

Teaching Children to Pray, part 1 of 2—

Make Prayer a Priority

by Mary Boyd

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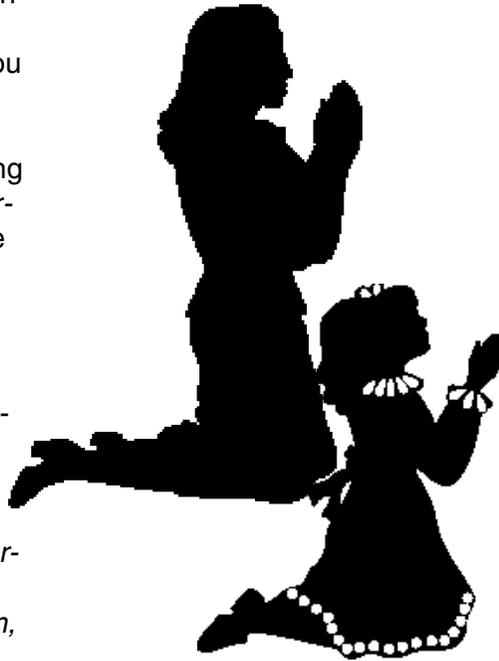
Is prayer a priority in your children's ministries or does it get the leftovers of time? What I mean is, do you save your prayer time to the end and then rush to get requests in? Does prayer get skipped because you ran out of time?

Sometimes we get so busy making sure the kids are having "fun" that we neglect the important spiritual principles that the kids need to be learning. Do you teach your kids to pray? Now you may ask, "Why do I have to teach them? Doesn't prayer come naturally to everyone? Aren't we all born knowing how to pray?" The answer is found in Luke 11:1: "*One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.'*"

Jesus responded by teaching them using the Lord's Prayer as a model. If prayer could not be taught, Jesus would have told them so. But prayer can and should be taught. Are you teaching your children to pray?

As children's leaders, we have the responsibility to make sure the children in our care are being taught the spiritual characteristics necessary to survive in this world as Christians. These characteristics will help kids to live their entire lives for

God. We want to challenge you to make sure your teachings are building these characteristics in your children.



Why don't kids pray?

A survey was done among Christian kids and the number one reason why they said they didn't pray was because they were afraid of doing it wrong. They didn't know what to say. These were the top five prayer concerns:

1. How do I pray?
2. Should I sit or kneel or stand?
3. Should I use any special words when I pray?

4. Do I fold my hands or lift my hands?

5. Should I pray silently or is it okay to pray out loud?

These concerns may build walls and hinder the child from giving to God what He so deeply desires—their hearts in prayer. As teachers and leaders, we must address these concerns!

Prayer is caught more than taught!

The Lord really dealt with me on this when we were children's pastors in Adrian, Michigan. I was the Missionettes Coordinator. On Wednesday nights, we had over 500 kids in Rangers and Missionettes; 200 of these were bussed in. I was directly responsible for over 300 Missionettes in 22 classes. Needless to say, Wednesday nights were very busy coordinating classes, teachers, etc. At times, kids would come up to me who were sick, not feeling well, etc. Because I was so busy, I would hurriedly tell them to go to the office. One day, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and said, "What are you teaching these children?" What was I teaching them? Every one of these was an opportunity to teach the children to pray first, then do what is necessary. I

was teaching them the opposite. They weren't learning to make prayer a priority.

That day, I changed my ways and prayer became a priority. When a child came to me, we prayed first. I taught the leaders to make prayer a priority in their classes and we saw a tremendous difference in our classes

and in the kids. I taught the leaders to put prayer first in their schedules and allow time for it. If prayer took a half hour, so what? The kids were learning to touch God. When prayer was at the end of class, many times it was rushed through or skipped because of time.

Make prayer a priority in your

Kids Church. Teach your teachers to make prayer a priority in their classrooms. Provide them with tools for teaching the children how to pray. In every class, have a five-minute segment of teaching another aspect of prayer, and then have prayer times.

Questions For Further Study—

1. What methods do you use to teach your children to pray? What improvements can be made?
2. List some reasons the children in your church don't pray. List some reasons why they do.
3. What steps can you take in your children's ministry to help children "catch" the habit of prayer?



Teaching Children to Pray, part 2 of 2—

Prayer Guidelines

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Make Prayer Fun!

Find ways to make kids *want* to pray. If we as leaders can make prayer fun and not boring, kids will want to pray. Here are some suggestions:

Have prayer challenges

Challenge the kids to pray a certain amount of time each day for a week. Start small and gradually increase the time. Give rewards to the kids who do it. Make up charts or bookmarks for the kids to keep track of how long they prayed each day.

Places to pray

Challenge the kids to pray in as many different places as they can, such as: riding their bikes, roller blading, in the shower, etc. Have them record the number of places. Give rewards for the greatest number of places and for the most creative places.

Missionaries

Give the children names of missionaries to pray for. Have them record each day they prayed for the missionary.

Prayer requests

Write down prayer requests to send home with the kids. This will give them something to pray for when they pray.

Maps/globes

Have the kids pray for a different country every day on their map. Have them pray for the

people to know Jesus. Have them mark or color the country they prayed for. When the continent is filled, have them turn in their maps for another map. The children's activity books from DFM have great maps in them.

Building Up a Child's Faith

Kids need to know that God is real. They need to know this for themselves and not just because someone told them. That is why prayer is so important. It shows kids that God is real when He answers their prayers and the prayers of others. Provide testimony times so kids can hear what God is doing. Share your own experiences of answered prayers. Share stories of answered prayers with the kids. The best stories are those of missionaries. The BGMC missions manual gives you twelve stories every year of God's miraculous power. These stories are really encouraging to kids and it builds up their faith in God.

Kids who learn to pray today will pray tomorrow as adults. They will learn to trust God when they have a need. They will learn to go to God first and to call on Him. Teach your kids to pray! It's the greatest tool we can give them in their spiritual walk with God.

Guidelines for Teaching Prayer

1. The way you pray shows that prayer is important in your own life.

The kids will learn from your example. If you pray long, adult-level prayers with big, hard-to-understand words, then you are showing them that prayer is for adults. Short, simple prayers teach that prayer is simple and deals with things of interest to the child.

2. Provide prayer opportunities throughout the session.

Take time out of activities and in the middle of stories to stop and say a short prayer of thanks or of petition.

3. Encourage children to repeat short prayers after you.

This is the first step toward the child using his or her own words in prayer. Keep the prayer short and use simple words. The child needs to understand what he is saying.

4. Children need to hear teachers pray often.

A teacher's attitude of reverence and sincerity is felt by the children. Our task is to earnestly communicate to children the importance of prayer.

Questions For Further Study—

1. Brainstorm ways that you can make prayer fun in your children's ministry.
2. How can the children in your church discover that God is real?
3. Read steps 1 through 4 in the sidebar entitled "Guidelines for Teaching Prayer." List ways to implement each of these steps in your own children's ministry.