

PAGE TWO – THE TWO PERSPECTIVES

Prior to the beginning of the lesson, set-up in the gathering space the large piece of newsprint from the previous session, which contains responses to questions about prayer and faith. Set-up in the gathering space a second large piece of newsprint. Use the marker to divide it into three columns. Label the columns: BODY, CONNECTED?, SPIRIT. Have a set of paper and pen/pencil for each small group to record responses.

Also make several copies of the article “Researchers Look at Prayer and Healing” from the link: <http://washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/23/AR2006032302177.html>

You will also need adults to facilitate small group discussion. (One adult for every 3-4 youth)

Note: If you are starting with a new session, remind the group of the agreement to honor one another’s opinions and to keep shared ideas in the group. Check in with group members to relate any conversations that they might have observed or experienced with others regarding the claims of how powers and forces work in the world.

Begin the lesson by reviewing the information from the first paragraph on PAGE TWO. If necessary, return to PAGE ONE to view the Tim Hawkins video again. Ask the group to respond to the following questions:

Is what happens in the mind through a prayerful, spiritual, or religious experience capable of affecting

the body and physical world?

Record responses under the column labeled SPIRIT.

Or are these experiences simply the result of the workings of the brain and the perspective of the individual?

Record responses under the column labeled BODY.

Allow discussion to continue for as long as time allows.

Next, tell the group they will listen to an interview about how these experiences affect the brain. Click on the link: “The Physical Effects of Religious Experience - Interview w/Carol Albright” and watch the video.

Read, from PAGE TWO the following:

In this video, neuroscience research has discovered that a certain part of the brain known as the “God part of the brain” is associated with religious experiences, especially in meditative states and during a temporal lobe epileptic attack. However, As Albright states, these tests can “record an aspect of religiously oriented experiences” but don’t include those everyday religious experiences of someone who is neither skilled in meditation nor afflicted with temporal lobe epilepsy.

Ask the group:

So do everyday religious experiences have measurable effects?

Allow discussion for as long as time allows.

Next, divide the large group into several smaller groups that have at least three youth and one adult. Give each smaller group a printed copy of the article: “Researchers Look at Prayer and Healing.”

Have the adult, with the youth read through the article and record responses and reactions to the information presented.

When small groups are finished, gather all youth and adults and ask each group to report on their responses and reactions to the article. Remind the group to be respectful of each other’s responses. Allow discussion to continue for as long as time allows.

Read, from PAGE TWO the following:

In this article, the effect of prayer on personal health is considered as well as the effects of prayer on others who are distant or even unknown. As the article states, “The quiet meditation and incantations of praying, or the comfort of being prayed for, appears to lower blood pressure, reduce stress hormones, slow the heart rate and have other potentially beneficial effects.” While this does not automatically prove that prayer heals, it does point to changes in the physical body as a result of prayer. But how prayer could work for another person, especially in a distant location, is more difficult to evaluate. Some believe that there are no scientific or rational ways to understand how this might work. This article shows how both the religious and scientific perspectives are considered.

Ask the group to think about the information presented in this session and consider how the body and spirit

might or might not be connected through prayer and faith. Record responses in the center column of the newsprint labeled CONNECTED?

Ask: What is the most difficult thing for you to understand or believe about how the body and spirit might be connected through prayer and faith? *Allow all answers and encourage youth to think about how there might be many ways of thinking about this subject.*

To close this portion of the lesson, ask the group if they can tell one way that they might talk to others about the reported effects of prayer and faith.

If the session will end, encourage students to ask family and friends about their understanding of how prayer and faith might affect the physical world and body. Be sure to save the large newsprint used to record definitions and answers from the first and second sessions. These will be used for the remaining sessions.