worship* (Loveland, Colo.: Vital Ministry Books, 1999).