

t.b.d.
think. believe. do.

facilitator guide

prayer

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Written by Bryan Bliss
Edited by Carla Barnhill, Bryan Bliss, Erik Ullestad
Art Direction by Tory Herman
Cover and Interior Design by Tory Herman
Interior typeset in Univers 10 point, 13 point leading

T.B.D. Think. Believe. Do.: Prayer

Sparkhouse Team: Carla Barnhill, Bryan Bliss, Aaron Christopher, Julie Coffman, Christopher Zumski-Finke, Tory Herman, Alisha Lofgren, Josh Stifter, Kristofer Skrade, Erik Ullestad, Jeremy Wanek

Reviewers: Thomas Isaac Collins, Tonya Lawrence, Sarah Logemann

Theological Backgrounds: Marion Brown, Lenny Duncan, Lindsay Ann Hankins, Marc Olson, Jason Brian Santos

Scope and Sequence Development: Jake Bouma, Eric Iverson, Amy Jacober



T.B.D. is unlike any small group study you or your students have experienced.

T.B.D. is based on a promise to students: There are no bad ideas.

You might be thinking: “Yeah, well, you haven’t met Zach...” We’ve known plenty of Zachs in the past. We love Zach! And more importantly, we love Zach’s questions.

There are always students who will push boundaries, who will ask that one question at the exact wrong time, putting the whole group discussion into a tailspin. With T.B.D., those questions become an engine that will carry you through the entire lesson.

So do you take the chance on letting Zach derail the entire lesson? Again?

Well...yes.

T.B.D. starts with the belief that students are ready not only to own their journey of faith, but to recognize that their faith is constantly *in process*. Who they are, what they believe, and how they live their lives is never really set. It is always to be determined.

T.B.D. takes the process of developing faith seriously, giving students the tools to articulate, investigate, and test out their beliefs on a broad range of topics that connect to their daily lives. The goal isn’t for them to come away from this series with a settled idea about a topic—although they might feel more settled than they did before. Instead, T.B.D. focuses on *how* students think, not just *what* they think. It offers them a process for diving into their questions, assumptions, and doubts that they can use for the rest of their lives.

+ That said, you know your group.

Talking about their faith this way might be a new experience for your students. If there are parts of T.B.D. that are too steep a hill to climb, adapt the lesson. The Facilitator Guide shows you the most comprehensive way to lead a T.B.D. session, but that doesn’t make it the only way. Experiment with how you gather the opening opinions. Or maybe spend the first session naming everything students think about the topic at hand.

And if you need more than four sessions, no problem. The goal of T.B.D. is to help students become thoughtful theological thinkers. That doesn’t happen overnight. If you’re patient and gracious with the teenagers in your group (and with yourself), you’ll create an opportunity for growth that will benefit them for the rest of their lives.

Even for kids like Zach.

+ You don’t have to know everything.

T.B.D. is inherently risky because you will never know where the conversation is going to go. That means it’s also full of possibility—full of energy. When students are free to say what they really think—and when the group encourages them to do so every time—they get an opportunity to engage with and truly own their faith.

Yep, there will be times when a topic will come up that you feel unprepared to handle.

And yep, there might be a student who wants to know some nuance of Augustinian theology.

But you don’t have to have the answer. This process is, well, a process. And you get to be part of it too.

While you should prepare for the lesson by using the Facilitator Guide, previewing the video, and becoming familiar with the general rhythm of each lesson, your role isn’t that of an all-knowing super youth worker (but we bet you’re that, too). Instead, you’re a guide who will transparently and enthusiastically help students uncover and develop a part of their faith lives they may not know exists.

Every student—every person—is a work in progress, especially when it comes to faith. We are always learning, always discovering, always reframing what we believe and how we should live out of those beliefs. So resist tying a tidy theological bow on the end of your time together. T.B.D. challenges students (and leaders) to adopt a faith that can handle questions with integrity, honesty, and excitement. If your students finish the lesson feeling a bit unmoored, challenge them to use the week between sessions to test out their questions and see how that shifts their thoughts. As you work through a unit, revisit the conversations from the previous weeks to help students find common themes or figure out how their ideas from two weeks ago might influence what they’re thinking now. Check in with them midweek and ask how they’re doing. And pray for them as they work through this process. While a firm answer will feel comfortable in the moment, it is ultimately at risk of being outgrown.

+ This is an ongoing process.

We can’t state this enough. T.B.D. is the beginning of a lifetime of growth, one in which students are equipped to explore and critique and process new information and experiences through the lens of a resilient faith. In a word, this is discipleship.

If this is already making you nervous, remember that you won’t be talking about anything your students haven’t already been thinking about. When they are able to ask big questions about their faith in the context of a supportive group, they begin to take steps toward a rich and meaningful life of discipleship.

How It Works

+ What You Need

You can lead T.B.D. with just a few simple supplies:

- A T.B.D. Student Journal for each student
- Your T.B.D. Facilitator Guide
- The T.B.D. DVD
- Pencils or pens
- Packs of sticky notes
- A bare wall, whiteboard, or other surface for posting sticky notes

+ Lesson Prep

This is the place where everything starts. Spend fifteen minutes (or more, if you have it) familiarizing yourself with the general question of the lesson, identifying places where you think your students might get hung up, and surfacing your own questions about the provocative statement. This work will not only prepare you to facilitate, but will also help you remember the ethos of T.B.D. as you enter into teaching.

The Facilitator Guide is designed to be highly usable during the lesson. Each move (more on that below) of the lesson is indicated by a yellow **+facilitate** box. If you get confused on what to do next, or how the lesson should proceed, these are your reminders. If this is your first time facilitating a T.B.D. lesson, it is helpful to read through the **+facilitate** boxes in advance.

Each page also includes **+tip** boxes that provide leaders with useful ideas to give context to information, expand the discussion with additional questions, and address questions or concerns that might come up in your group.

At the bottom of each page is the **Lesson Notes** section. Think of this as a workspace, allowing you to track the progress of the lesson in real time, right in the Facilitator Guide.

+ Provocative Statement (5 minutes)

At the beginning of each lesson, students are confronted with a provocative statement. This statement is meant to touch on a theological question that not only resonates with students but activates their intellect and imagination.

Start by having a student read the provocative statement and short text that follows out loud.

Once the text has been read, ask students to respond. This is an opportunity to get their initial, knee-jerk opinions. What do they really think about the week's topic? Do they struggle to agree with it? Do they struggle not to?

It's important to remember that no response is out of bounds, no idea is off limits.

This is a discussion that will get students talking and even disagreeing with each other. Which is exactly what you need as you turn the page and start processing these ideas.

+ Think (10 minutes)

After the initial exploration, students will use their student journals and sticky notes to begin writing down their ideas, opinions, and questions.

At this point in the lesson, you're trying to surface every possible bit of information your students have—from the safe and orthodox, to the risky and questionable. They need to feel safe saying what they *really* think about the opening statement. Gather these ideas on sticky notes and have students post them on a wall.

Once you've got a wall full of information, have each student talk about one or two of the ideas they posted. As students talk, begin to look for overlap—places where you can group sticky notes with similar ideas or questions. After about ten minutes, you'll have a collection of ideas about the statement that will serve as the outline for the rest of your conversation.

+ Video (15 minutes)

Throughout the session, students will be asked to evaluate and revise their own thinking on the lesson's provocative statement using new information that expands and complicates that statement. The video offers the first dose of that information with a look at church history and the ways the Christian tradition has addressed the topic at hand.

Each video has three new pieces of information that you'll find listed as a **+tip** in the Facilitator Guide. When the video is finished, use this as a reference point as students work as a group to begin processing and including this new information along with what they already have on the wall. What's changed? What new insights do they have? What's become more complicated? How does history bolster or dispel the group's initial claims? How has it challenged them?

Students then rank the ideas on the wall, making note of those they believe still have worth in the discussion, as well as those that no longer seem relevant. After more discussion, reorganize the sticky notes again to incorporate new themes or insights.

+ Bible (15 minutes)

The Bible section is the second opportunity for students to incorporate new information into their discussion.

Each Bible section asks the group to explore two passages chosen to give perspectives that will support, confound, or outright trouble the conversation you've had up until now. In some cases, the Bible verses may seem contradictory—that's intentional—so push your students to see what they might do with that.

Have students work in groups, using their journals to unpack the verses, each of which is supplemented with a **+tip** box to give additional context for the passages.

After students have discussed the two passages, it's time to go back to the wall—posting, culling, grouping—to see how the Bible has influenced their thinking.

+ Believe (10 minutes)

The final round of discovering and revising has one task: come up with an honest statement that reflects a real belief that the group can hold right now.

First, allow students to work through the first two questions on this page of their journals individually. Once everybody is ready, move to the third question as a group.

Your revised provocative statement should reflect the work you've done on the wall—something that each student in the room can say authentically and with integrity. But there's also space for students to write down a statement of their own that can reflect lingering questions, discoveries, or convictions.

+ Do (5 minutes)

Each session ends with a self-determined, low-risk opportunity for students to test out their beliefs and report back to the group. As a group, brainstorm what your Big Action will be. Will you pray for an enemy each night? Organize a prayer rally? Commit to praying once a day? Whatever it is, choose an activity that will further clarify your belief on the week's lesson.

The student journal offers activities to bolster the week's Big Action, as well as questions to help students unpack what they're seeing and learning during the week so they can report back to the group at the next session.

As you work through the lesson each week, look for opportunities to build on what you've covered in previous sessions, to connect themes and ideas and concepts. Keep talking and listening as you watch your students become theological thinkers who are ready to own what they believe.

**prayer is
important**



t.b.d.
think. believe. do.

facilitator prep.

What's the Point?

On the surface, every person of faith would probably say that prayer is an essential part of a vibrant spiritual life. But most people would also admit that they don't pray regularly. Or if they do, it's a rote prayer before a meal or at bedtime. Or maybe a little shout-out to God when something good happens. This week's discussion is meant to push students beyond saying, "Of course prayer is important." It's going to ask them to think about why and when and even if that's true. And if it is, what are they going to do about it?

Background

- Martin Luther once said that prayer is rubbing God's ears with all the promises from Scripture. Sounds kind of weird, doesn't it? But Luther hits on an important part of prayer—Scripture is full of God's promises about prayer (among other things). There are promises like: God will hear us, God will answer us, God will help us. So when we come to God with our prayers and petitions, we do so with the belief that God is listening. This relational aspect of prayer can be a helpful hook for your students as they think more intentionally about prayer.
- Throughout the history of the church, prayer has been considered a central spiritual discipline. In other words, it's really important! But just like brushing your teeth or eating broccoli, prayer can be important without being meaningful. Feeling obligated to pray can take all the joy out of the practice. The ancestors of our faith understood that when you stick with something long enough, it becomes a habit. Suddenly, what was once an obligation becomes an essential.
- Every world religion has a practice of prayer. It's an essential part of our sacred texts and our formalized worship. It's done in private meditation and in public profession. Clearly, there's something about prayer that meets a deep and universal human need to connect with something bigger than ourselves. Students might not buy this, but the idea that prayer is a common thread through all religious expressions might get them thinking about it in new ways.

Student-Specific Tips

- Prayer is an opportunity to invite God—who is always present—into our daily lives. But if God is always present, why do we have to reach out to God? Why do we have to work for something that's already happening? That's a fair question. Like most people, students tend to be fairly oblivious to all the ways in which God is present and at work in the world. Invite them to think about prayer as a way for us to expand our view, to focus ourselves for a bit, and to remember that we are surrounded by and immersed in the divine.
- Students will undoubtedly know plenty of great, ethical people who don't pray at all. If you can live a good life without prayer, why bother? Don't dismiss this point of view. There are plenty of people who feed the poor, visit the sick, and work with prisoners who don't have active prayer lives or even an active faith.
- Realizing that prayer allows them to be completely understood can be powerful for students. God knows all the parts that are hidden from others, their brokenness, their hopes, all their fears and joys. Prayer is an interaction with the one being in the universe who sees them, loves them, and values them unconditionally. That's a big deal. Maybe too big for some students. Be prepared for some follow-up conversations about sin, grace, and forgiveness.

Check-In

As a leader, one of your roles is to make sure the lesson goes well. However, T.B.D. asks a little more from its facilitators, namely transparency and authenticity. Obviously you don't have to tell students about every doubt and question you've ever had, but for you to lead well, you need to know what assumptions and potential tripping points you're bringing with you. So take a little time for a brain dump to help yourself move beyond your initial responses to this week's topic and into more intentional interactions with the ideas behind the provocative statement.

- Take 30 seconds and write down every word that comes to mind when you read the statement "Prayer is important."
- Okay, now look over your responses above. Where did you surprise yourself? What insights do they give you about your own relationship with prayer? Spend some time considering what you want to bring with you into the class discussion and what you want to leave behind.

+ facilitate.

The lesson starts with an open-ended question to poke at student assumptions a bit.

As you get started with this lesson, have students read this text, and ask them for their initial responses.

If you're using sticky notes, hand them out now.

+ tip.

Think of this page as a place to prime the pump. It's a balancing act, so pay attention to when the conversation begins to peak. That's the time to turn the page and move to the next section of the lesson.

You've probably said a prayer.

And you probably remember the reason you prayed—you were about to eat a meal with your grandma, your friend was sick, that AP test. It just seemed like the thing to do.

So why did you pray?

Well, because **prayer is important**.

But why is it important?

Because it is.

Isn't it?

+ It's all starting. Right now.



+ tip.

If students are struggling to engage or the initial conversation stalls, consider asking a question that—at first glance—has nothing to do with prayer. For example: "What makes something important in your life?"

Lesson Notes

+ Topics or questions to address:

+ Where the group might struggle:

+ facilitate.

Have students work through the questions on this page in their journal. When they're ready, have them post their thoughts on the wall.

After all students have had a chance to add their ideas, look for themes and connections as a group. Move the sticky notes into these groups.

Before you turn the page, give students an opportunity to add one more sticky note to the wall and discuss why they made the addition.

think.

prayer is important

Is prayer important? Use this page to support your answer with facts, logic, deeply held feelings, and knee-jerk reactions.

What might make it hard for you to believe prayer is important?

4 T.B.D.: prayer. © 2018 Sparkhouse

What are words (positive or negative) you commonly associate with prayer?

When are you most likely to pray?



+ When you're ready, pick the ideas you want to share with the group and add them to the wall.

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+ tip.

Remember: these won't be fully formed ideas. We're asking students to respond honestly (and rapidly) to the topic, so there will be some rough edges.

Lesson Notes

+ What's on the wall?

+ Topics or questions to address:

+ facilitate.

The video will introduce new information to students—information that may support, contradict, or confound the conversation you’ve already had.

After the video is finished, have students process this new information by answering the questions in their journal and then discussing them as a group.

+ tip.

Here are the three new bits of information introduced in the video—just in case your students missed them.

- *Lex orandi, lex credendi* is a Latin phrase that means “The law of prayer is the law of faith.” This was written to explain that belief is passed on to us through worship. In other words, spiritual practices like prayer aren’t an expression of our faith, but rather one of the ways we discover and deepen our faith.
- John Calvin said, “Prayer is a chief exercise of faith.” Calvin took prayer very seriously—so seriously that he developed a set of rules for prayer.
- The Daily Offices. Monastic communities center their entire lives upon the rhythm of daily prayer. The offices consist of prayers, a psalm, appointed Bible readings, canticles, and the Lord’s Prayer. Eventually seven offices developed: Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. St. Benedict’s Rule establishes a common pattern: Nocturns and Lauds (middle of night), Prime (6:00), Terce (9:00), Sext (12:00), None (3:00), Vespers (sunset), and Compline (before bed).

+ Video

- + *Lex orandi, lex credendi* means the law of prayer is the law of faith. Why would someone think prayer is a requirement for faith?
- + John Calvin says, “Prayer is the chief exercise of faith.” Make a list of the top five most important things you do every day. Where does prayer rank?
- + What’s the benefit of following a specific prayer schedule like the Daily Offices?



Lesson Notes

+ Video notes:

You’ve got more information. So let’s revisit the wall.

- + Put an “X” next to three ideas you can no longer leave on the wall.
- + Put a check mark next to the three you most agree with.
- + What’s not on the wall, but should be? Add it now.

+ facilitate.

Give students a chance to process the video and discussion, and then turn back to the wall. Have students read the instructions at the bottom of this page and then begin voting by making “X” and check marks on the sticky notes.

When they’ve finished, have each student discuss how and why they voted.

Once again, organize the sticky notes by votes and see if there are any emerging correlations or themes.

+ tip.

At this point in the lesson, remind students that, even if their ideas don’t receive a lot of votes, they still have value. Give them freedom to chase their ideas, even if the group moves in a different direction.

+ Top themes on the wall:

+ facilitate.

The Bible verses once again introduce new information to the lesson. Have students work in groups of two or three. As they read and discuss the Bible passages, point them back to the provocative statement of the lesson. What do these passages tell them about the importance of prayer?

+ tip.

Don't let your students off the hook here. These are difficult questions with big implications. Praying for someone can fundamentally change the way we think of them. What might that lead to? What would change if they thought they were being prayed for?

+ Bible

Read Matthew 5:43-48 with a partner. Discuss:

- Why does God ask us to pray for our enemies?
- How does it change you to pray for people you don't like?
- What do you think about your "enemies" praying for you?



This is about unpacking the verses and thinking deeply about Scripture.

Now read Psalm 102:1-2 together. Then discuss:

- Why do we pray during a crisis?
- If God wants our prayers, why would God hide from us?
- How do we know God listens to all our prayers?

Now that you've discussed the Bible verses, what needs to be on the wall?

- + With your partner, come up with two or three new ideas to share with the group.
- + When you're ready, put them on the wall. Extra points for dramatic, mic-drop reveals.

+ tip.

This passage is the psalmist's cry for God to listen, an act of prayer that is likely familiar to students. We often pray during crises or times of sadness. Pushing students to ask why we pray during those times is key in this lesson.

+ facilitate.

When students are finished, ask them to read the instructions in their student journal and come up with two or three new sticky notes for the wall.

Have each group explain what they're adding to the wall and why.

Lesson Notes

+ Other verses to discuss:

+ facilitate.

Have students work through the first two questions in their journal. Encourage them to get up and study the wall—even to further organize and move the sticky notes, if they discover new connections.

When everybody is ready, it's time to tackle the provocative statement. This could mean rewriting the statement completely, adding words, subtracting words—you decide. Whatever statement you come up with needs to stand up against the work you've done during the lesson. It needs to be something students say with integrity right now.



+ Take a look at all the information on the wall. What are some common themes? Connections? Write two or three here.

+ Is there anything you'd add to the wall? Anything you'd take away? Write those here.

+ So... is prayer important? How would you rewrite that statement? As a group, figure out what you can now say about prayer, and write it here.

T.B.D.: prayer. © 2018 Sparkhouse 11

+ tip.

Students may be sensitive to having their ideas discounted. If there is a lot of disagreement, consider having students write and present individual provocative statements.

+ tip.

If your group is struggling with coming up with a new statement, suggest they use the following lead-ins:

- Prayer is important because...
- If prayer is important, then...
- I think prayer is...

Lesson Notes

+ What's the new provocative statement?

+ facilitate.

Once students have a working provocative statement, they will brainstorm a way to “test” it in their daily lives.

This should be an activity that is achievable, but also asks students to risk a little more than they might usually.

Once students have figured out what they want to do, have them look at the other activities for the week and prepare for the end of the session.

do.

+ Big Action

You’ve spent a lot of time thinking about how prayer is important—if it’s important. Now it’s time to put your ideas to the test. As a group, decide on one thing you can do—together or individually—to make prayer a bigger part of your daily life. Write your answer below as a reminder for the week.

How will you make prayer a part of your life this week?

+ Wait. How? What? Help!

Prayer doesn’t have to be articulate, or even verbal. You just have to commit to the time and practice. Use the following blanks to focus your thoughts and then use the results as a guideline for praying this week.

Something you’re thankful for:

Something God can help you with:

Something you’re questioning:

+ Prayer Doodle

Think of someone or something you’d like to pray for. Write it down. Draw it. Put whatever you want in the space below and use it as a reminder of your prayers this week.

+ tip.

Many students are intimidated by the simple mechanics of prayer. It may be helpful to share the ways you pray.

Lesson Notes

+ How can I support the Big Action this week?

+ facilitate.

Your students will use this page to center and collect their thoughts during the week. Remind them that they'll have an opportunity to share what they learned and experienced at the beginning of the next session.

+ tip.

Consider sending a quick text to your students during the week to check in on their progress and encourage them in the week's Big Action.

Connect with parents and let them know what you discussed this week and what their child will be working on in the student journal.

Think about using social media to stay in touch. Hashtags, pictures, and updates can all keep students motivated between sessions.

+ Before the next session, take some time to think about this week's lesson.

+ What I discovered...

+ What I'm still questioning...

+ And now I can honestly say...

Lesson Notes

+ Who should I contact this week?