

A Scripture Union resource book



# ULTIMATE

## Creative prayer



Judith Merrell

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Scripture Union is an international Christian charity, working with churches in more than 130 countries, providing resources to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to children, young people and families and to encourage them to develop spiritually through the Bible and prayer.

As well as our network of volunteers, staff and associates who run holidays, church-based events and school Christian groups, we produce a wide range of publications and support those who use our resources through training programmes.

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# So what's it all about?

Many children are taught to recite prayers 'parrot fashion' from a very early age. They might learn a mealtime grace or the Lord's Prayer, in exactly the same way that they learn a nursery rhyme, but do they ever learn who they are talking to and do they understand the meaning of the words they repeat?

You've probably heard young children pray 'Our Father who art in heaven, Harold be thy name...' It's a common mistake to make since children will often insert familiar words with a similar sound in place of words that have no meaning for them. A small 4-year-old was once heard to pray, with great sincerity, 'Our Father who's Martin Evans...' Well, there were three children called Martin in her class so it was an understandable mistake! It is vitally important that we take the time to explain the whole concept of prayer to children young and old, so that they grow up confident that they can talk to God easily and naturally about whatever is on their hearts.

Have you ever tried to explain prayer, what it is and how you do it? It's no easy task! Take a couple of minutes to think about it now. What words and expressions would you use?

Many years ago I remember hearing prayer described as 'like a telephone conversation with God'. Yet prayer is something far better than that. God is never out or too busy to answer our call. We don't need to worry about running out of credit. We don't need to fret about high rates for calling another network and we don't need to worry about how we're going to pay the bill!

Once we have explained what prayer is, children then want to know why we pray. We need to explain that God wants us to be in constant touch with him and, just as we chat to our friends, so God wants us to talk to him. God chooses to work through people's prayers and in this way he gives us the opportunity to play a part in the good things he does. We also pray because the Bible specifically tells us to. See Ephesians 6:18,19; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; 1 Timothy 2:1,2; James 5:13-15.

When I was a child, prayer time at my junior school was always introduced by the words, 'Hands together and eyes closed.' It was all part of an accepted ritual. We didn't listen to the words that followed. I'm not sure that we even understood them, we just waited for the word 'Amen' which was the cue to open our eyes. I often wonder how many children have grown up with the assumption that 'Amen' means 'You can open your eyes now'! While familiar routines offer the comfort of a security blanket, they can also leave people thinking that there is only one correct way to pray. Years of listening to other people pray on their behalf can leave children with the impression that only ministers and Sunday group leaders can talk to God. Equally, if all our prayers begin with 'Most Almighty Father God' and end with 'Amen' children may well assume that this is the secret formula that makes a prayer work! Misunderstandings gleaned at an early age can take a long while to shake off.






It is important that leaders don't just pray on behalf of children or adults, but encourage them to participate as well. It is all too easy to switch off when someone else is praying! Moreover, if leaders always pray at great length and pepper all their prayers with long and learned words, those listening may well be left feeling 'I could never do that!' It is therefore essential that we find ways of encouraging others to pray both on their own and in groups.

The following creative prayer ideas have been divided into five sections. The first section 'But I don't know what to pray' includes ideas for how you might structure and stimulate sessions for a time of group prayer. The second section 'Prayers to join in' includes a number of response prayers where a leader and the group or congregation pray alternately. The third section 'Prayers to shout out loud' includes a handful of prayer shouts and chants. The fourth, section 'Prayers to write, draw and make' covers prayer collages, praise posters and many other creative prayer suggestions that can be used either with groups of children or in situations where all ages meet to pray together. Finally, there is a section of prayers suitable for various festivals and special days during the year.

With thanks to the writers of Scripture Union's curriculum programmes who have inspired several of the ideas in this book. Particular thanks to

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**Key to symbols:**

- 
 Can easily be used or adapted for use with under-5s.
- 
 Suitable for use with 5- to 11-year-olds.
- 
 Suitable for a mixed age group or all-age service.
- 
 Can be used as part of a five-minute all-age talk.
- 
 Craft equipment required.

# ULTIMATE

## Creative Prayer

# 1 But I don't know what to pray...

Many groups feel that they would like to have a time of open prayer as part of their weekly meeting, but for many children and some adults this can be a daunting prospect. They'd rather not join in because they don't know what to pray about. A short time of discussion can provide a natural lead-in to prayers.

Sometimes people find it helpful to have some kind of structure on which they can base their discussion and the prayers that follow. You might like to try out some of the following ideas.

Thank you, sorry, please (teaspoon prayers)

under-5s   5 to 11s   all-age   5-min talk

Perhaps the most simple way of structuring a prayer is to use the three themes thank you, sorry and please. Have a short time of chat and discussion focusing on what the group might want to say to God using these three themes. Finally have a short time of open prayer or ask a leader to weave together all the topics mentioned, in a closing prayer. TSP, the first letters of Thank you, Sorry, Please, remind us of the recipe book abbreviation for teaspoon. It can be helpful to give younger children a plastic teaspoon to take home to remind them of these three basic categories for prayer.

## Prayer bookmarks

5 to 11s

Children often grow up with all kinds of misunderstandings about prayer. Some children believe that only important folk like archbishops and Sunday group leaders can pray. Others think that you can only pray about big, important issues. Some children think that it is wrong to pray in the middle of the night because God might be asleep and one or two believe that God will only hear you if you pray in church. Why not make prayer bookmarks to help your group remember that God does not restrict where, when and how we can pray?

Encourage children to copy out the following short prayer on side one of the bookmark:

Lord God,  
Thank you that wherever I am,  
Whatever the time,  
I can pray about anything at all,  
Big or small!

On side two get the children to write:

ANYONE can PRAY about ANYTHING, ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

Let children decorate their bookmarks with drawings or sticky shapes. Then, punch a hole at the bottom and attach a tassel.

## Three envelopes

under-5s 5 to 11s

Some groups start out by being rather shy about praying out loud. In this case why not pin up three envelopes labelled 'Thank you', 'Sorry' and 'Please' and let group members write their prayers on slips of paper and put them in the appropriate envelope. Don't forget to check the envelopes from time to time to let everyone share in the joy of the thank you prayers and to find out how the please prayers have been answered.

## Prayer hand

5 to 11s all-age 5-min talk

Some people find it helpful to pray around the fingers of their hand. The index finger, which people generally use to point the way, reminds us to pray for the people who point the way for us in our lives, eg teachers and church leaders. The middle finger, which is taller than the others, reminds us to pray for those who rule over us. The third finger, on which many adults wear a wedding ring, reminds us to pray for those whom we love. The little finger, which is the weakest, reminds us to pray for those who are weak, elderly or ill. It can also remind us to pray for 'little old me'! Finally the thumb, which is set apart from the fingers, reminds us to pray for those abroad, missionaries or people living in difficult situations.

## Yesterday, today, tomorrow

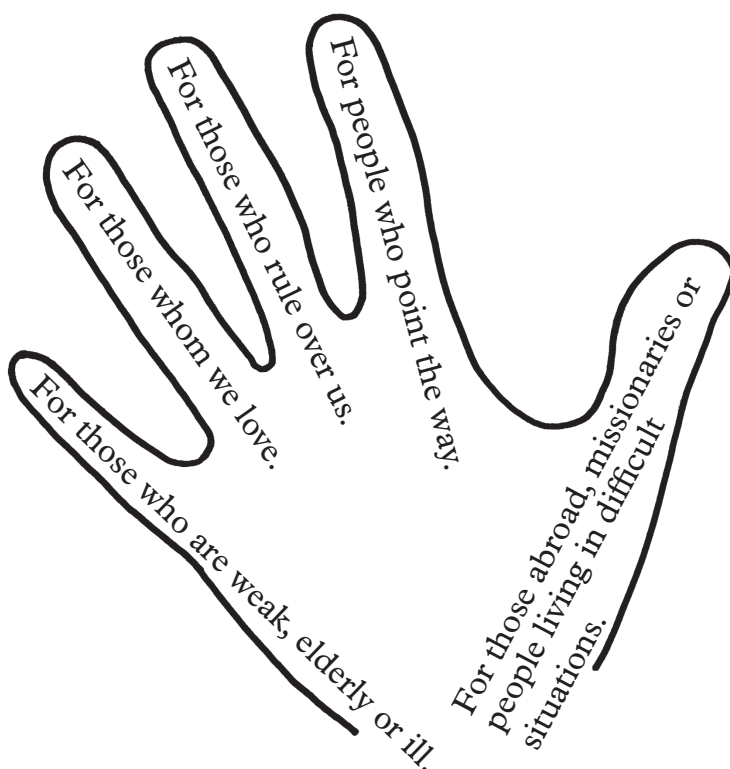
5 to 11s

Divide a sheet of paper into three columns and ask the group to tell you about anything that happened yesterday which they would like to give thanks for. Do the same for today and then move on to tomorrow, asking whether there is anything happening tomorrow that the group would like to request special prayers for. Make brief notes in each column and then move on to a time of open prayer. As each thing is prayed for tick it off so that everyone can see which items remain. It is often a good idea to ask a leader to close in prayer so that any items not yet mentioned can be included at this point and no one need feel that their prayer requests have been forgotten.

## Past, present, future

5 to 11s

This activity is very similar to the above suggestion, but it gives the opportunity to look at a wider period of time. The column labelled 'past' might include last week or last month, while the column labelled 'future' might cover next week, next term or next year.

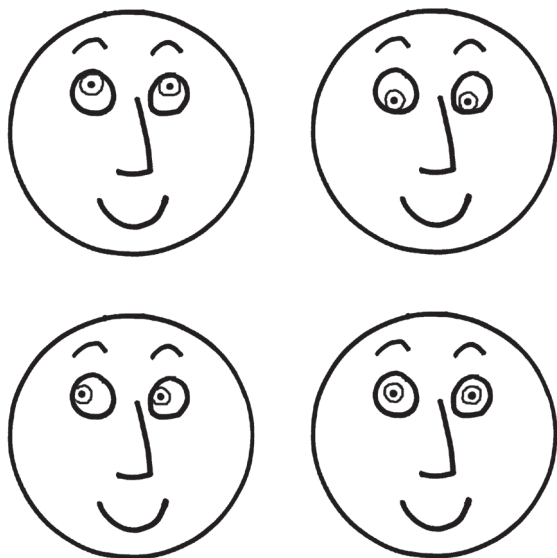




## Four faces



The four faces illustrated below can work as a very effective prayer reminder. Draw each face on a separate sheet of paper. Then show the faces to your group, one at a time, to prompt their suggestions for prayer. The first picture reminds us to begin by looking up to God and offering him our praise and worship. In the second picture the eyes are looking down. This reminds us to look at ourselves and pray about our own lives, thanking God for all the good things that have happened and saying sorry for all our wrongdoing. In the third picture the eyes are looking to one side. This reminds us to look around at others and to pray for our friends and for those who are ill or absent. Finally, in the fourth picture, the eyes are looking forward to the future. This reminds us to pray about some of the things that will be happening tomorrow, next week or next month.



## Circle prayer



Ask your group to stand in a circle and hold hands. Then, in a few moments of silence, ask everyone to pray, first for the person on their left and then for the person on their right. Alternatively, if your group is quite confident about praying out loud, you might like to go round the group and ask each person to pray a short prayer for the person on their left, thanking God for them and asking that God would bless them. You could finish by singing a song about us all being one together.

## Prayer and music mix



Some people find it hard to concentrate when prayers run on for a long time. Why not intersperse prayers and music?

Invite the group to sing a song or hymn with three or four verses and ask two or three people to contribute one short prayer in between each verse. Give each person a specific topic for their prayer (eg friends and family, the church and its organisations, the country and its leaders, international needs) and, if necessary, encourage them to write down their prayer beforehand.

## Prayer pauses



Many people find it helpful when prayers that are led from the front include short pauses for private prayer.

Father God, we thank you for our church/group and we ask that you will help us to grow closer to each other and closer to you.

Let's think of the people sitting on either side of us and ask that God will be especially close to them. (PAUSE.)

We also remember those people who are not with us today, perhaps through illness or because they are on holiday.

Let's remember them in our own prayers now. (PAUSE.)

Father God, we thank you for the town where we live and we ask that you will help us to spread your love to our friends and neighbours.

Let's think of one or two particular friends and ask that God will help us tell them the good news. (PAUSE.)

Father God, we thank you for the time we have spent together and we ask that you will be with us throughout the rest of the day.

Let's all think of the things that we are going to do later today and bring them before God now. (PAUSE.)

Lord, thank you that you listen to all our prayers spoken and unspoken. Amen.

## The church

5 to 11s    all-age    5-min talk

Draw a simple outline of your church building and inside, on the left-hand side, write the days of the week. Then, working through the seven days of the week, ask your group to name the different organisations that use your church buildings each day, eg Girls'/Boys' Brigade, mother and toddler

group, prayer group, youth club, Sunday club. Pray for each group in turn asking that God will bless them in all their activities and that each group will come to know him better. If your group are used to praying aloud, you might like to ask different people to say a short prayer for each of the groups that meet on your church premises.

|           |                                |
|-----------|--------------------------------|
| Sunday    | Church, Sunday Club, 18+ Group |
| Monday    | Mother and Toddler Group       |
| Tuesday   | Girls' Brigade                 |
| Wednesday | Prayer Group, Badminton Club   |
| Thursday  | Boys' Brigade                  |
| Friday    | Xstream                        |
| Saturday  | Youth Club                     |

## Prayer diaries



A prayer diary can often be used to encourage children to pray regularly. Give each member of your group a sheet of paper which they must divide into four columns. Leave the first column blank and put the headings, 'Thank you', 'Sorry' and 'Please' at the top of the remaining columns.

Write the seven days of the week in the first column and rule a line under each day. Encourage your group to take the diaries home and spend a few minutes each evening writing a short thank you, sorry and please prayer about the events of the day.

## News time



Have a short time of sharing in which each group member briefly relates what they have been doing during the past week and what they expect to be doing during the coming week.

Make sure that no one feels that their news is too insignificant. God is interested in every aspect of our lives, not just the things that we consider to be important. Let this news time lead into a time of prayer, thanking God for the good things that have happened, asking God to bless those events which are still to come and asking him to help in those situations that are a cause for concern. You may like to have a short time of open prayer in which several people pray for one or two of the items mentioned.

Alternatively, you might prefer to have a time of silence in which each person quietly goes round the group, praying for the group members in turn as they remember what they said.

## News headlines



Tape the news headlines from the radio just before you meet with your group. Listen to the recording together and then pray for those items mentioned on the news. Point out that amidst all the bad news in the world Christians have an important message of good news to tell others.

## Prayer clusters



Christian adults often pray in small groups, but for children this can be a daunting prospect. To help children feel at home with this practice, it is a good idea to give them a few guidelines to begin with.

Divide the children into groups of four or five and ask them to all think about one really good thing that happened to them last week. When they have had a few moments to think, ask them to tell the rest of the group what it was. Next ask the children to think ahead to the coming week and ask if there is a particular event that they are concerned or excited about and to share this with the rest of the group. Then suggest that each child in the group says a short prayer for the child on their right. It might go something like this:

*'Dear Lord, thank you that Jenny had a really good time with her friends at the swimming pool last week. Please help her not to feel nervous about going to the dentist on Tuesday. Amen.'*

## Walkabout



Many people find it hard to concentrate when they are sitting still. In fact some people can concentrate more easily when they are on their feet and moving around. Why not try out the following idea which enables people to move around as they pray.

Ask group members to share anything for which they want to say 'thank you', 'sorry' or 'please' to God. Write each suggestion in large lettering on a sheet of A4 paper. You might like to add to these sheets any prayer requests from mission partners attached to your church and also prayer pointers about situations in the news. These could be accompanied by photos and news clippings and should be prepared beforehand. Display these prayer requests around your room, spaced as far apart as possible. Invite the group to walk around, stopping from time to time to read the sheets and to pray silently for each item. You might like to play some very quiet music in the background.

## Three circles

5 to 11s

all-age

5-min talk

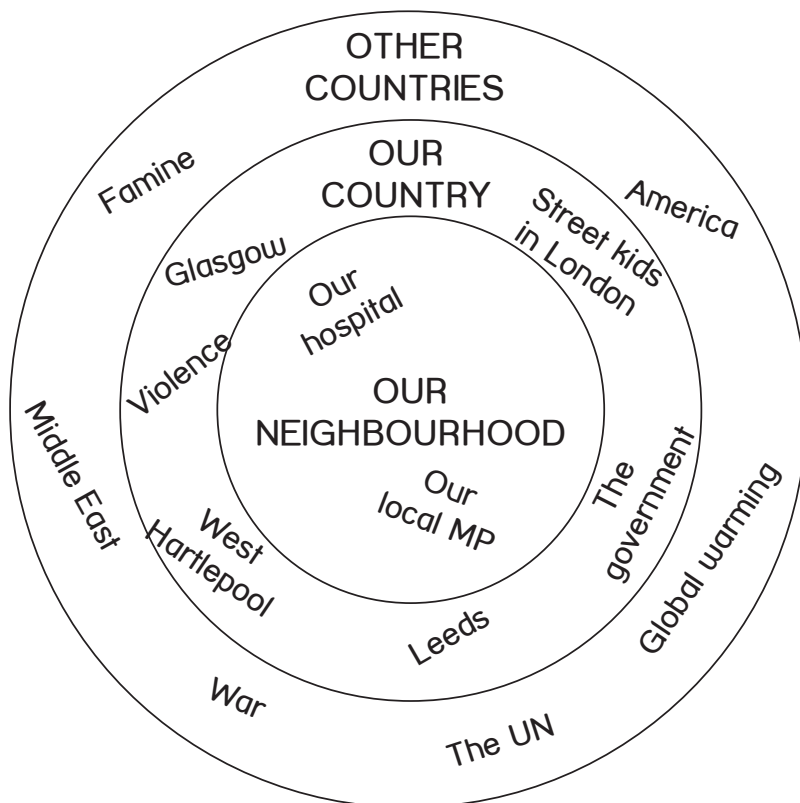
Draw three circles, one inside the other, on a large sheet of paper. Label the inside circle 'our neighbourhood' and ask your group to suggest local issues that should be prayed about. Make one or two notes in this circle to remind everyone of the topics for prayer. Then label the second circle 'our country' and this time ask your group to suggest national topics for prayer and note down their ideas. Finally label the third circle 'other countries' and talk about and make notes on international topics for prayer. Finish with a short time of open prayer. Alternatively, ask a leader to weave together all the topics mentioned into a concluding prayer

## Scrapbook

5 to 11s

craft

Why not keep a large prayer scrapbook for your group? Begin with a short time of news and chat in which group members share some of the joys and worries of the previous week and any concerns that they have for the following week. Then, ask a leader to weave all these ideas into a prayer thanking God for all the good things that have happened and asking for his help in areas of concern. Write each prayer in marker pen on a blank page in the scrapbook, so that the whole group can read the prayer aloud together. You could include photos or drawings to accompany the prayer. Don't forget to date each prayer as it is written. From time to time look back over earlier pages and think about how God has answered the prayer requests.



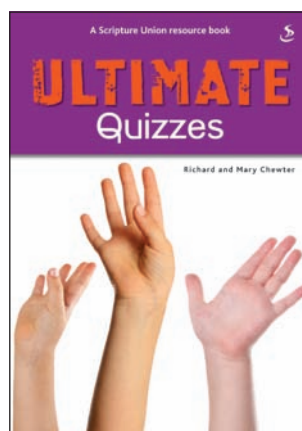
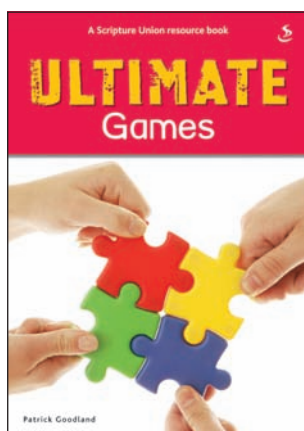
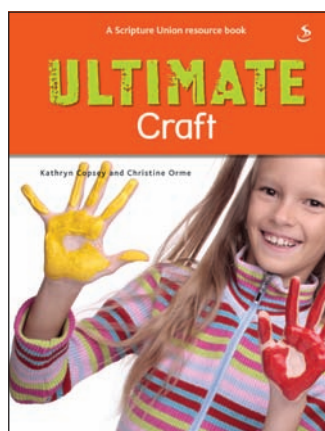
# ULTIMATE

## Creative prayer

Do you work with children or young people? Need that extra bit of inspiration to help your group explore the Bible? Want that extra idea to complete your session? Then the **ULTIMATE** series is for you! Each **ULTIMATE** book is packed full of ideas that have been used successfully by others and are more than likely to work for you!

**ULTIMATE CREATIVE PRAYER** is crammed full of creative and imaginative ways to help you and your group get praying. Ideas include prayers to draw and make, prayers to shout and sing, prayers to pray alone and pray together. Inside you'll find all the instructions and guidance you need to help your group pray and grow together.

Look out for these other great **ULTIMATE** resources:  
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CD-ROM

The material in this book was originally published as  
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light to live by