

Let's try praying like this...

{14 – Debate & Deliberation}

What's it like?

It's like praying through a tough topic. It's like using disagreement or tension for constructive prayer, and not only for argument. It's like wrestling with something, and praying that God makes sure no one gets hurt. It's like figuring something out, with God's help, especially when those of you who are praying aren't exactly sure what God wants you to do.

What's it for?

It's for making sure God is a part of the conversation when the conversation gets complicated. It's for asking God to help sort through complex decisions or issues. It's for asking God to help when folks disagree on what to do. It's for remembering that our faith is not a separate piece of our life – it's the foundation upon which everything else is built, even – and especially – the tough stuff.

When could I use it?

You could use it any time you're figuring something out, like big decisions or tricky situations. You could also use it whenever folks are disagreeing over something, and you want to ask God for help.

Where could I use it?

You could use it on purpose wherever you know some sort of debate might happen. You could use it as an intervention wherever an argument suddenly starts. You could use it wherever you do your serious thinking.

How it works...

This isn't the kind of prayer that just happens – it's more like a special tool in your prayer toolbox that gets used for particular situations. It's not really a style of prayer – it's a situational prayer. Most people don't go looking for tough choices to make or tough topics to debate – but these things happen to everyone whether you like it or not. This prayer works by making sure God is part of the process – asking God for things like helping you think clearly, being respectful of others with differing opinions from you, helping you set aside your own ego so that the best possible outcome has the best chance of happening. You don't have to go through tough stuff alone. Sometimes simply stopping and asking for help can calm people down or clear your head.

Try it!

Today you're going to have a debate. Find some people, pick a topic, or better yet, a news story (we've included two samples below). You'll be divided into two groups – “the decision was good/agree/” group and “the decision wasn't good/disagree” group, or however else you might like to divide things. Your two groups will divide up and come up with arguments for why your group feels they're right.

1. Before you divide up, say a prayer asking God for guidance. Join hands in a circle (as long as it's pandemic-safe)– every person will contribute something to the prayer. When you're done talking, squeeze the hand of the person next to you, and it will be their turn. Do this all the way around the circle until everyone has had a turn.
2. After the prayer, have a debate! Make sure that people take turns, that only one person talks at a time, and that things stay respectful (select a moderator if need be). Here are a few tips from the realm of premarital counseling on communication and conflict resolution: use “I” statements. Just speak about what you feel or think. Don't start a sentence with

“you people...” It won’t help. Also, try repeating back what you heard: “I heard you say...” This way the person feels heard, and you make sure you heard them accurately.

3. When the debate winds up, answer these questions together: 1) What is usually the goal of debates? 2) What was our goal after asking for God’s guidance?
4. Circle up and pray again, just like the first time. Be sure to spend some time with the “What did you think” question below.

### What did you think?

Learning goal: Prayer is powerful – it *does* things: not only in how prayers are answered, but also in the very act of praying itself.

### Debate topic: Are Black Friday Christmas sales starting too early?

Some points of view to get you started (if you need them):



The Friday after Thanksgiving has long been considered a major shopping day known—“Black Friday”—with many stores offering their best deals to kick off the Christmas shopping season. Black Friday trends towards starting earlier with each passing year. Some stores haven been opening their doors for their Black Friday deals on Thursday evening, requiring their employees to cut their Thanksgivings short.

At one point, some retail employees flocked to social media Internet petition site *Change.org* to sponsor petitions asking for early-opening retailers to push back their sales. They argue that, by opening so early, retailers are stealing from them precious time with family and friends. And their pleas echo the common complaint that the holidays have become too commercialized.

Retailers and other supporters of increasingly early Christmas sales argue that stores have every right to open early if consumers demand it. They point out that Black Friday is an important event for the retail industry. Furthermore, they say, a strong holiday retail season is just what the economy needs to create jobs and lower unemployment.

During the past year’s pandemic conditions, stores spread out some of their “Black Friday” sales throughout the month of November. How does that factor in?

Jan 27, 2012

## Pa. school bans Uggs from class to keep out smuggled phones

By [Michael Winter](#), USA TODAY  
Updated 2012-01-27 7:30 PM



Students at a middle school in Pottstown, Pa., were bringing their phones into class by hiding them in fleece-lined Uggs, so the principal banned outdoor boots in classrooms.

CAPTION

By Ugg Australia

A Pennsylvania middle school has banned outdoor boots in class after some students were caught hiding cellphones in their Uggs, [Newser](#) tells us.

Pottstown Middle School forbids cellphones, iPods and other electronic devices from classrooms. They must be turned off and kept in lockers during regular school hours.

But after some Ugg-wearing students were caught smuggling phones into class, Principal Gail Cooper informed parents that come Monday, "outdoor, open top boots" would be banned from classrooms, according to the local [Mercury](#) newspaper, which broke the news.

"Students may continue to wear outdoor boots to and from school to protect them from cold, snow and ice but need to change into a pair of sneakers or shoes before entering homeroom. Students may also continue to wear lace up, tight at the ankle, boots, shoes and high top sneakers," Cooper wrote in a letter sent home to parents Wednesday.

Violators face progressive punishment ranging from confiscation of the phone to detention to a one-day suspension.

When the news story was posted on [the paper's Facebook page](#), "reaction was swift, voluminous and resoundingly negative." Here's a sample:

- "Hmmm. I know most girls hide them in there bra, or their waist band," wrote Emily Ann Miller. "It's ineffective they will just keep finding other places. Plus my phone fits in my sneaker."
- "Quite absurd, posted Darlene Roen Bainbridge. "How about a cell phone ban in school, as reasonable footwear is more necessary than a cell phone? UGG...Sounds like fashion profiling...lol!"
- "If a middle school student is determined enough to have their cell phone on them, believe me they will regardless of the shoes they are wearing," wrote Jessica August. "I'm assuming this is applying to mostly girls since I rarely see any boys wearing Uggs.... Pockets, bras, socks, what's next?? I think this is absurd!"
- "They should worry more about the kids who walk home and throw snowballs at cars and people and all the other things that are actually important," Joanne Murray posted.

*From Pastor Ryan, following his remarks on 1/10 regarding the attack on the Capitol*

*It seems the Holy Spirit is working again this week, as this was the next type of prayer in line as we resume the prayer class this week. My remarks this past Sunday have sparked mixed reactions. In the spirit of modeling prayer through debate and deliberation, I thought I would take a moment to try to sum up some of things I heard from the congregation's feedback. In this way I hope to show that I have heard you. I pray that God helps us to hear each other, no matter what. Not with the intention of necessarily changing anyone's minds; but with the goal of increasing mutual understanding and love.*

*Some folks were upset by my remarks. They felt that I overstepped my office by touching on some political topics. They felt that I added to the division going on. They felt that the pulpit wasn't the place for what I said, that it is for scriptural and spiritual matters only, and not civic ones.*

*Some folks were appreciative of my remarks. They said that they were glad I talked frankly about a tough topic. They said that it meant a lot to them to speak out against the violence that occurred and against the dishonesty that helped encourage it.*

*If my words, or my tone, caused anyone to feel divided or upset, that was not my intention. I seek your forgiveness if that is the case. At the same time, I stand by what I said, or at least what I intended to communicate. Prayerful consideration of Scripture and our Lutheran teachings led to my main points: that we should be theologians of the cross who honestly call things what they really are – including when folks ignore reality, especially ignoring it to the point that it turns into hatred and violence – and that we as Christians have a duty to speak the truth in love – including in our vocation as citizens. Jesus prayed to God to protect us as we live both in this world and out of it; that God would make us one; and that others would come to believe in God through us. The Christian symbols on display during the violence greatly disturbed me, and if we as Christians are not the clearest voices denouncing the violence and the lies that fed it, things will get worse. It is not my opinion or point of view that the election was not stolen; it's a verified, scrutinized, challenged, and upheld point of fact. I'm not supporting one party over the other; I'm just saying – that's what happened, and to keep saying otherwise will only make things worse. And again, I say that not to divide or upset anyone.*

*I love you all, and accept you, whatever your opinion or stance is on anything. And also, in love, I commend to you to call things what they are, and to speak the truth in love. I can only preach the Gospel if I first acknowledge the sins in this world of ours. May God save us, and our country, from this chapter of division we are living in. May God grant us unity, but not uniformity, and may we rejoice in the richness of our differences, while finding the common ground to speak out against injustice and hate.*

*In Christ,  
Pastor Ryan*