



The Gift of Prayer, part 1 of 2—

The Gift of Prayer

by Verda Rubottom

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?



The Gift of Prayer, part 2 of 2—

Involving the Children in Prayer

by Verda Rubottom

We who minister through Christian education know it's not enough to observe others praying; children need to experience for themselves the power of prayer. To facilitate this we need good planning and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. Our objective is to provide opportunities for children to enter into prayer during Sunday School and children's church. However, it's important to remember that prayer is a matter of the heart. We can require respect and cooperation during prayer times, but we must rely on the Holy Spirit to change hearts and give boys and girls the desire to pray.

Here are some ways to involve children actively in prayer:

- ▼ Ask volunteers to lead the class in prayer.
- ▼ Provide time for students to give praise reports of answered prayers. Make a class praise book with a page for each child to draw or write about something he or she is thankful for.
- ▼ Break up into small groups for a discussion on how God answers prayer. Shy children will be more likely to ask questions in this setting. Follow this up with small group prayer.
- ▼ Keep a class record of prayer requests and answers to

prayer. Be sensitive to requests of a more personal nature that should not be recorded. Pray for the requests during the week.

▼ Have children make individual prayer journals in class. Then provide time each week for them to record their individual requests and answers to prayer. The journals can be sent home at the end of the quarter and serve as a permanent reminder of God's working in their lives.

▼ Challenge your class to memorize key verses of Scripture on prayer, using a variety of teaching methods that involve active participation. Make sure the children understand the meaning of the verses. Use these during prayer times to reinforce the application of the verse.

▼ Use a globe or world map when praying for missionaries to increase an awareness of worldwide missions and compassion for people in other parts of the world. Have a child hold the globe as you pray.

▼ Invite children with special requests to come for prayer during your praise and worship time. In a large class you can have other teachers pray with children individually while the main teacher continues to lead the rest of the group in worship. This can also be done at the

The Lord's Prayer

We can help children grow in their understanding of prayer by using The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) as a model. Here are some principles you can explain in class discussions:

- ◆ God wants His children to approach Him as their heavenly Father.
- ◆ God's name is holy.
- ◆ We should pray for God's will (His plan for everyone) to be done on earth.
- ◆ God wants us to ask Him for the things we need each day. He cares for us.
- ◆ We need to ask God to forgive us for the wrong things we do and to help us to forgive others.
- ◆ We should ask God to keep us from things that tempt us.
- ◆ We can ask God to deliver (rescue) us from evil.

close of the lesson. Allow time for the Holy Spirit to move in the hearts of the children; be sensitive to His leading.

▼ When a child requests prayer for a significant event such as a family move or surgery, invite your class to pray for the child by forming a circle, joining hands and praying as a group or individually around the circle.

Finally, in all our planning, let's not forget one of the most important things we can do for the children. We should take time every week in class to pray for God's blessing on each one

of them—just as Jesus did. The young lives entrusted to our care need to feel loved and blessed by the touch of Jesus each week as they leave our classrooms. Assurance of His

presence will give them the security they need as they face life's challenges in the week ahead.

Questions For Further Study—

1. What do children need to do in order to become effective in prayer?
2. How might the use of prayer journals reinforce your children's understanding of prayer?
3. Name some ways you can involve the children in your congregation in prayer.