



GODCONNECTS™

A COURSE IN CHRISTIANITY



LHM.ORG/GODCONNECTS

DISCUSSION GUIDE - SESSION 7

USING THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

This is an interactive study guide. We designed it to be flexible so it will fit both group and personal use. It includes links, which provide extra information on Internet sites where you can browse and dig as deep as you want.

A PDF discussion guide containing all 12 sessions, as well as single session guides, are available at www.lhm.org/godconnects.

To find the discussion guide on the DVD, load it into your computer (not your DVD player). You can right click the menu. Push "Open" instead of "Play" and you will pull up a list of files, which includes the discussion guide.



ABOUT US

God Connects is a ministry of Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM). As a Christian outreach ministry, LHM supports churches worldwide, producing Christian radio and TV programming for broadcast, Internet and print communications, dramas, music, and outreach materials—all designed to reach unchurched people in the United States and more than 30 countries around the world. Lutheran Hour Ministries' flagship program, **The Lutheran Hour**, airs weekly on more than 1,400 stations and the American Forces Network. To learn more about this long-running Gospel program and LHM's other ministry resources, go to www.lhm.org.

CONTACT US

We would love to connect to you. Call us at **1-855-JOHN316 (1-855-564-6316)** E-mail to lhmresponse@lhm.org.

INTRODUCTION

GodConnects: In a difficult and confusing world, God is connecting to you!

God, are You there?

Everyone, at some point, asks this question. It can come at moments of sterile reflection or in times of deep despair. "God, if You are there, why don't You show Yourself to me?" In this confusing world where authenticity is so elusive, it seems like we cannot connect to God.

We could not connect to God, but the good news is that God connects with us. He has been doing this from the beginning in amazing ways. The most direct way God connected to us is when He became one of us in Jesus Christ. When Jesus was on this earth, He was the very revelation of God as He taught and healed and loved.

Then to restore our connection to God which had been shattered because of sin, on the cross, Jesus willingly paid the penalty for our sins—in His own death! This is the most authentic, startling and determined love the world could have ever imagined.

Now God connects to us by revealing Himself in the Bible. This God-given book has an amazing story. It tells of God's constant and compassionate work to restore our relationship with Him.

GodConnects wants to share that story with you. *GodConnects* is a course that tells this unique, unequalled story. Whether you do not believe in Christ as Savior or want to deepen your faith in Him, as you delve into *GodConnects* you will explore what the Bible says about this remarkably loving God, and how this love gives direction and meaning to your life today and forever.

On this website, you can explore these questions of faith. You will find videos and other up-to-date media that take advantage of today's technology.

So let's get started

PRAYER

Session 7: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for making me Your own child in Jesus Christ, Your Son. Teach me how to pray, that I may share my life with You, and be confident You will hear and answer my prayers. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

7.1. WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is simply talking to God, communicating with the true and living God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Prayer is God's gift to us. As our Heavenly Father, God loves to hear from us. He delights in our requests, thanksgiving and praise. He is eager to hear our sorrow and sadness. God cares about each of us and promises He will respond to us as we speak with Him.

In Philippians the apostle Paul sums up God's invitation to pray and His gift of peace as we dialog with Him:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Prayer doesn't have to include fancy words or phrases. In fact, it is an exciting and heartfelt part of a healthy relationship with God.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What thoughts come to your mind when you think of prayer?
- What has been your experience with prayer?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "The Gift of Prayer" (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2012/the-gift-of-prayer-5-2012>) is an article that explains the great privilege of prayer.

7.2. WHY SHOULD I PRAY?

Jesus both commands and invites us to pray:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

With hope, faith and trust in God, we respond to His invitation to pray.

7.3. WHEN SHOULD I PRAY?

Times that would seem natural for prayer include when we're in church, before meals, and at bedtime. But prayer isn't just for those venues. The Bible invites us to "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). God wants us to be in an ongoing conversation with Him. Your prayers can be formal at times, but frequently they are simply a conversation—just like you might have with a friend. Sometimes you will pray out loud. At other times, you speak with God silently in your thoughts. God hears all your prayers and is glad when you take time to share your life with Him.

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Pray without Ceasing?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7723PD.mp3>)

7.4. WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

God invites you to communicate with Him just as you would communicate with a friend or family member who loves you and cares about you. You wouldn't only call that person when you want something from them. You call to thank them, to compliment them, to share your joys, your sorrows, and your life—and to share theirs. The same is true of our prayer life with God.

He invites you to confess your sins and failures to Him and ask for forgiveness.

I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:5)

He lets you know you can compliment Him for His great works.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy Name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. (Psalm 103:1-2)

God invites your requests and your thanksgiving.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:17)

In other words, you can talk to Him about anything. No concern is too big or too small.

You are also invited to pray for others. Prayer is not just about your life, but also about caring for other people and asking God's blessing for their lives.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. (1 Timothy 2:1-6)

(Jesus said) "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matthew 5:44)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How can expanding our prayers beyond simple personal requests and needs to include thanks and praise reinforce that prayer is about more than our concerns, it's our entire relationship with God?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "How Do I Pray" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA8105PD.mp3>)

7.5. WHAT IS THE LORD'S PRAYER?

When Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray, He responded with what has been called, "The Lord's Prayer." It is a good pattern and guide for prayer. In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus taught His disciples to pray. The traditional translation of the Lord's Prayer is this:

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Each phrase is packed with powerful prayer counsel:

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN: *We approach God as a good and faithful Father who loves us and seeks for us to be in a relationship with Him. God is good. He promises to show His goodness in our lives.*

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does it affect your thoughts about prayer when you think of God as your loving Father who cares about every facet of your life?

HALLOWED BY THY NAME: God's Name is holy. We, as His servants, want to honor His holiness and show the holiness of His Name in all we say, think and do.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- God's Name is His reputation and it impacts how we think of Him. What kinds of things happen in life which make it hard to see God as a holy, good, loving Father?
- How does the hurt we cause by our selfish words and actions harm God's reputation for others?

THY KINGDOM COME: In addition to eagerly wanting Jesus to come back and restore all things, we pray that God's work is active in our lives. We want Him to prevail with His blessing, His truth, and His mission. We also pray that our lives show what God's kind, gracious and righteous ways are all about to the world around us.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How can your words and actions help extend God's kingdom in your home, workplace and community?

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN: God's will is for all people in the world to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. We humbly subject all our wants and desires to God's goals and desires for our lives and for the world.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it often so hard to subject our will under God's will?

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD: Jesus lets us know we can ask God to supply our daily needs. He cares about us to provide for us. No concern is too small for our faithful God.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why do you think Jesus focuses our attention on today's needs rather than our future needs?

AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US: We depend on God for the forgiveness of our sins. We also ask that His forgiveness flow through us to others in our lives. We are asking that God's spirit of grace and compassion takes hold in our relationships.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What happens to our relationships if we refuse to forgive each other?
- How can you forgive the really big sins other people commit against you?

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL: God doesn't tempt us, but He sometimes permits us to go through difficult times to teach us to rely on Him and not ourselves or others. Satan uses those same situations to tempt us to doubt our Father's love, and turn away from Him and His will for us. We pray that He keeps us from everything that would lead us away from His will. We also pray He would protect us and our loved ones from all evil and harm.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe a test you have gone through in your life. In what ways did it pull you away from God, and in what ways did it draw you closer to Him?
- Why must we be careful when we try to figure out for ourselves or explain to others why God is permitting us to go through difficult times?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "He Speaks, We Listen" (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2012/he-speaks-we-listen-5-2012>) is an article that extols the Lord's Prayer.
- "The Lord's Prayer" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1085>) is a pamphlet in which you can find out more about each portion of the Lord's Prayer and how it can help you pray.

7.6. HOW DOES GOD ANSWER PRAYER?

God answers every prayer of a believer. Sometimes He says, “Yes.” Other times He says, “No, I have something better in mind.” Still other times He says, “Wait for My answer; the time is not right yet.”

Throughout the ages God has rescued people from trouble and has provided for their needs. His greatest “Yes” was in sending His Son Jesus to save us from eternal separation from Him and give us the gift of eternal life.

But there are times when God responds with the answer “No” to our prayers. It is during those times we are called to trust Him. Jesus experienced that Himself. Even when He begged with tears to be delivered from the suffering He was to face on the cross, God responded “No” (see Matthew 26:36-42). God’s plan was to save us through the sacrifice of His Son. The apostle Paul wrestled with God’s answer of “No” to his prayer, but in faith he was able to move forward:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

Sometimes God responds to our prayers by having us wait for Him and by letting us decide our own course of action. Along this journey, we are called to trust His timing and His ways, knowing that He loves us and has our best interest at heart—as well as the best interest of all those who will be impacted by His answers to our prayers.

But for You, O LORD, do I wait; it is You, O Lord my God, who will answer. (Psalm 38:15)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe a time you were better off not receiving what you wanted.

7.7. IF GOD DIDN'T SAY YES TO MY PRAYER, WAS IT BECAUSE I DIDN'T PRAY ENOUGH?

Prayer is not a ritual or work that earns God’s favor or causes your wishes to come true. Prayer is a gift of God, expressing an intimate relationship with Him and a steady trust in Him. God wants you to approach Him with humility and trust. If your prayer isn’t answered the way you want it to be, you are called to trust your Heavenly Father who loves you and promises to care for you always.

Jesus offered wise words about our prayer life:

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6:5–9)

If God already knows what we need before we ask, some might wonder why we should still pray? That’s missing the point about prayer. It is not about what we can get from God, but about building our trust and our relationship with our loving, faithful Father.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- As a teenager, what things were you uncomfortable discussing with your parents?
- What things do you regret not sharing with them?
- In what way is our prayer life with our Heavenly Father like that? How is it different?

DIGGING DEEPER

- “No Is a Good Thing” (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2012/no-is-a-good-thing-5-2012>) is an article explaining why God sometimes does not grant the requests we make in prayer.

7.8. HOW DO I LISTEN TO GOD?

In prayer we speak to God, but how does He give us His answer? Many people look to circumstances in their lives, but each event in our lives is a small piece of the puzzle. Often in the middle of a situation we can't know why God does what He does. It's all a matter of trusting the good and gracious will of our Heavenly Father.

In such times the only safe place to seek God's answer is in His Word, the Bible. The Bible is living and active:

For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

As God's Word lives in you, the Holy Spirit will teach you and bring to mind God's Word for your life. He will strengthen your confidence that your Father is doing what is best for you and everyone associated with you. Jesus said,

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:26)

The Bible invites you to let God's Word dwell in you so that you will be tuned in to God's leading and will for your life.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Describe a situation when you weren't sure where God was guiding you.
- How would you deal with a similar situation today?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Listen to God's Voice" (<http://blogs.lcms.org/2012/listen-to-gods-voice-5-2012>) is an article that explains that we must be wary of "listening to our heart" as God's response to our prayer. Rather we trust God is speaking to us in the words of the Bible.

7.9. WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY OR AM TOO UPSET TO PRAY?

When you don't know what to say or can't even speak, the Bible promises the Holy Spirit prays for you with groans too deep for words.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

The Bible also assures you that Jesus Himself intercedes for you—prays on your behalf.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the One who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. (Romans 8:31-34)

Because of His love for you, God makes sure your prayers are heard and your needs are understood by God.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Jesus already told us the Father knows what we need before we ask. What added confidence do you get knowing Jesus and the Holy Spirit are also bringing your needs before Him?

DIGGING DEEPER

- *Prayer: When You Don't Know What to Say* (booklet, <http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#7.9>)

7.10. WHAT ATTITUDE SHOULD I HAVE IN PRAYER?

It is important to come to God with humility and repentance—acknowledging your imperfection and failure, trusting in His mercy, and sacrificing your will for His. Prayer is not a tool to use so you can get your own way. It is yielding your complete self to the hands of your Savior who cares for you. Sometimes God humbles us and prepares us for approaching Him in prayer as this [movie clip](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOgdjlPRWMg) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOgdjlPRWMg>) from *Bruce Almighty* illustrates.

God calls us to pray:

In faith:

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. (James 1:6-7)

Seeking His will:

And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. (1 John 5:14)

In the Name of His Son, Jesus:

(Jesus said) "In that day you will ask nothing of Me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My Name, He will give it to you." (John 16:23)

We often include these three features when we request something, and then we say, "If it is Your will. In Jesus' Name. Amen." The Hebrew word "Amen" is faith's strong confidence that God will answer our prayer as He has promised.

7.11. WHAT HELP CAN I FIND FOR MY PRAYER LIFE?

Online apps and other prayer resources can be found here: <http://www.lcms.org/pray>

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father what a tremendous privilege You give Your children to pray to You—the God and Creator of all. Give me confidence You will always hear and answer my prayers for Jesus' sake. Amen.