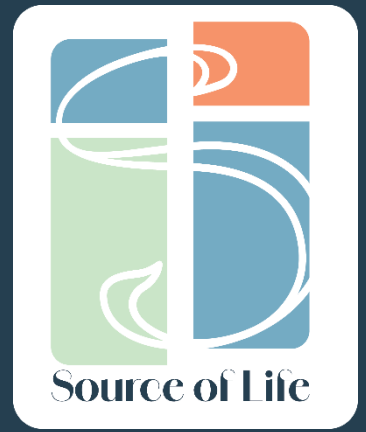


APPENDICES



YEAR LEVEL	9 & 10
TITLE	Warming the Heart Article
STRAND	Prayer
APPENDIX	6

Warming the heart

Can prayer really be good for us?

WORDS LILIANA OKOUMOUSIS

Over the past year, every single one of us has been challenged like never before. From the state of crisis that the world has been in to simple worries in our everyday lives, it can be easy to lose faith and to find ourselves lost.

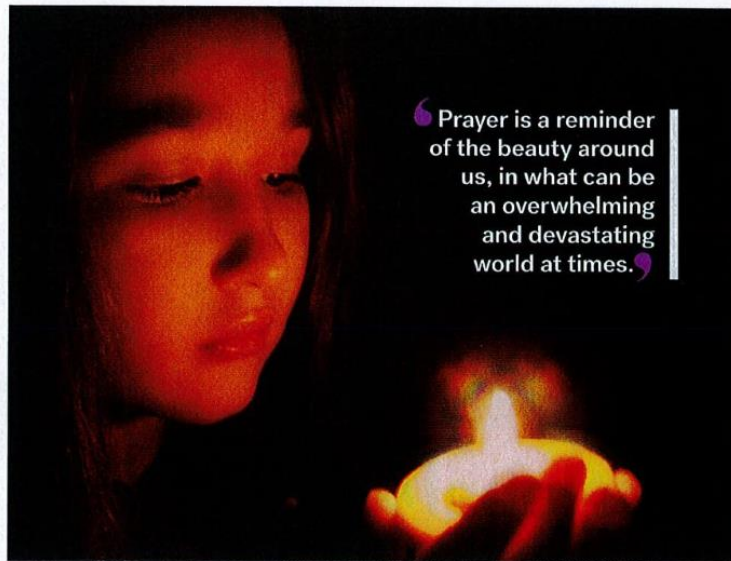
Hopelessness can be suffocating, but there is a way to find light in the darkness.

People can find hope in many ways: by thinking through issues themselves, by sharing how you're feeling with others, or by finding something they're passionate about and focusing on that. But what stronger hope, what brighter light, that the one from God? I find the best way to get that light from God is through prayer.

Prayer is helpful in many aspects of life, but are there any proven benefits? I started looking into scientists who dedicate their lives to asking these very questions and it turns out that meditation and prayer actually change the workings of your brain, specifically the part that controls your concentration and focus called the frontal lobe.

A study was conducted by Andrew Newberg, MD to test the effects of meditation and prayer, and it was found that participants experienced a higher level of calm and tranquility at the end of the study than at the beginning. These results were recorded after only eight weeks of prayer and meditation.

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Prayer is a reminder of the beauty around us, in what can be an overwhelming and devastating world at times.

Prayer and meditation help you deal with overbearing negative emotions, and allow you to open yourself back up to more favourable feelings such as joy, faith, and hope.

Many people pray because it allows them to feel free. It allows people to grapple with their sins, to give thanks, or ask for help when they're feeling lost. It is about believing that we are loved and accepted, and that there is hope for the future. In the end, prayer can be a constant in our life – it will always be there no matter where we find ourselves.

Wanting to get some more opinions, I spoke to two leaders at my school, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Bentleigh, Maxine Viado and Joanne Bradshaw. I asked them, 'How do you believe prayer re-enforces hope?'

Maxine believes that prayer is about the comfort of having a connection with God.

'Being a woman of faith, I find nothing is as comforting or liberating as the act of prayer. Prayer can come in many forms, spoken, written, sung, but fundamentally, I value it as the pursuit of a connection with God – earnestly

listening to God's voice and having genuine conversations.'

Joanne spoke to me about how prayer provides comfort along your journey.

'It is always heartwarming to know someone has your back. By praying, you reiterate to yourself that God is always looking out for you and those you love, which provides a sense of hope. Prayer is a reminder of the beauty around us, in what can be an overwhelming and devastating world at times.'

The world certainly has been devastating in recent times, and the isolation that we have all experienced has made it extremely easy to lose hope. I have found prayer has brought hope, love and comfort to my life. In times of loss and heartache, I know that I can always count on God to be there to listen to what I have to say.

As people of faith, it is so important to never forget that it is the act of prayer, of opening ourselves up to God, of releasing all of our troubles and worries, of feeling free, that will allow us to light that flame of hope within us. ●

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