



## PRAYER STRATEGY

### Teaching Kids How to Pray

Sometimes God gifts parents with moments when we think, *maybe I'm doing okay with this parenting thing*. Like a few weeks ago when my son, age seven, saw a homeless man as we drove and said, "God, please help that man. He looks dirty and sad." Awww. So sweet.

But let's be real. My stack of "teach me how to parent" books is tall enough for my toddler to use as a stool to reach the chocolate cookies I store on top of the fridge. And I still need more professional tips. But one thing we do well as a family? We pray.

My son's impromptu prayer prompted this question: "How do we teach our kids to pray?" Here are some things that work well for us.

#### A Biblical Example

We observe three things from [Luke 11:1-4](#) that may help us teach our kids.

**Lead by example.** The disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray *after* they saw Jesus praying.

**Teach them by example.** In response to the disciples' request, Jesus teaches them by praying *with* them and giving them the Lord's Prayer as an example.

Here are some tips I use:

**Starting and ending with the same phrases.** Starting with addressing God and ending with Amen. It helps kids know how to start and end.

**Keeping words simple.** Simple words kids understand teach them that God wants to hear their simple words too.

**Using lifestyle triggers for prayer.** We pray at specific situations and impromptu prayers to teach a mind that is quick to pray. Our specific times: breakfast, dinner, bedtime, and when we hear sirens.

**Including variety.** Jesus taught the disciples various kinds of things to include in prayer in his example of what is known as the Lord's Prayer, such as thankfulness, requests, and asking forgiveness, to name a few. We too can pray various kinds of prayers as an example for our kids.

## **Stages and Ages: What works well for what age?**

**Baby Steps:** Before kids talk, praying out loud seeds their hearts towards prayer as something normal, just like Daddy's silly face when he tries to make them laugh.

**Toddler Steps:** When my kids are old enough to talk (somewhere between ages two and three) I ask them, "What is prayer?" And give them the answer, "Prayer is talking with the One and Only True God." I keep asking them the question over many days until they tell me the answer and it blossoms in their hearts.

We also add closing eyes and simple "repeat after me" prayers. For example, "Thank you, God (thank you, God) for this food (for this food) and giving us (and giving us) all we need (all we need) Amen (Amen)."

**Preschool:** Once "repeat after me" prayers mature to normalcy, we begin giving a prompt and ask them to fill it in so they pray from their own hearts. For example, "God, thank you for \_\_\_\_\_, or God, please help me \_\_\_\_\_." And we welcome what comes from their heart, even if they thank God for their favorite Lego police guy every night for a week.

**Grade school:** Right now, we started giving our oldest, the seven-year-old, prompts to pray on his own. Like, "Can you thank God for our food tonight?" Or even just asking him to pray. Sometimes it's plain and rote, while other times he inspires us with passion. We even asked our three-year-old this week and he proudly said a simple prayer: "God, thank you for pizza. Amen."

## **Prayer Creativity**

**Prayer Journal.** We bought our oldest a spiral notebook and pencil. During our afternoon quiet times while siblings sleep (doesn't happen every day), he puts entries in his spiritual journal. I gift him full freedom to draw or write his thoughts or ideas to God in any way. Sometimes I

prompt him—"Write a prayer about your sadness today"—or ask him to read his Bible and then draw what he thinks or feels. He really enjoys his journal and it is never a forced thing—just a suggestion. We don't want our kids to resent prayer or their spiritual life.

**Prayer songs.** Sometimes we make up our own worship songs by using familiar tunes like Old Mac Donald and changing the words. The best was hearing my seven-year-old making up a song to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" while playing Legos: "God, You are so holy. There is no one like you." *Melt my heart.*

**Other ideas:** Let them paint, dance, or mime a prayer to God. Communicating with God can take various forms as long as it honors His name.