What is the secret in finding joy? According to Isaiah, the Lord says that all who come to His house will find JOY in His house of prayer. The secret to this joy, just like everything else in Christianity, is INTIMACY WITH GOD. It’s about falling in love with Jesus and praying out of a desire to know more of the Bridegroom’s heart. If you see prayer as just a duty, then it will be just that. But if you take time to cultivate intimacy with the Lord and then see prayer as the privilege of sitting with Him speaking out of the desires of His heart that He shares with you, then it is much more exciting! He doesn’t want workers but instead a Bride who partners with Him in love. He wants us to be with Him where He is (John 17:24) and He is in His Father’s house, the ultimate House of Prayer! He is the Great Intercessor and invites us to join with Him!

The most practical way to cultivate this intimacy and knowledge of God’s heart is to spend time in His Word. READ it, WRITE it, SING it, PRAY it, SOAK in it, MEDITATE on it, MEMORIZE it. Read about Jesus healing the sick and ask Him how He was feeling as He laid His hands on all those people. Read Psalm 139 and ask God what songs He was singing and what He was speaking over you as He created you in your mother’s womb. Ask the Father what the pain was like in His heart as His beloved Son hung on the cross. Ask the Holy Spirit what it was like as He hovered over the waters before creation. Study the Song of Songs and learn how Jesus sees you as His bride. Then sit still and listen to His still, small voice. Use God’s Word as a doorway to a deeper relationship with Him. Then pray out of this, knowing that it’s not about asking for what you want, but about finding out what God wants and talking with Him about that. We manifest the desire of the Father’s heart through our prayers.

Know that our God has a heart for you and that if you are praying in agreement with His Word and His will, then He wants that thing much more than you ever could. This makes prayer exciting and increases our longing to be with Jesus.

Isaiah 56:7

These I will bring to my holy mountain
And give them joy in my house of prayer.
Their burnt offering and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar;
For my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

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1 Belden C. Lane, Spirituality as the Performance of Desire: Calvin on the World as a Theatre of God’s Glory (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 1
Prayer Pictures

Look up a simple children’s prayer online. **Prayer is how we talk to God. We tell Him our feelings and thank Him for the things He has given us. Today we are going to learn a prayer we can say.** Teach the prayer to the children. Practice it together every week until they know it well. If possible, have the children say it for the congregation.

**You will need:**
- black marker
- paper for each child
- crayons

Before class, write the phrase ‘I thank God for...’ on the top of each child’s paper. **One way we can pray is to draw a picture of our prayer. An important part of prayer is to thank God for the things He has given us.** On your paper, draw a picture of something you are glad God gave you.
Adapt these activities for your elementary students. Consider sending the ideas home for families to use together.

**Prayer Boxes**

**You will need:**
- small box for each child (shoe boxes work well)
- wrapping paper and tape to cover the boxes
- markers
- other supplies for decorating (optional)
- small piece of paper for each child

Have the children create prayer boxes. They can decorate the boxes however they wish. When they are finished decorating, have them write the word ‘Prayers’ on the top or side of the box. This box is a place where you can put your prayers to God. Prayers are how we talk to God. We can ask for things that we want God to do. We can tell Him things that we are thankful for. When we pray, sometimes we ask God to take care of the people that we love or people who are hurt or sad. On your piece of paper write a prayer and put it in your box. Your box is a special place for you and God where you can write things to Him.

**Prayer Scrolls**

**You will need:**
- piece of paper for each child
- piece of string for each child
- writing utensils
- basket

Have the children write a prayer request on their piece of paper. After they write their request, have them roll up the paper and tie a string around it (you may need to help them with this). They can place their completed scroll in the basket. When everyone has finished, pray out loud for each scroll as a class. Do not open them at this time, but pray for the person who wrote the scroll and whatever need they wrote down. Tell the children you will continue to pray for them this week. Take the scrolls home with you and pray for the needs of at least one child every day (once you take them home, you may open the scrolls to pray more specifically). Check back with the students in a few weeks to see how God is answering their prayers.

Dear Jesus,
Please help my brother get better. He fell off his bike and broke his arm.
Ashley
**SPEND TIME AS A YOUTH GROUP FOCUSING ON PRAYER.** There are many tools that people throughout history have used to help them focus on prayer. One of these tools is a **PRAYER LABYRINTH**. A labyrinth is like a maze, except there is only one path to the center with no possibility of making a wrong turn. Create a simple prayer labyrinth on the floor using tape. (You can find a pattern online). Explain to students that this is a time to focus on prayer and their relationship with God. Before they enter the labyrinth, pray as a group to dedicate the time to God. As they walk each student should focus on God. They might choose to spend the time reflecting on an aspect of their faith. They may choose to repeat the Lord’s Prayer or some other prayer of their choice. They may also simply pray about what is on their heart.

**ANOTHER IDEA IS TO PRAY FOR YOURSELF** on the way in, pause to dwell in God’s love and majesty in the center, and pray for others on the way out. If you do not have space to create a labyrinth on the floor, you can also print off an image of a labyrinth for each student and have them trace the path with their finger rather than walking the path as they meditate and pray.
Teacher’s Devotional

Building a relationship of prayer with God doesn’t mean that you have to know all the right prayer forms and have all the words a minister would speak. Open your Bible to the Psalms and use God’s Words as you pray. This creates a divine spiritual connection to God.

To begin, go to the Psalms and skim the headings. Choose one. Read silently. Then read each line aloud slowly, resting for a few seconds at the end. Repeat the psalm, quietly meditate or reflect on what you read, then talk to God about what you read and how it made you feel—just say it from your heart.

The Psalms aren’t the only portions of Scripture one can pray. The following are suggestions based on what is going on in your life:

- Prayer when God seems far away and slow in answering your prayers – Psalms 13; 42; 88
- Prayer when you are seeking God or want to know Him better – Psalm 25:4-5; Psalm 27:7-11; Psalm 63:1-8; Psalm 119:9-11, 33-35
- Prayer after you have done something wrong for which you are sorry – Psalms 32; 38; 39; 51
- Prayer when God’s will is not clear to you – Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
- Prayer when God has given you a burden that seems too heavy for you – Matthew 26:38-42
- Prayer when you are discouraged or depressed – Psalms 12; 61; 102; 130

Family Activity  Family Prayer Walk

Prayer is one way we can minister to the people around us. By lifting them up in prayer, we can ask God’s blessing upon them and lift up their needs to God, even if we do not know their needs specifically.

As a family, go for a walk around your neighborhood. Stop at the end of each driveway and pray for the people living in the house, even if you don’t know them. You might choose to pray for their health, their faith, their job, or any other ideas you might have. Take turns praying so that each member of your family has the opportunity to pray at a house.

Other Ways to Pray Scripture

- READ the passage and then “decorate it” with your own prayers. These prayers are answers to what God says to you in His Word.
- MEDITATE and study a passage until you understand it well. Then paraphrase it and pray your paraphrase.
- MEMORIZE a passage. But learn the words by heart so that you can recite them with inflection and tone.
SCRIPTURE REVEALS TO US who God is, what He requires of us, and how He shows His love to us in mighty saving acts of grace. We can never begin to know all there is to know of Him, but our gracious God is able to show us enough of Him in order to have life, health, and peace.

Through the written Word of God, the Holy Spirit teaches us all we need to know of the triune God. We learn what He desires to make known to us.

The Bible does not teach us in neat theological categories. Rather, God makes Himself known through accounts of His work in the lives of real people, through prophecies and prayers, doctrinal teaching, and wise sayings.

When we follow all these threads of truth, we see a pattern emerging—a royal robe woven from the gathered truths of Scripture adorns our King and displays His love.

To see God more clearly, we express what we learn from Scripture in a coherent way, known as the essentials of faith. The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed both express the essentials of faith.

The great Reformation confessions of faith further laid out the teaching of Scripture in a systematic way, weaving together the Golden Threads of Scripture, bringing forth the royal robe that glorifies Jesus our King. By studying them, we grow in our understanding of God. Such knowledge leads us to put on the robe of Christ by faith. This means that we take our place in union with Him, growing in love and obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The essentials of faith are not all Scripture has to say about God, but represent the Golden Threads around which the whole royal robe is woven. Under the heading of “Teacher Devotionals,” every Bible lesson in this curriculum is keyed to the Golden Threads it expresses. The Stray Threads section picks up additional ideas or notes the ways in which the Golden Threads may get distorted.

Believers in the Reformed tradition are a people who celebrate that God can be known because He graciously has made Himself known. A crucial part of our faithfulness is learning and studying the essentials that have been revealed. So, we offer these in hopes of enriching every Bible lesson, enabling you as a teacher to trace the threads of Christ’s Royal Robe in the teachings of Scripture.
ESSENTIAL NUMBER ONE: The One True God is the Triune God of Grace—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—Whom Alone We Must Worship and Serve.

In the Old Testament, we learn that the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the creator of the entire world and the constant redeemer through the mighty acts of the people Israel. In the New Testament, we see the LORD, Israel’s God, actually is the triune God, who reveals Himself to be the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has entered into covenant faithfulness with His people and will not leave us or forsake us.

ESSENTIAL NUMBER TWO: The Eternal Son of God Came to Us as a Human Being in Jesus Christ.

In the fullness of time, God the Son took up our humanity as He came to us as Jesus, the man from Nazareth. Jesus is both fully God and fully human. He is all that God has to say to us, in word and deed, about who He is and how He loves us. And Jesus is all we have to say to God, as the one man who lived a life of perfect obedience to Him, on our behalf. In Jesus’ relationship with His Father, and in His promise of the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, we come to know that the one God is triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

ESSENTIAL NUMBER THREE: Holy Scripture is the Word of God Written, Through Which, In the Power of the Holy Spirit, We Truly Meet the Triune God.

One of the great achievements of the Reformation was the recovery of Scripture as our sole authoritative source for knowledge of God and its return to the ordinary people of God. The traditions of the church could be helpful in interpreting the Bible, but must always remain beneath the written Word of God. The Reformers affirmed at the same time that what needs to be known about God from Scriptures can be known by ordinary people who engage in a plain reading of the Bible. The Bible is clear enough in its essential teaching for all who read with prayerful reliance on the Holy Spirit to speak through the Word.

ESSENTIAL NUMBER FOUR: The Triune God is Sovereign Over All.

Our religion is not simply a human invention. Nor is it subject to human whims for change and supposed corrections. We do not have the freedom to decide who we would like the Lord to be. God is, and He has made Himself known to us, in Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. While what we may know of the triune God is true and reliable, we always recognize that we never know all there is to know about Him. The Lord God is high and holy, completely other, beyond our grasp and control, and splendid in His glory. God is moving history toward its appointed end. The triune God of grace is in control. He reigns. He alone is Judge. He alone is worthy of our praise. We never have dominion over Him. God alone reigns.

ESSENTIAL NUMBER FIVE: Humanity Has Fallen Into Sin

The Scriptures teach us that, although God created us good, through our own willful choices, we sinned against Him. The sin of our first parents rocked and wracked the world with terrible consequences. Now, by nature, we are prone to suppress the truth and to choose against our God and our neighbors again and again. There is nothing we human beings do in this world that is not without the taint of sin. We are helplessly lost in our sin. This means the death of ever hoping to get to the Father on our own. Such a realization is the beginning of crying out in repentance and faith for the rightness and goodness that only can come from the Lord Himself. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, comes to us as a man and has enacted perfect obedience, free from sin, on our behalf.
We are Made Right with God by Grace Alone through Faith Alone.

Our salvation from our sins and our sinfulness is all from Christ Jesus. We never can earn our way into God’s favor, whether by our good works, zealous worship, or many prayers. The Father forgives our sins by the work of Jesus Christ alone. Christ’s death alone takes away the guilt of our sin. Christ’s faith and obedience alone, the living sign of His covenant faithfulness, comprise our reconciliation with God. He gives us Christ’s righteousness. Our record before God is replaced with Jesus’ record! When this happens, we believe in who Christ Jesus is and what He has accomplished. We confess that He is our Lord and Savior. But even this belief and confession is a gift of God, the result of the Holy Spirit’s work inside us. Salvation is all of God. We simply rest in what He has done for us.

Sanctification means “to make holy,” and it refers to the work of the Holy Spirit to form Christ in us. For we not only receive a new record of righteousness in Christ, we receive a new nature. God places His own Spirit within us and a wonderful series of benefits begins:

- The Holy Spirit unites to Jesus Christ so that all that belongs to Him comes to belong to us (John 16:14-15).
- The Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us, fashioning us more and more in the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).
- The Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds to the Scriptures so that we might be transformed by hearing the Word (John 14:26).
- The Holy Spirit prays within us, crying out to the Father for us and through us (Gal. 4:6).
- The Holy Spirit assures us that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16), and His presence is the guarantee of our salvation (Eph. 1:13).
- The Holy spirit give us the power to be faithful witnesses to Christ (Acts 1:8) and enables us to do the ministry and works of Jesus (see Matt. 10:1 and John 14:12).

Of course, the old, sinful nature still remains in us and, thus, the new and the old are in conflict. Christian growth involves a hard struggle. We can never do it on our own. We live in constant need of “the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (1 Pet. 1:2). The person of the Holy Spirit, then moves us to live in obedience and empowers us to keep going even after we fail or when the way is difficult. His work will continue until we meet Jesus in heaven at last.

God chose us to believe in Him now that we might spend the rest of our lives serving Him and telling others about Jesus. The essential teaching of election is the awareness that we do not make our way to the Father; He has come all the way down to where we are to claim us. Election, then, is not about living a life of ease but one of service. Those whom He calls, He sends to bring His message to a lost world. If we know Him, it is because He chose us. If He chose us, He sends us to tell others, “Believe the good news and discover your chosenness!”

The people of God, Christ’s Church, bring His Word and His love to a broken world. We are in the world, even though we do not belong to this world (John 17:16). We serve the world even though we are aliens and strangers here, passing through on our way to our heavenly homeland. Psalm 84 notes that those who “have set their hearts in pilgrimage” to the city of God cause the dry, desert lands to become a place of springs as they pass through. With the Holy Spirit prompting us and empowering us, with the grace of Jesus cleansing us, with the love of the Father beckoning us, we both gather for worship and move out in service to God. So, even though the church does not belong to the world, it strives to love the world as Christ did.