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Prayers From the Heart of a Child

by Shaun McKenley



FROM LOST PUPPY DOGS TO SPIRITUALLY LOST MOMS AND DADS, IT'S AMAZING WHAT YOU'LL HEAR WHEN YOU PRAY WITH A CHILD. In fact, some of my most cherished times as a children's minister have been spent in prayer with a child.

This was something that Christ knew, too. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record our Savior's thoughts when He said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you, anyone who doesn't have their kind of faith will never get into the Kingdom of God" (Luke 18:16, 17 NLT).

As adults, entrusted with laying a foundation for the spiritual development of these little ones, there are ways that we can help our children communicate with God. It is our duty to encourage them to come before the Father and to help them experience the joy and ease of prayer.

Children need help talking to God.

Everyone—especially children—would find prayer easier if they could find a way to forget ideas of "correct methods of prayers" and just start talking. After all, prayer is just that—a conversation with God. Avoid focusing on the form and method of prayer. Instead, model for them prayers that are easy, comfortable ways to talk to God just as you would a friend.

How would you talk to a friend? Typically, you could talk to a friend about your day, express your fears, and even share some frustration. As our closest Friend, God wants to speak to us. Encourage children to listen as the Father speaks to their hearts as they grow in a lifestyle of prayer.

Nothing is too BIG—or too SMALL—for God.

It's true: God can help us face some of the most difficult times of our lives. But God also wants to be involved in the smaller moments, too. He wants to know about our day. He likes to hear about the snowflakes we saw and how we enjoyed His creation. That bully at school that scares us . . . He wants to know about that, too.

Anything is okay to talk to God about. Don't discourage children from talking about their sick pets, favorite cartoon characters, or the fun they had at their friend's birthday party. Teach children to thank God for their favorite cartoon and share what's on their heart.

Making prayers relevant to children's lives enables them to grow closer to God and experience a God that is concerned with every single detail of their lives. Because kids tend to view the world in terms of me, my, and mine, it is okay to focus on their daily lives. Avoid topics that may be so distant from them that they make God feel remote and far away.

A better idea might be to focus on their personal prayer requests, like healing Brian of his chickenpox, being thankful for the Sunday school teacher, or Joshua, who might have a hard time sitting still during class. As children mature, begin introducing them to a broader scope of prayer by including requests for missionaries and children around the world.

God hears ALL prayers.

God is always there, willing and eager to listen to anything we have to say. But sometimes kids aren't sure, and they need some type of proof. So . . . give it to them!

Perhaps the best way to help children realize that God listens is to point out those prayers He has answered. Ask them if they prayed for Mom to recover quickly from the flu. When she's feeling better, remind them to thank God for answering their prayers.

Make answered prayers real to children. Consider creating a prayer wall where they can write prayers on one side and then write the answer on the other. You could do this with a piece of paper taped to the refrigerator or a posterboard in their room. Teach them to thank God for each and every answer, no matter how big or small.

It is also important to help children understand that God answers prayers in a variety of ways. God may answer their prayer exactly as they requested. But God may also answer in a different way, wait to answer, or even say no. Helping children see every answer to prayer helps establish their faith and encourages them to continue praying.

ANY place is the RIGHT place.

There are many different ways to pray: kneeling, standing, lifting hands, and even laying on a bed. Encourage children to pray whenever and wherever they want, even if it is a quick "Please make Alex all right" after he falls on the playground.

Prayer is a fundamental building block to the spiritual development of everyone, including children. Prayer is never inappropriate, especially when it comes straight from the heart of a child. When all is said, that is all you need to teach children to help them communicate with their God who is always listening.



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Sweet Hour of Prayer

■ In times of distress, Christians know there is only one place to run, one place to hide, and one place to find victory—in the sheltering arms of a loving Father. Going to Him in prayer is a right and a privilege. William Walford of England knew this well in 1842 when he asked his friend, Thomas Salmon, to write the words to a poem that Walford had been composing in his head. In 1861, American Composer William Bradbury wrote the music to what is now one of the best-loved hymns in the Christian world: "Sweet Hour of Prayer."

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father's throne
Make all my wants and wishes known!
In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer.*

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
Thy wings shall my petition bear,
To him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless:
And since he bids me seek his face,
Believe his word and trust his grace,
I'll cast on him my every care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer.*

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
May I thy consolation share,
Till from Mount Pisgah's lofty height,
I view my home and take my flight:
This robe of flesh I'll drop and rise
To seize the everlasting prize;
And shout, while passing through the air,
"Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer!"*

Submitted by Beth Anderson