

Ten Ways To Teach Your Child To Pray



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by Pastor Mark von Ehrenkrook

"Ten Ways To Teach Your Child To Pray" is written for parents who desire to lead their children in a spiritual walk with Jesus Christ. It was said of Jesus that the disciples came to Him and asked Him to teach them how to pray. It was the only time they specifically asked Him to teach them something. (Here is a good question to ask yourself: has anyone ever asked you to teach them how to pray? Why or Why not?) Obviously Jesus modeled a vibrant prayer life in front of the disciples. In response to their question Jesus answered, **"This then, is how you should pray:**

**"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the kingdom and the power
and the glory forever. Amen."**

Matthew 6: 9-13 NIV

This prayer, known as the Lord's Prayer, has been our model through the years. Thousand of pages and hundreds of sermons have covered the Lord's Prayer from many different aspects. It is simple enough for a child to memorize and understand yet profound and almost incomprehensible to those who know it best. It is a far cry from rote prayers like, "Now I lay me down to sleep" or even "God is great, God is good..." In this pamphlet we will explore ten ways to teach your child to pray in the way that Jesus directed us.

1. Lord's Prayer
2. Power of A Prayerful Model
3. Parts of Prayer
4. Family Prayer
5. Personal Prayer
6. Public Prayer
7. Sinner's Prayer
8. Balanced Prayer
9. Power in Prayer
10. Answers to Prayer

1. Lord's Prayer It is important that our children at some point memorize the Lord's Prayer. It is a Biblical model of prayer set in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. This is the English equivalent of the very words of Christ our LORD. The prayer contains elements of Praise, Supplication, Adoration, Profession, Confession and Repentance. It reminds us that life is more than what we can see and touch but that there is an unseen world of good and evil, and there is a loving God who directs and superintends the present as well as the future. Some churches traditionally pray the Lord's Prayer each week during corporate worship time. The Lord's Prayer is, by our Savior's own words, how and what we should pray.

2. Power of a prayerful model As a parent, you know the power of modeling. Isn't it true that our kids follow our example much more readily than following our words? Teaching our kids to pray begins with the aspect of parental modeling. If we are serious about teaching our children about prayer, it is vital that we as adults cultivate a dynamic prayer life. Recently a boy colored a picture of his family for his public school teacher. His teacher saw that his father was drawn with a square, black hand. She asked the child about the square hand and the boy replied: "Oh, that's my dad's Bible, he always has his Bible in his hand." What an incredible example this father is spiritually to his children. When I ask adults about their own spiritual journey, they frequently tell me about a mother, father or grandparent who was overheard praying for them when they were young. Not only were these prayers answered, but the child learned a great deal about the importance of prayer through their godly model. It would be very impractical to think that our children will attach more importance to prayer than we do ourselves.

3. Parts of Prayer: Some parents teach their children that prayer consists of ACTS. This is an acronym for, Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. My wife and I have found it is more simple to suggest a prayer TIP. TIP stands for, "Thank you," "I'm Sorry," and "Please." Children can readily identify these parts to prayer. When a child says they can't think of anything to pray, the parent will say, let's think of a "Thank you" prayer or do you have an "I'm Sorry" prayer that you need to tell God? Usually kids can come up with a "Please" prayer fairly easily. See if your children can identify what parts of the Lord's Prayer are T.I.P..

4. Family Prayer: Whenever the family comes together for prayer it is a marvelous teaching and modeling time. Children should be encouraged to participate with either sentence prayers (Only one sentence long) or by praying one of the parts of prayer mentioned above. Set ground rules for the children, such as; treat everyone's prayer with respect, encouraging words only, no put-downs, everyone has the right to pray for whatever they personally feel is important. Families can vary their types of prayer and one night use conversational prayers and another night use a guided approach, where the leader directs which kinds of prayers should be said at a given time. Echo prayers is where the leader says a phrase and the other members echo what is prayed. This is especially helpful for little children. Family or corporate prayer time is a good time to check for any misconceptions about God and prayer.

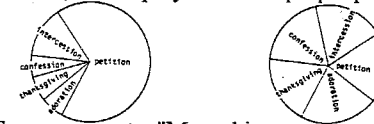
5. Personal Prayer: Since prayer is talking with God, where we seek comfort and ask forgiveness of sin, and since He even told us how to pray, the reasons for helping your children establish a personal prayer life are obvious. The way to go about it is not as apparent. We can provide helps such as a prayer journal or prayer list (a sample list is included in this pamphlet,) and we can model prayer both as adults and families, but the child must want to spend time with Jesus alone. In order to do this, it is necessary to provide a foundational understanding of prayer and our relationship with Christ. Certainly we need to teach our children that God is ever present and able to hear our prayers. Children must know that God is interested in their smallest need or concern. "Cast all your care upon me for I care for you." I Peter 5:7. Children must also be convinced of the power of prayer, that is why having a family prayer list is so important. As children see God answering specific prayers, this gives them confidence to go boldly before God in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16.) Children should be taught that God answers every prayer. (See 10 below)

6. Public Prayer: A vibrant prayer life moves from private prayers, to family prayers to corporate or public praying. Many adults have never had the opportunity or the desire to pray publicly. Prayer, however, should be such a natural, moment by moment experience, that being asked to pray in public would not be life threatening. One way to practice this spontaneous prayer life would be to hook your prayers to an every day sound. Some people pray when they hear a car horn, a bell, or a siren. Many families in our church pray whenever they hear a police or fire siren. They just pause for a moment to pray for protection and safety of the persons involved. These life situations call us to pray in unexpected ways and help create for adults and children the ability to practice the daily presence of Christ. When people are more comfortable with spontaneous private prayer they can move more easily into public praying.

7. Sinners Prayer: Someone has said that the first prayer God hears from a person is the sinner's prayer. There is no Biblical evidence to suggest that God is limited in any way, but it is a profound thought. It does help us begin at the beginning, in other words, we cannot expect our children to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit or to desire a relationship with Christ if they have not personally confessed Jesus as their Savior. We cannot expect our children to grow in their prayer-walk if they do not know the LORD. One of the most rewarding experiences for a parent is to lead their child to Christ. I am sure that I must have prayed many times before that day in 1958 when my mother led me to the LORD. As a boy four years old however, I do remember that afternoon and I still recall the spiritual reality of that sinners prayer. Christ entered my life like I had never known and He has never left. The point is this, that the most important prayer anyone will ever make is that prayer that opens the door of their life to Jesus.

8. Balanced Prayer. In an early "Nancy" cartoon, Nancy is kneeling at her bed obviously praying. She is asking for a bicycle, a doll, some skates, etc. In the next frame her mother enters the room and asks Nancy if she was indeed praying. Nancy affirms that she was talking to God, but she asks her mother why she inquired. Her mother replied, much to Nancy's embarrassment, that she thought Nancy was talking to Santa!

Even as adults we are prone to practice unbalanced prayer, focusing on our needs and the urgent needs of others. When we practice balanced praying we are developing our relationship with God and it becomes less of a one way street. The first of these two diagrams displays how most of us spent our prayer time. The second diagram is more of the approach we should strive for. Asking for things is just a small aspect of prayer and this illustration helps put the parts of prayer in their proper perspective.



9. Power in Prayer: Tennyson wrote: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." As our children encounter spiritual warfare it is comforting to know that they have a God who is strong and ready to help. Our kids need to be aware of the battle that is going on in the spiritual realm and the awesome power that is available through prayer. Scripture tells us that "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." James 5:16b. Because our adversary is "like a roaring lion walking around seeking whom he may devour," (I Peter 5:8) it is imperative that our kids learn to go to God in prayer for strength and guidance.

10. Answers to Prayer: We must teach our children that God hears every one of our prayers. While my wife and I were serving as short term missionaries in Japan, we saw many people go to Shinto Shrines, throwing coins and clapping their hands to get the attention of whatever god would listen. Scripture says that we have this confidence that if we ask anything in his name He hears us. John 14:14 Our children should know that every prayer is heard by God and is important to him. Every prayer of petition or "Please" prayers is answered in one of three ways, God answers, Yes, No or wait. In our prayer journals we can chart God's answers. When we are specific in our requests, we can see Him answering more clearly. Yes answers are wonderful and exciting to see. "No" answers are incredible teaching experiences, especially when the answer is an obvious NO! No answers are always for our best but it takes time to understand what God was doing when He says No to a prayer. No or wait responses are more demanding and require more time to prevail in prayer. My cousin prayed for 30 years for the salvation of his father. He never gave up believing that God had answered each prayer with "Wait." Late in life his father finally submitted to Christ and my cousin realized that from the very first prayer, God had answered "Yes...but wait."

Teaching our children to pray as Jesus taught requires a proactive approach. It demands that we be what we want our kids to become. It is not the job of the pastor or Sunday School teacher to teach your children to pray, in as much as we have just seen that prayer is more caught than taught. May God richly bless your efforts in teaching your children to pray. If you have any comments or suggestions to help other parents, please write to me at the address below.

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