

Teaching Children to Pray

A One-Hour Workshop for Teachers/Parents

Introduction

Prepare:

1. Bookmark 1 Thess. 5:17 in several different Bible versions and place them randomly under several of the participants' chairs in the meeting room.
2. Print several "mini-posters" and place around the room, with quotes about prayer such as:
 - a. "When thou prayest, rather let thy heart be without words, than thy words without heart." ~ John Bunyan
 - b. "Developing our own relationship with God through prayer is key to leading children to a living faith." ~ Cheri Fuller
 - c. "You cannot lead anyone closer to God than you are yourself." ~Ruth Bagwell
 - d. "Though her voice is small and mild,
All heaven stills for the prayer of a child." ~Unknown

Teach:

1. Ask participants with Bibles under their chairs to read 1 Thess. 5:17 aloud.
2. Point out that we can teach children about prayer only if we are actively praying ourselves (refer to peripheral posters). Children learn to pray by: a) modeling-seeing and hearing parents, teachers, and others pray, and b) direct instruction.

Children and Prayer

Prepare:

1. Make copies of the attached handout, *Teaching Children to Pray*, for the expected number of participants.
2. Print each of the following words on a separate sheet of paper: Wow, Oops, Thanks, and Please.

Teach:

1. Distribute the handouts and give the answers from the key, discussing each and encouraging input from the participants' own experiences with children.
2. Explain that adults often pray using the ACTS format (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication). We can make children aware of these different kinds of prayer using more child-friendly words. Hold up the word cards as you describe how to explain these types of prayer to children:

Wow – telling God how wonderful, awesome, and great He is!

Oops – saying we're sorry and asking God to forgive us when we've done something wrong

Thanks – saying thank you to God for what He gives us and does for us

Please – asking God to meet needs, for ourselves and for others

Prayer Activities

Prepare:

1. Print and cut apart the group instructions included below.

2. Set up “learning stations” around the meeting room, with one group instruction card and the corresponding items in each station:
 - Letter to God – provide paper, pencils
 - Prayer litany –provide markers and a tear sheet with several lines of the following text: For. . .(leave the rest of the line blank),
We give you thanks, O God.
 - Write words to a familiar tune – provide tear sheet, markers
 - Prayer reminder chain – provide copy of article “Teaching Children to Pray for Others” from article archive on lifeway.com/kids, enlarged copy of Prayer Chain instructions from “Prayer Activities” handout below, construction paper strips, stapler, markers
3. Make copies of the handout, *Prayer Activities*, for the expected number of participants.

Teach:

1. Explain that participants will have the opportunity to experience some prayer activities and share ideas for using these types of activities in their homes or classrooms.
2. Form four groups. Direct each group to a different learning station to read and follow the assignment instructions.
3. Allow about 10 minutes for groups to work. Then call for each group to describe their activity to the whole class and share comments as directed on their instruction card.
4. Give the handout, *Prayer Activities*. Instruct participants to scan the handout and make a check mark beside one activity they would use in their home or classroom. After allowing time, ask if any would like to comment on which activity they checked.

Resources

Display as many of the following resources as possible, or print the list on a white board or poster board to display in the meeting.

When Children Pray by Cheri Fuller

Kids Can Talk to God by Denise George

How Do Our Children Grow? by Delia Halverson

I'm a Christian Now, Revised by William Young

“Children and Prayer” by Kathy Flynn, *in mINistry with Kids*, Winter 2004-2005

“Teaching Kids to Pray” by Marcia McQuitty,

www.scbaptist.org/childhood/teachingprayer.htm

Conclusion

Explain that childhood is an important time to help children make the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, worship, serving, and giving a part of their lives. Remind participants that children make good pray-ers because of the childlike qualities they possess, and that we can teach children to pray by praying with them, praying for them, and guiding them in prayer activities. Close with prayer for these leaders and parents who are responsible for the spiritual guidance of the children in their homes and churches.

Group Instructions: Print, cut apart, and provide the resources listed in the workshop plan.

Letter to God

Imagine that you are a second grader. Write a letter to God on the paper provided. Remember to print – you have not learned to write in cursive yet!

As a group, discuss how writing letters to God could be used with children, in a classroom or in a family setting.

Be prepared to briefly describe this activity and your discussion to the class. Appoint a spokesperson to speak for the group.

Prayer Litany

Scan Psalm 136 for an example of a litany, where one person reads lines and the whole group repeats a phrase after each line.

Work as a group to complete the sentences on the chart to create a prayer litany.

Discuss how a prayer litany could be used with children, in a classroom or a family setting.

Practice reading the litany together, and be prepared to present it to the class, along with a brief summary of your discussion.

Write a Song

Work as a group to write a prayer of thanks to God that will fit to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” Practice singing your song together.

Discuss how this activity could be used with children in a classroom or a family setting.

Be prepared for the group to sing to the class, and appoint a spokesperson to give a brief summary of the discussion.

Prayer Reminder Chain

Make a construction paper chain, with each link telling a prayer suggestion for a different day of the week. See the articles provided, for ideas on how to divide up prayers.

Discuss how this activity could be used with children, in a classroom or a family setting.

Appoint a spokesperson to briefly describe your activity and discussion to the class.

Teaching Children to Pray

Children as pray-ers

Children are a significant part of the body of Christ, and possess qualities that make them effective pray-ers. These qualities include:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Suggestions for teaching:

- 1. Give children a _____ of what prayer is.** Model reverence, spontaneity, and honesty when you pray. Use simple, conversational language.
- 2. Pray _____ the child.** Thank God for His care, for things in His world, for the child (calling him by name).
- 3. Encourage the child to pray using his _____.** Memorized prayers take away spontaneity and honesty in prayer. Invite children to pray by saying, "Would you like to talk to God about...?"
- 4. Take advantage of _____ moments.** Use the seasons, weather, animals at the zoo, and the variety of trees and flowers to give God credit for His beautiful creations. Take time to say short prayers about things the child brings up in conversation, about what's going on in their lives, about local and world events. Take children's prayers seriously.
- 5. Respect the child's _____.** Brief prayers are best.
- 6. With preschoolers, avoid overemphasizing the _____ of prayer.** Focus on being quiet, reverent, and paying attention while others are praying. Explain to slightly older children that we bow our heads as a symbol of reverence to God, and close our eyes to concentrate and block out distractions.
- 7. Handle prayer time in a _____ of ways.** To keep prayer time from becoming routine, and to meet the needs of different children, vary the prayer activities used.

Key: Teaching Children to Pray

Children as pray-ers

Children are a significant part of the body of Christ, and possess qualities that make them effective pray-ers. These qualities include:

1. **trust** - *(they believe it when we tell them God hears and answers prayers, and they believe that God will do wonderful things and will keep His promises!)*
2. **compassion** - *(they have a natural sympathy for others and desire to help)*
3. **simplicity** - *(they are straightforward and to-the-point in their prayers, they say what they mean.)*
4. **quick to repent** - *(they more readily say "I'm sorry" than adults...)*
5. **quick to forgive** - *(they don't hold on to grudges and hard feelings, thus they have purer hearts than many adults)*
6. **sensitive to God** - *(their open hearts and trust make it easy for them to hear Him speak, and they want to please Him)*

Suggestions for teaching:

1. **Give children a living example of what prayer is.** Model reverence, spontaneity, and honesty when you pray. Use simple, conversational language.
2. **Pray with the child.** Thank God for His care, for things in His world, for the child (calling him by name).
3. **Encourage the child to pray using his own words.** Memorized prayers take away spontaneity and honesty in prayer. Invite children to pray by saying, "Would you like to talk to God about...?"
4. **Take advantage of teachable moments.** Use the seasons, weather, animals at the zoo, and the variety of trees and flowers to give God credit for His beautiful creations. Take time to say short prayers about things the child brings up in conversation, about what's going on in their lives, about local and world events. Take children's prayers seriously.
5. **Respect the child's attention span.** Brief prayers are best.
6. **With preschoolers, avoid overemphasizing the posture of prayer.** Focus on being quiet, reverent, and paying attention while others are praying. Explain to slightly older children that we bow our heads as a symbol of reverence to God, and close our eyes to concentrate and block out distractions.
7. **Handle prayer time in a variety of ways.** To keep prayer time from becoming routine, and to meet the needs of different children, vary the prayer activities used.

Prayer Activities

- Written prayers
- “Love letters” to God
- Prayer journal
- Prayer litanies (see Psalm 136- let children or groups write their own)
- Guided prayers (adult suggests a topic, pauses to let children pray silently)
- Sentence prayers
- Silent prayers
- “Korean-style” prayers (everyone prays aloud at once)
- Sing prayers – Sing hymns/choruses that address God directly
Write words to a familiar tune
- Movement prayers – Liturgical dance
Moving to praise music (may use streamers, flags)
Signing
- Drawing- draw the things you want to pray about (can be stick figure people)
- Prayerwalking- in the neighborhood, or inside the church
- Nature Walk –preschoolers say open-eyed prayers as they discover God’s world.
- Prayer Project- choose a particular missionary/people group/local ministry, research their needs, and pray regularly for them. (Put feet to your prayers with a related ministry project!)

Prayer Chain

Seven construction paper strips decorated and made into a chain, each one telling who to pray for each day of the week:

Monday- parents & grandparents
Tuesday-sisters & brothers
Wednesday-friends
Thursday- missionaries
Friday- President & other elected leaders
Saturday- pastors
Sunday- church leaders/teachers

Musical Prayers

Arrange chairs in circle (two circles if group is large); place index card on each chair with a prayer target such as “Pray for the youth mission trip to Mexico.” Or “Pray for the salvation of anyone at church today who doesn’t know Jesus.” Children march around chairs to music; when it stops, quickly sit in nearest chair and pray for that request until music starts again.

Beach Ball Prayer Toss- Print prayer requests on strips, cut apart, and tape to a beach ball. Toss the ball to a child, they pull off a strip and pray aloud for that request, then toss the ball to another child.

Variation- use a ball with a world map imprinted on it. Children pray for a country their hand is touching when they catch the ball: for the people to come to know Christ, for the missionaries there, for Bibles to be available in their language, or for the children of that country.