

Helping Kids Pray

by Katie Barbee

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Read more . . .

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If we are to teach children the importance of prayer, it first needs to be a priority in our own lives. Children can detect authenticity. If we are not genuine, they will notice. We don't have to have perfect prayer lives—God uses imperfect vessels! But we at least need to be in the habit of talking with God.

With all that is happening in the world today, it is so important to remember to pray *for* our children as well as praying *with* them. Children live busy lives and, sadly, not every child has a stable home life. As children enter school or church or other similar environments, they may have a thousand different things weighing on their minds. We need to ask God to bless the short time that we have with them.

Often times, a typical experience of leading a group of children in prayer can end up sounding like we are merely reciting a wish list. Children call out their prayer requests and then an adult or possibly a couple of children pray for those requests. Many times, those requests are limited to physical illness or injury. And although God hears all of our prayers, there is so much more we can be teaching children about how to communicate with God.

By selectively implementing a variety of ways to pray, we can begin to teach children to *praise* God for who He is, *invite* God to be active in their lives, to *anticipate* God's answers to their prayers, and to *thank* Him for what He has done and continues to do. We can do this in fresh ways that hold the attention of children. Prayer is powerful, effective, and exciting. It does not have to be, and *should not* be, boring or stale.

Let's consider just a few ways to pray. Remember that you can choose the type of prayer that fits best with what you are striving for each time the children gather. Some methods of prayer require no preparation—just dive right in! Others might require some supplies and preparation and often will continue for more than one gathering time. Through prayer, you can teach children to be mindful of the needs of those near to them like friends and family, as well as those far away in places they may never have visited or even heard of. You can also teach children to pray the Word of God—an amazing and powerful experience to introduce to children.

Personal Prayers

Sometimes our lists of prayer requests can fill up quickly with the needs of others. While it is a beautiful gift to lift up another in prayer, it is also important to remember to pray for ourselves and for our own needs.

Gather children and ask them to tell you whom they most often pray for. Tell children that while it is wonderful to pray for others, it is also important that they remember to pray for themselves. Remind them that praying for themselves is not a selfish thing to do and that the Bible is filled with examples of people who prayed for themselves.

Tell children that one way to pray for themselves is to take a verse of Scripture and to repeat the words as a prayer to God. Read Psalm 51:10. Talk about what it means to have a clean, or pure, heart. Have children repeat Psalm 51:10 after you. Then give children time to find a quiet spot by themselves, away from the other children. Ask children to take time to confess silently to God the things in their hearts that they think God would want them to change. After confessing each thing, they should silently repeat the words from Psalm 51:10 as their prayer to God.

Side-by-Side Prayer

If you ask children for a list of prayer requests, you will find that most often they will ask for prayer for people they know. The needs of family, friends, and ourselves usually top our own prayer lists too. However, it is also a good idea to teach children to pray for the needs of people they see every day, but who they may not know very well.

Gather children and explain that you will announce a location where the children might spend time each week. Children should think of the people who sit on their right or left when they are in those locations. Then children will have time to sit and pray silently for those people. Call out various locations such as school, home, and church. Get creative and think of other places children frequent throughout the week as well, such as a playground, after-school care, a team practice or other rehearsal, the library, or a store. If you announce a particular

location that does not apply to a child, she should continue praying for the person she was praying for in the previous location until you announce a new location.

Encourage children to be mindful of who is around them as they go through their week and to take time to pray for those people, whether they know them very well or not.

Better Than a Roller Coaster Prayer

Prayer is exciting! The thought that God, the Creator of the entire world, hears us when we speak to Him and answers us when we pray is amazing. Giving children permission to get excited and to celebrate when prayers are answered will help them to connect on their own level with God. In addition, they will see what an amazing gift it is to be able to ask God for the things they need and to experience His answers in their lives.

Ask children to help you create a list of prayer requests and praises. When the list is complete, lead the children in praying for the requests and praises. Mix up the order so that requests and praises alternate. Each time a praise is mentioned, allow children to raise their arms in the air and to shout in celebration, as though they were riding on a roller coaster. Consider trying this each week when children come to class. It will certainly get kids excited to start their class time with prayer!

Valentine's Day Prayers

Holidays provide special times for prayer and prayer projects. Gather children and ask them to stand in a circle. Explain that Valentine's Day is a time when we show kindness and love to one another. Then tell children that they are going to participate in a prayer activity that will give them an opportunity to say nice things about someone else and to hear what nice things someone else has to say about them.

Ask children to look at the person standing on their right. Then explain that as you go around the circle, each child will be asked to tell the rest of the group what they like most about the person on their right. Then they will say a one-sentence prayer thanking God for that person. Continue until everyone has had a turn.

These four prayer ideas are just a springboard that will hopefully stimulate your thinking and help you discover even more ways to excite children about prayer. Find methods that you find most effective in leading children to the throne of God, and then enjoy the journey together!

“Helping Kids Pray” includes excerpts from Katie Barbee’s new book, *Helping Kids Pray: 52 Ways to Help Kids Talk to God* (Standard Publishing).