



A Parents' Guide to Praying with Children

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

- Deuteronomy 6:7

Parents play an important role in our children's spiritual growth. We are called to constantly saturate our children with who God is, what He has done and how we ought to respond. This includes teaching them about prayer and creating safe opportunities for them to practise speaking to God.

Why We Pray

When God created man in the garden, He created us to be in communion with Him, to walk with Him and talk with Him. The Old Testament Psalms is God's song book and prayer book for His people. He gives us words to speak to Him in all circumstances. In the New Testament, God is not just a distant figure, but a good heavenly Father who cares and provides for our needs. This is the view of prayer that we as parents need to pass on to our children: A true and loving relationship of honest, sincere communication with God through the Holy Spirit because of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

How We Teach Our Children to Pray

Often times children don't want to pray because they are unsure and afraid to say something wrong. Here are some ideas that you could try, to encourage them to step out in a safe environment and gain confidence in approaching God, our heavenly Father.

Use age-appropriate words and sentences.

This will help them feel comfortable talking to someone they cannot see. For example, when defining prayer, say something like, "Prayer is talking to God about whatever is on your mind. In prayer, we learn to thank Him, tell Him what we did wrong or ask Him for help."

Encourage them to ask anything, in any way, at any time, in any place.

Remind them that prayer is never badly timed, but always welcomed by our loving Heavenly Father. Remember that the things you may think of as silly may be the biggest problem that they are presently facing: an injured toe, a lost toy or their friend saying mean words to them. Allow them to bring their concerns of the day to God.

Help children pray using a variety of teaching aids and resources.

1. Repetitive prayers. Teach your children a simple prayer that you repeat every day, this could be a blessing or promise from scripture, a mealtime prayer, praise prayers at the end of the day or a request for a good night's sleep. The repetitive nature will give them the vocabulary they need to form their own prayers. Here is a good example of a promise prayer from scripture, Numbers 6:24-26.

2. Popcorn prayers. These are simple one-line prayers. Choose a topic and have each family member say one sentence, or even one word, to God about that topic.

3. Picture prayers. Have children draw the thing they are praying about, this can be requests or thanksgiving, even adoration could be expressed as an art work. This makes the prayer more concrete. Put the drawing up in the house and encourage them to talk to God about it every time they look at it.

4. Finish-the-sentence prayers. This is a good way to help frame their prayers and give them confidence. You say, 'Thank you God for giving us...' and then you allow the child to fill in the blank. Celebrate whatever they say and join them in thanking God for it. Then give them another line. You could use the structure in the next point.

5. Use memory aids.

ACTS--This acronym Stands for: Adoration, confession, thanksgiving and Supplication. You can teach younger children simpler words for these types of prayers: praise, sorry, thank you and please. Then pray in this order.

5-finger prayer--This structure is similar to ACTS, however it divides supplication into 2 sections: requests for myself and for others. So each finger has a prayer type to pray. Thumb is praise, pointy finger is confession, middle finger is thanksgiving, ring finger is requests for others and baby finger is requests for myself.

6. Use scripture. Teaching our children to read the scripture and pray it back to god gives them confidence that they are praying according to God's will. Some examples include Luke 11:1-13, Ps 46:1, Rom 15:13 or Ps 27:8.

7. Use worship songs. Songs that are Word-based and gospel-centred sets the tone of the prayer (celebratory, reverential, etc) and helps to prepare our hearts.

How We Wait in Prayer

Many times, we allow prayer, especially with children, to be viewed as a transaction. I ask for something and God provides for my wishes. However, scripture shows that this is not what prayer was intended to be. It is meant to be a conversation between a dependent child and a loving father in times of joy and despair, thanksgiving and repentance, knowing that God's answer will not simply be yes, but rather what is best for us. Because of this, it is important to model for our children that sometimes the answer is 'yes' but, sometimes it is 'wait', sometimes it is something completely different than we expected and sometimes the answer is 'no'.

God is not a vending machine and regardless how He answers us, we continue to hope in Him and trust His best for our life. We see this in Matthew 7:7-11. We are told that if earthly fathers always want to give good gifts to their children, how much more our heavenly Father, who has even better things for us and knows best what we need. Therefore, we need to show them how to speak with God and the many different ways that we can do this.