

'Prayer'

A reflection for Lent



SLIDE ONE – HOLDING SLIDE

LEADER'S NOTES

Missio has a series of reflections focusing on Lenten words and themes. This reflection explores the word 'prayer' and the Lenten invitation to strengthen our bond with God through prayer.



SLIDE TWO

There are some words we hear a lot of during the season of Lent. 'Prayer' is one such word. In fact, the 40 days of Lent recall the 40 days of prayer Jesus spent in the wilderness.

Like Jesus, we too are asked to use the 40 days of Lent as a focused time of prayer. But what do we understand prayer to be? What do we think of when we hear the word 'prayer'?

Suggestions might include: to ask God for things or for help, to worship, to give thanks.



These are all helpful descriptions for us, but they don't fully explain what Jesus understood prayer to be. To help us understand what prayer meant for Jesus, it's useful to know that the Hebrew word for prayer is *tefillah*, and that *tefillah* means 'to unite' or 'to bond with'.

Hebrew is the official language of the Jewish people and as Jesus was a Jew, *tefillah* would have formed his understanding of prayer. For Jesus, prayer was first of all about uniting with God, his loving Father.

In the Gospels we read that 'Jesus often went onto the mountain to pray.' (Luke 5:16). And this helped him to face many challenging times and decisive moments. Apart from his time in the wilderness, can anyone name other occasions when Jesus sought help through prayer?

Suggestions might include: when choosing his disciples, in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the cross.

How do you think prayer helped Jesus during these times?

Suggestions might include: It gave Jesus strength to cope, allowed him time to reflect, helped him make difficult decisions and act on them.

There are many young people for whom prayer also provides time to reflect, strength to cope, and guidance on what to do. One example is 17-year-old Yousef.

SLIDE THREE

Yousef is a refugee from Iraq who now lives in Jordan. He and his family were driven out of their home in Baghdad following a long period of religious persecution. Even at school, where Yousef should have been safe, he experienced bullying and huge pressure to give up his faith and be like everyone else.

Tragically, when Yousef was 16, the bullying resulted in a terrifying attack. He was doused in petrol and set alight. Yousef was lucky to survive. In the months that followed he had to leave his home, travel to a new country, and undergo rounds of painful treatment to heal his wounds.

Yousef says that it was prayer that sustained him throughout all these challenging times. When asked to explain how, Yousef simply says, "Jesus helps me." He also says he "feels spiritually healed" when people pray for him.

During the many months spent recovering, Yousef also found encouragement in the Bible. His favourite passage reads 'Be my saviour, renew my joy, keep my spirit steady and willing.' (Psalm 51:12)

Yousef and his family are now safe in Jordan. Although they had to flee Iraq quickly and arrived with nothing, the local Catholic community provides them with accommodation and food. With the help of Missio, Yousef is also now receiving an education and support at his local Catholic school.

Throughout his challenging times, Yousef, like Jesus, found strength by uniting with God in private prayer. And now that he is part of a church community again, he also values the times he prays with others.

Belonging to a community of prayer, Yousef, like Jesus and all of us here in this school, unite as children of God –tasked with a mission to be loving, merciful, and just to all.

Charities like Missio remind us that, as children of God, our community of prayer stretches across the world. Each member shares the same responsibility: to pray for and support each other, as Jesus taught us.

Lent, as we heard at the start of this reflection, is a time to focus on *tefillah*. Can you remember what that means? *Tefillah* means prayer that *unites* us with God - and as God resides in everyone – prayer that unites us with one another.

This Lent, take time to think about what prayer means for you. Do you view it as a way to be at one with God, like speaking to a loved one, or is it like asking an adult you don't know very well for help?

If it is the latter, commit to getting to know God – as Yousef did – through reading the Gospels. Mark out as 'favourites' the passages that appeal to you and ask God to help you understand them more fully.

Finally, make an effort to spend more time in prayer, either private prayer or with others. We will begin by doing that now, with the prayer that Jesus taught us. But let's start with a few seconds of silence, uniting with God, with Yousef, and with each other.

Our Father, who art in heaven...

