



The Gift of Prayer, part 1 of 2—

Instructing Children to Pray

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One of the most valuable things we can teach children is how to pray. Many of God's chosen leaders learned to pray as children. King David learned to commune with God as a young shepherd boy on the hills of Judea.

Inspired by Example

A good place to begin is with our own prayer life. Our students will sense the power of the Holy Spirit in our teaching if we have spent time in prayer through the week. In Luke 11 one of Jesus' disciples requested, "Lord, teach us to pray." The disciples saw the wonderful relationship Jesus had with His Father through prayer, and they wanted this too! Likewise, children will have a greater desire to pray when they see evidence of an effective prayer life in people they admire. Parents and teachers who communicate freely with God teach by their actions that prayer is an important part of Christian living and a natural outflow of a close relationship with God.

Examples from Scripture are foundational for teaching on the subject of prayer. Stories such as "The Boys Who Would Not Bow," "Daniel in the Lion's Den," "Hannah's Baby Boy," and "Peter in Prison" are about prayer and God's intervention. Stories can be used to clarify the ways we

can pray in a variety of situations. Reinforce your lesson with follow-up discussions, Bible games, and appropriate learning activities. Help the children understand how they can apply prayer in their daily lives.

Children also need to know that God has been working in people's lives throughout history. Stories of great Christians



from our nation's history are an excellent resource for teaching children how prayer has influenced our culture. Add to this some current testimonies of Christian role models and testimonies from people in your own church. We don't have to look far to find examples of amazing stories of answered prayer.

Instruction Is Essential

When we teach children about prayer we should take

care to preserve their innocent faith. Avoid making prayer seem too complicated or giving the impression that prayer is a formula, a ritual, or merely a church or family tradition.

Prayer is talking, worshiping and fellowshiping with Jesus, our Friend. When children understand this they will be more likely to share all their feelings with the Lord and come to Him with confidence. Children need to understand that they can talk to God about anything, no matter how big or how small the problem.

When we invite children to pray aloud in class we can expect many different kinds of prayers. In the book, *Children's Letters to God*, there are many examples of how children see things. One letter is from Jeff who says, "Dear God, it is great the way you always get the stars in the right places." In another Donny asks, "Dear God, is Reverend Coe a friend of yours, or do you just know him through business?"

Children will pray in a natural way if they are not concerned about other people's reactions. Their prayers will reflect their spiritual maturity, level of development, and experiences at home and in church. The teacher's responsibility is to set the emotional and spiritual tone in the classroom that encour-

ages children to pray, while gently guiding them into greater understanding.

Although many of the children we reach have church backgrounds, we should not assume

that they understand what prayer is all about. Many come from prayerless homes; others pray more out of habit, and some may even be influenced by false doctrine and have erro-

neous concepts of who God is. Our challenge is to help students build a solid foundation for their prayer lives.

Questions For Further Study—

1. What is prayer?
2. What do a person's prayers reflect?
3. What do children need to see in order to become effective in prayer?

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