



The Lord's Prayer

The ABCDEs of Family Prayer

Many of us can look around our congregations on Sunday morning and identify 'the prayer warriors' in our churches. We can be awed by the naturalness of their inclination to pray often, earnestly, and with humble hearts. We can also be challenged and convicted by how prayer can be difficult for us to understand and practice in the rhythms of our own daily life. This is further complicated when we think about how to teach the value of prayer to the children and youth in our communities of faith and in our homes.

Where can we start? While it is beyond doubt that kids learn by watching, the further challenge is to provide them with opportunities to learn by participation. Families and churches can grow by praying together. Here are five key concepts to consider when building a whole family house of prayer:

Anything can be a matter for prayer always.

The Apostle Paul's appeal in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray without ceasing" can seem like an impossible challenge! However, try thinking about it as the constant potential to always be living in a spirit of readiness to turn all of family life into an orientation towards God, whether in times of trial or thanksgiving. The lost teddy bear? Say a prayer together with your child. The good test results? Say a prayer together with your child. The kids are fighting? Welcome God to bring a spirit of His peace. While many families have established habits of dinner grace or bed time prayers, it is good for kids to begin to develop an awareness that God is always present, always caring, and always inviting us to turn our hearts towards Him so we can listen for His voice (Psalm 139:1-18).

Brevity can be beautiful.

Children have a shorter attention span and smaller range of vocabulary available to them for articulation of thoughts. They might be easily intimidated by prayer if they feel pressured to conform to a certain length or depth of prayer. When inviting your child to pray, assure them that length is not important. Perhaps as a family you can practice 'popcorn' one-sentence prayer times. If praying in response to a child's prayer request, use the words they have provided. They will feel affirmed that they were heard by a loving parent/adult, and you will avoid instilling an idea that their prayers need adult translation between their thoughts and God's heart. However, if a child seems to lack words or is struggling to communicate you can assure them that the Holy Spirit is a special messenger at work and God knows what they are feeling and is listening (Romans 8:26-27).

Clarity can be crucial.

Even a concept like ‘thankfulness’ can be too abstract for younger children. Therefore, instead of asking children, “what can you thank God for today?” ask them “what was really great about today? What has God given you that let you enjoy that time? Can you say thank you?” In her book, *Spiritual Disciplines for Children*, Vernie Schorr Love recommends inviting children to make prayer lists as “a way to create a physical experience to help prayer become concrete. A prayer list also encourages children who respond to a daily chore chart and are highly visual. The list needs to be simple and easy for children to use.” It is also good to be clear with kids what they can expect from prayer– that God will hear, but may answer in different ways and times: yes, no, maybe, or “I have a better idea”. Every good gift does come from God (James 1:17), and we can trust His goodness, even if the gift is different than what we expect.

Different types of prayer can be a delight.

It is important as children’s ministry workers and parents that we get to know each of our kids as individuals and appreciate the different pathways that might spark their imagination in talking to God as they process their life experiences. Some kids might like to sing their prayers, while others might like to draw a picture of their prayer concern or thanksgiving. Some might process the joys or trials of their week by acting them out with dolls or Legos. Some might love to share with the group or siblings, while others might prefer to journal alone. It is good to challenge kids to try new means of meeting with God, but ultimately we want to see them appreciating their unique identity in Christ, gifting of the Holy Spirit, and ultimately, God’s desire to meet them where and how they are. Busy kids might need movement prayers and quiet kids might need silent prayers. It is good to keep a class or group of siblings tracking in the same direction (reflecting on the same themes/stories or asking the same questions about God’s character and His work in the world) even if methods of response vary, as it is good for the kids to see each other being the body of Christ with many parts (1 Corinthians 12).

Emphasizing listening can be essential.

The goal is for kids to understand the ‘call and answer’ dynamic of prayer. This is not a one-sided conversation. Talking with kids about how exactly God ‘answers’ our prayers without an audible voice can be challenging. It is good for parents and churches to make sure kids hear about answers to prayer and what those looked like in ‘real life’. Often, our kids hear the concern but not the follow-up. As churches, consider keeping an answer to prayer board. Families can also do this or kids can have a column for answered prayer in their prayer lists as described above. Families can talk about how we can hear from God through His word, or other believers we trust and respect, or an actual change in circumstances. Consider having a family verse for the week and ask each other through the week to be looking for how God has spoken through that verse in your life together or as individuals at work, school, or play.



The Lord's Prayer Cards for Kids

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) can be a great place for a family or a church to begin to come together in a spirit of intergenerational prayer. It is already familiar to many adults and it is a short and rhythmic prayer that many children will be able to memorize with relative ease. A church can commit for a season to reciting it as part of a service before children are dismissed (it can be projected on Powerpoint or printed in bulletins for those less familiar/able to memorize). A family can commit to repeating it together and alone. The hope is that as children recite with church and family they will feel connected to God in community.

One of the benefits of the Lord's Prayer for children's instruction is the emphasis throughout on the character of God. This prayer is not only a cry to God, but a reminder throughout of who God is, and as we pray it, we remind ourselves of God's nature and name. He is a holy, kingdom-building, sustaining, forgiving, delivering, and all powerful God. And- he invites us to call on Him anytime and anywhere! As Vernie Schorr writes, "The goal of intentionally focusing on God's character through the practice of prayer is to guide children to know and experience God's character in ways that result in a desire to be like Him." 1 John 4:19 reminds us, "we love because he first loved us" (NRSV). In teaching the Lord's Prayer, we can remind our children of the depths of God's love for them, calling out a response in love from them.

On the following page is a craft you can do as families or Sunday School classes to familiarize your kids with the Lord's prayer. It can be printed on cardstock, single hole punched, and attached to a ring to become a flip book. It can also be printed on copy paper and stapled together as a book. On each 'postcard' kids can draw a picture that represents the phrase referenced, either around the words or on the back side. Below is a passage that can be read with each phrase and a question or two that can start a discussion with kids. The activity can be completed at once or spread out over several weeks/sessions as part of a Sunday school class.

Our Father who is in heaven, Holy is your name. (Exodus 15:11, 1 Peter 1:15-16, 2 Tim. 1:9)

What does it mean that God is holy? How can we become holy?

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven, (Matthew 5:1-12)

What does God's kingdom look like? How can we act as part of His kingdom?

Give us this day our daily bread. (John 6:8-11, Luke 22:7-38)

What are some stories from the Bible where God fed people? Does God feed us? How?

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. (John 3:16-17, Luke 6:37-42)

Why does God forgive us? What does it mean to forgive those who hurt us?

Lead us not in to temptation, but deliver us from evil. (James 1: 13-14, Romans 8:37-39)

What can separate us from God's love? How does it feel to know God is with you always?

For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever. (Isaiah 40: 28-31)

What is God's power like? Does God get tired? How can we access His power?

Amen.

Our Father, who is in heaven, Holy is
your name.

Your kingdom come, Your will be done,
On earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive
those who sin against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but
deliver us from evil.

For yours is the kingdom, the power,
and the glory, forever and ever.
Amen.