

CHILDREN AND PRAYER – IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL SETTING

Ed. – This is a great article for adults who want some specific help in how to pray!

During our Lord's earthly ministry, He welcomed little children, even when his disciples were trying to keep them away and considered them nuisances. (Mark 10:13-16). In fact, when His disciples asked Him "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" our Lord called a little child and had him stand among them. He said, "...unless you change and become like little children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:3 *NIV*). Jesus loves to have children talk with Him and He loves to talk with them through His Word, the Holy Scriptures.

For children, as well as for adults, talking with the Lord in prayer is similar to talking with people whom we know:

- People who love us and care about us
- People who have demonstrated that loving care for us.

When praying, it is important for children as well as for adults to know that we are talking with a Friend. Jesus says to children what He said to his disciples in John 15:14-15: "I call you my friends." We sing the hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." With children we sing songs that talk about our Lord's friendship with us and his loving care for us:

- *Jesus Loves Me This I Know*
- *Jesus Loves the Little Children*
- *Jesus Loves Children, Jesus Loves Me* (and it continues "Jesus loves you with love tenderly; Jesus loves all no matter how small; that's why I love Jesus better than all.")

For some of us, it is easier to say what's on our mind by writing it down. For some children, it may be helpful for them to write out their prayer. Then, after writing them out for themselves, ask them

- To share their prayer with the rest of the group by reading what they have written, or, if they are reluctant to do so,
- Have the teacher/parent read the prayer for the rest of the class/family as a part of the time of prayer.

Children learn to pray the same way that they learn to talk:

- By listening to us as adults pray, and, then,
- By imitating what we say and do as we pray.
- When they are learning to speak, they don't speak in complete sentences and thought patterns. The same is true in learning to pray. We don't need to be concerned about how we say it; just say it. This is true for adults/parents/teachers just as it is for children.
- Our children learn the importance of prayer by seeing us pray at meal times, and at the beginning and the end of day, and about things that are happening in our lives—the small as well as the large things that are happening each day.

For that reason, it is important for us as teachers/parents to:

- Refrain from speaking long, involved prayers when we are praying with children; use short sentences in our prayers. State in a simple way our thoughts.
- Use the same kinds of words that we would use in conversation with a friend—no 16th century vocabulary such as "Thee" and "Thou" and "giveth" and "blesseth;"
- Begin our prayers in a simple manner, such as "Jesus." That's the way we talk with our friends and our parents/grandparents, our aunts/uncles whom we know love us and care about us.

With those individuals whom we know love and accept us,

- We pour out our hearts to them.
- We tell them what is going on in our lives.
- We say what we are thinking without being concerned about using the correct words or sentence structures.
- We just talk, and if it doesn't come out right the first time we say it, we rephrase it and say it again. We can do that in prayer. It's OK.

Some things to do in class and send home with the children for use in home would be:

Have the children finish the following prayers to the Lord:

- “Jesus, you love me. I love you because (and have them say whatever comes to their mind as to why they love Him).”
- “Thank you, Jesus, for (and have them express whatever they are thankful for).”
- “Jesus, I ask you to (and have them complete this by stating what they want the Lord to do for them or someone else).”
- “Jesus, please forgive me for (have them list specific things that they know they have done wrong. AND, then, have them THANK the Lord for dying for their forgiveness for these specific sins.)”
 1. For this, you might want to have them write on a paper and after the sins are listed, have them write at a diagonal across the sins: “God forgives all my sins because Jesus died for me.”
 2. And, then, have them either run it through a shredder or have them wad up the paper, place it in a container and burn it in front of their eyes. That way, they know that no one else will see the sin or sins listed.
 3. If this is done in a class room setting, you might have all the students join with you as the teacher or parent in this simple prayer: “Thank you, Jesus, that you have forgiven me for this/these sins.” That impresses upon them that God has really forgiven them.
 4. “Jesus, help me to forgive others the way you forgive me. I pray to forgive (mention here the name of the person or persons).”
- “Jesus, my friend/relative (list here the name of the person) doesn’t know you yet. Please, bring them to know you as their friend and Savior.”
- “Jesus, I get sad when (have the child put in here what he/she may be sad about that day. Then, have the child and the parent pray with and for the child and what causes the sadness)”
- “Jesus, sometimes I worry about or am afraid about (have the child mention here what that is);” then, have the child or you as a parent or teacher pray about that in a simple way, asking the Lord to work it out.
- Have parents and students pray for the teacher and the children in the class each night or morning before Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, or the Christian Day School. Pray for:
 1. The teacher to know how to show Jesus’ love for the children and to teach the lesson for that day.
 2. The children to work with the teacher and treat the teacher and other students with respect.
 3. The Lord to show Himself to be very real to the children as they study His Word so that they see Him as their friend as well as their Savior.
 4. The Lord to show them how to put into practice right away what they learn that day in God’s Word.
- Have parents and child pray for the pastor and the others who are leading the worship service. “Thank you, Jesus, for our pastor _____ and for all of the others who help us worship and learn about you. Please, work through them in our worship service, and help us to worship you.”
- “Lord Jesus, I don’t like (mention here the name or names of people I don’t like). Help me to change my attitude.”
- When you pray at the beginning or the end of class, ask the children if they have anything that they would like you to pray about for them. You will be pleasantly surprised at the positive response in their requests. Then, pray for those specific requests. Ask them next week about their request and what is happening in response to that prayer.

As teachers and parents, it is important for us to show the children how the Lord answers our prayers. Keep a list of the things/people we pray for. Then, as we see the Lord’s answer to those prayers, thank Him for those answers. It’s also important to emphasize that the Lord answers all prayers in one or more of three ways:

- “Yes,” and he grants the request;
- “Not yet; wait awhile; this isn’t the right time for that”—just as a parent says to a 10 year old, “You can’t drive the family vehicle until you reach a certain age and have been trained. Then, you can drive because you will use the vehicle responsibly and won’t hurt other people.”
- “No.” If he granted our request, it would not be good for us or for anyone else. He says “No” in order to protect us and others from harm. He always wants what is best for us. We can trust Him to do what’s best because He sent His own Son, Jesus, to live, suffer, die and rise from death so we can be in His family now and in heaven forever.

Other prayer focuses could be:

- A prayer walk – take the children on walk around the neighborhood and have them pray for the people they see, the people in the houses, for the creation that God has made, etc. This may take some instruction prior to the walk and some ‘extra help’ to assist the children in praying throughout the walk. This type of activity helps the children incorporate prayer into their daily lives.
- Have a special time in class to pray for those that are listed in the bulletin or newsletter who may be ill or in need – have the children say the prayers as much as possible.
- Make prayer journals in class and encourage the children to use them at home.
- Have a family time of prayer
- Have the children ‘adopt’ a person in the congregation; a person in the community; a congregation committee; congregation leader; to pray for – in class and at home. They can do this individually, in pairs, triads, or as a class.
- Pray in a circle – holding hands if possible – close with a song.
- When a child expresses a need or concern ask them if you can pray with/for them – right then. This teaches children that they can pray with / for others in ‘real time’. Encourage children to pray for one another in ‘real time’.
- It may be very helpful for children to see pictures of Jesus smiling, and enjoying the company of children, etc. That way they realize that he is still very much human as well as God. And, they will be able to relate to him more easily.

Some ways to involve children in times of prayer in a worship service would be:

- When Sunday School staff, Vacation Bible School staff, and parochial school staff are installed, have the children come forward and place their hands on the shoulders of or stand behind the individual teachers as the pastor or lay leader prays over those individuals.
- At the beginning of the school year, have the teachers in the public schools come forward and pray for them and their classes. At that time, have the children in the congregation come forward and place their hands upon the shoulders or simply stand behind the teachers as part of the blessing for the teachers.
- If the congregation participates in something like “Christmas for Kids” in their local community—collecting gifts for children from low income families—before the gifts are delivered to the children or agency delivering them, invite the children of the congregation to come forward and place their hands on the gifts while an adult, or even one of the children, would pray for the children who will receive the gifts.

Ask God to grow your prayer life:

As someone has said, “the best way to learn to pray is to start talking with the Lord.” Ask Him to do what the disciples did, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (Luke 11:1).

Ask God to grow your prayer life – no matter where it is at this point. Consider asking another teacher to be a prayer partner with you. Gather together with all the teachers to pray prior to class. Pray for the children in your class during the week; pray for their families; pray about the lesson you will give and for the hearts that will receive it; consider beginning a prayer group outside of your ‘regular’ prayer activities; start a prayer journal; go to a prayer retreat; sign up to receive a prayer daily via email (search the web to see the hundreds of possibilities, find one or more that encourage your prayer life); learn something new about how to pray – stretch your prayer life. Share with the children how you are still learning about prayer and most importantly how Jesus and you talk together as friends.

Teaching children is not an easy task and yet as anyone who has taught knows – the rewards are great treasures in our lives. Think about one or more instances that God has blessed you with through the teaching of children – in your class or in your family. Thank Him right now for the child/children that taught YOU and encouraged you in your relationship with Christ.

The Lord delights in our prayers and in our teaching the children in our charge about prayer and leading them to grow in praying themselves. May you be blessed abundantly as you serve through “teaching the little children to come unto Him (through prayer)”.

A Good Prayer Resource for Kids (among many!):

PrayKids! is an 8-page, full-color children's prayer curriculum published bi-monthly inside each issue of *Pray!* magazine. *PrayKids!*'s mission is "to encourage a passion for Christ through prayer" in elementary-age kids.

There are 26 issues in all and each issue can be ordered separately.

Go to: <http://www.navpress.com/landing/praykids.aspx>

For more information about CPR (Center for Prayer Renewal)

or the Northwest District LCMS Prayer Ministries, go to: www.nowlcms.org

