

## Children and Prayer in Classrooms and Homes

**D**uring 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?"<sup>2</sup> He called a little child and had the child stand among them.<sup>3</sup> And He said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:1-4). 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 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 prayers. Then, after writing their prayer thoughts:

- Ask each child to share the 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 adults pray.
- By imitating what adults say and do as we pray.

When children 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 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 kind 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 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. 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.

## Things To Do in the Classroom and in the Home

Have the children finish the following prayers:

- "Jesus, You love me. I love You because . . ." (Have them say whatever comes to their mind as to why they love Him.)
- "Thank You, Jesus, for . . ." (Have them express whatever they are thankful for.)
- "Jesus, I ask You to . . ." (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. Then, have them THANK Jesus for dying and rising from death for the forgiveness of these specific sins and of all their sins—even those not listed.)
  1. You might want to have them write the sins on paper. After the sins are listed, have the children draw a cross over the sins as they say, "God forgives all my sins because Jesus died for me."

2. Have them either run the paper through a shredder or have them wad up the paper, and toss it in a trash can never to be seen again.
3. When accomplished, have children and teacher/parents join together in praying this simple prayer: "Thank You, Jesus, that You have forgiven me for this/these sins." Praying this prayer impresses upon them the reality of God's undeserved love given to them as their sins are forgiven.
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 the name of the person) doesn't know You yet. Please, work through me to bring them to know You as their friend and Savior."
- "Jesus, I am sad when (have the child add what he/she may be sad about that day). Then, have the child and the teacher/parent pray with and for the child about whatever causes the sadness.
- "Jesus, sometimes I worry about or am afraid about . . ." (Have the child name the worry or fear.) Then, have the child and parent/teacher pray about the sadness or fears in a simple way, asking the Lord to help the child trust in God's love and care.
- Invite parents and children to 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. Teachers as they show and tell Jesus' love to children throughout the day as they teach and care for students.
  2. Children as they learn and work with the teacher.
  3. Children to show the love they have in Jesus through respect for teachers, classmates, and family members.

4. Children so Jesus and His great love become very real to them as they study His Word so they come to know Him as their Savior and friend.
5. Children so they are, by the power of the Holy Spirit, able to put into practice what they learn that day in God's Word.



- Have parents and children pray for the pastor and the others as they lead worship. "Thank You, Jesus, for our pastor \_\_\_\_\_ and for all of the others who help us worship and learn about you. Please, work through the worship leaders to help us come to know You, and praise and honor the greatness of Your love."
- "Lord Jesus, I don't like (*mention here the name or names of people disliked and reason for such*). Help me to forgive and change my attitude."
- When you pray at the beginning or the end of the day (*classroom or home*), ask the children if they have anything that they would like you to pray about for them. Then, pray for those specific requests. Talk to them about their prayer request sometime during the following week and God's 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 for which you have prayed. Then, as we realize the Lord's answer to those prayers, thank Him for those answers. It's also important to emphasize that the our God answers all prayers in one or more ways:

- "Yes." He grants the request.
- "Not yet; wait awhile; this isn't the right time for that." A parent may say 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." So it is that God in His wisdom tells us to wait because He foresees things we do not.

- "No." God says "No" in order to protect us and others from harm. God provides us with what we need and not necessarily with what we want. He always desires 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 Focal Points

- A prayer walk. Take the children on a 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 before 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.
- Set aside a family time of prayer
- Have the children "adopt" a person in the congregation, a person in the community, a congregation board or committee, congregation leaders to pray for during class time and at home. They can do this individually, in pairs, triads, or as a group.
- Pray in a circle—holding hands, if possible. Close with a song.
- Pray with the child at the moment a child expresses a need or concern. This teaches children that they can pray with/for others in "real time." Encourage children to pray for one another in "real time."
- Display images of Jesus with children. Doing so is very helpful to visioning Jesus as smiling and enjoying the company of children. In this way concrete learners come to the realization that Jesus came to earth as a man as well as God, better enabling them to relate to Him.

## Involve Children in Prayer During Worship

- Have children come forward when Sunday school staff, vacation Bible School staff, and parochial school staff are installed and have them place their hands on the shoulders of, or stand behind, the individual teachers as the pastor or lay leader prays for the individuals.
- At the beginning of the school year, have the teachers in public schools come forward and pray for them and the children in 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), invite the children of the congregation to come forward and place their hands on the gifts while an adult, or individual children pray for those 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 as the disciples did, “Lord, teach us to pray . . .” (Luke 11:1).

Ask God to grow your prayer life. Consider inviting another person to be your prayer partner. Meet with that individual or with others to pray. **Parents and Teachers:** Pray for the children in the class/school during the week; pray for their families; pray about the lessons that will be taught and for the minds and hearts that will receive them. Consider

- Beginning a prayer group outside your personal prayer activities.
- Start a prayer journal.
- Organize or participate in a prayer retreat
- Sign up to receive a prayer daily via e-mail. (To join in praying for children, sign up to receive monthly prayer sheets from LCMS Children’s Ministry by e-mailing [patti.borghardt@lcms.org/children](mailto:patti.borghardt@lcms.org/children).)
- Learn something new about how to pray—stretch your personal prayer life.
- Share with children that you are still learning about prayer and most importantly about how Jesus and you regularly talk together as friends.

Teaching children may not always be an easy task and yet as anyone who has taught knows that the rewards are great treasures in our lives. Passing along the faith from one generation to the next is the responsibility of everyone. Support of parents in their role as “faith shapers” is also the responsibility of the faith community. Think about one or more instances through which God has blessed you through children. Thank Him for the opportunities you have to share your faith with the next generation and for the child/children that have taught you and encouraged you in your relationship with Christ.



The Lord delights in our prayers and in our teaching of children. It is our privilege and responsibility to journey with children as they grow in coming to know their Savior through prayer, and in praying for others and for themselves. May you be blessed abundantly as you serve through “teaching the little children to come unto Him (through prayer).”

## A Prayer Resource for Kids

*PrayKids!* is an eight-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 the Center for Prayer Renewal or the Northwest District LCMS Prayer Ministries, go to: [www.nowlcms.org](http://www.nowlcms.org)



CM Connections is published on the Web by the LCMS District and Congregational Services, Children’s Ministry, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; 1-800-248-1930; [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org). This publication may be reproduced without charge in its entirety for non-commercial purposes without prior permission from LCMS Children’s Ministry.

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