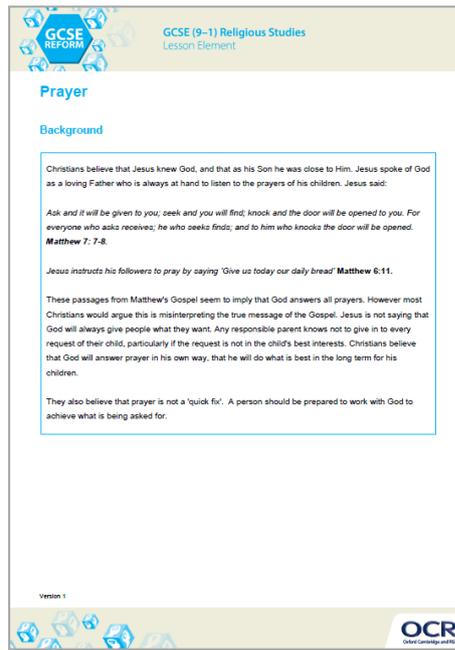




Prayer

Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions should accompany the OCR resource 'Prayer' activity which supports OCR GCSE (9–1) Religious Studies.



The Activity:

This resource comprises of 4 tasks.



This activity offers an opportunity for English skills development.

Associated materials:

'Prayer' Lesson Element learners' activity sheet.



This resource is an exemplar of the types of materials that will be provided to assist in the teaching of the new qualifications being developed for first teaching in 2016. It can be used to teach existing qualifications but may be updated in the future to reflect changes in the new qualifications. Please check the OCR website for updates and additional resources being released. We would welcome your feedback so please get in touch.



Prior learning

What is prayer? Types of prayer in Christianity eg Thanksgiving, Penitential, Adoration, Intercessory. It would also be helpful if students have studied the attributes of God.

Prayer – Background

Christians believe that Jesus knew God, and that as his Son he was close to Him. Jesus spoke of God as a loving Father who is always at hand to listen to the prayers of his children. Jesus said:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened.

Matthew 7: 7-8.

Jesus instructs his followers to pray by saying 'Give us today our daily bread' Matthew 6:11.

These passages from Matthew's Gospel seem to imply that God answers all prayers. However most Christians would argue this is misinterpreting the true message of the Gospel. Jesus is not saying that God will always give people what they want. Any responsible parent knows not to give in to every request of their child, particularly if the request is not in the child's best interests. Christians believe that God will answer prayer in his own way, that he will do what is best in the long term for his children.

They also believe that prayer is not a 'quick fix'. A person should be prepared to work with God to achieve what is being asked for.

Task 1 – Two Christian responses to prayer

Read the two quotations below. How do they reflect or contradict Jesus' teaching above?

Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.

**Soren Kierkegaard –
Danish philosopher and theologian
(1813-1855)**

"The wise man in the storm prays to God not for safety from danger but for deliverance from fear."

**Ralph Waldo Emerson - American
lecturer and poet (1803-1882)**



Task 2 – Does Prayer Work?

In recent years a number of scientific studies have taken place conducting research into the question above. The link below will take you to a video in which two academics try to answer the question. While watching the video make notes as to what the two academics say. The teacher is likely to need to pause the video to explain and summarise the key points, key terms and direct students to record certain ideas.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/30/prayer-science_n_1464622.html

Q: Does it matter that these scientific studies seem to conclude that prayer does not work?

High Achieving students might also like to read this blog post from *Candy Gunther Brown @candygbrown, Professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University and author of Testing Prayer: Science and Healing (Harvard University Press, 2012)*

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/candy-gunther-brown-phd/testing-prayer-science-of-healing_b_1299915.html

Task 3 – Formal debates

The idea of prayer, and questions as to its efficacy, raises profound philosophical questions for Christians. One of the best ways to explore the arguments is to use formal debating rather than class discussion. Formal debating requires students to construct a coherent argument and use evidence to defend their points. Students should work in teams of three with a proposer, a main speaker and a summary speaker. The team supporting the motion is the proposition and the team arguing against is the opposition. Each speaker should aim to speak for three minutes. Depending on the size of the class and the abilities of the students the teacher should be free to adapt the number of debates and who takes part. The following debate motions are given as suggestions:

- This House believes that God answers all prayers.
- This House believes that prayer is pointless.
- This House believes that you shouldn't test God.

The links below should be shared with students to help them in constructing their speeches though this activity also lends itself to independent research including key Bible passages on prayer and other philosophical and theological quotations.

<http://www.philosophyofreligion.info/arguments-for-atheism/problems-with-petitionary-prayer/>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3193902.stm>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/1627662.stm>



Task 4 – Essay

Following on from the debates it would be a good idea to set the students an essay entitled: Does Prayer work? The example below is suggested as a model answer.

Prayer is something common to all major world religions. It is a fundamental part of Christianity and in Matthew chapter 6 Jesus told his followers how to pray. These words (The Lord's Prayer) are a primary part of worship across most Christian denominations. However there are a number of philosophical objections to the notion of prayer, particularly petitionary prayer. I would argue that prayer may help a believer as a tool for reflection but nothing beyond that.

The first major objection to the idea of petitionary prayer is that God cannot logically answer them. In Matthew 7:7 Jesus said "ask and it shall be given to you; seek ye shall find." This clearly shows that Christians who ask God for something can expect an answer. But the classical attributes God is said to possess do not allow petitionary prayer to work. If God is immutable then you cannot change his mind. What he has already decided will occur, your prayers make no difference to the mind of God. Furthermore if God is omniscient that he already knows what you are going to ask for and what you are going to do. (Jeremiah 1:5 – before life forms in your mother's womb I knew thee.) It is a logical contradiction for Christians to believe in a personal God who can answer prayers whilst also maintaining a God who is transcendent and omnipotent. I concur with the Danish theologian Kierkegaard who maintains that "prayer does not change God but rather it changes the one who prays."

This brings me onto my second substantive point that prayer may have a positive effect on an individual even if no scientific evidence shows that either God exists or that he answers prayers. A study from Duke University in 2001 found that patients who received intercessory prayer recovered better from surgery than those who had not been prayed for. However another study two years later by the same hospital found no benefits from prayer. The Bishop of Durham Tom Wright explained that this is because "it's like setting an exam for God to see if he will pass" and that prayer doesn't work like that. This is a poor criticism as it undermines any scientific study into the effectiveness of prayer. If God won't respond to a test like this how can we be sure any prayer is ever answered?

This raises a final point, the lack of answered prayers highlights problems associated with the problem of evil. With so many people in the world (not just Christians) praying for peace and unity why doesn't God act. In the book of Job the devil is granted permission by God to test the faith of Job, a righteous man.

Job suffers unimaginably yet retains his faith and after Job prays for his friends God restores his fortunes and gives him twice as much as he had before. (Job 42:10). Lucky Job! To be blessed by God after so much torture. What about the prayers of children torn from their parents in concentration camps? What of the person injured in a terrorist attack who loses a limb? If God can answer Job's prayer, why can't he answer everyone else's? The answers from Christians are unsatisfactory: God is testing people or people suffer now in preparation for paradise or human free will as a result of the fall is to blame. A God who fails to answer petitionary prayers or to intervene to end suffering where there is biblical precedent he's done so before is a hypocrite and not worthy of adoration and praise.

Philosophically it makes no sense to say that a transcendent and immutable deity would care for the individual prayers of the billions of people on our planet. The effects of prayer cannot be scientifically tested and proven to work and the existence of evil raises damaging questions about a God who can answer prayers but chooses not to. Mother Theresa said that "prayer is not asking - prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God." Prayer is therefore placebo. If it makes you feel better then great but ultimately Mother Teresa's quote is fatalistic and self-defeating. Putting yourself in the hands of God and putting him in charge shows ultimately that prayer is pointless.



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