

How to Teach Your Child to Pray

The greatest thing you can do for your children is to help them develop a relationship with God. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. . . . And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them” (Mark 10:14, 16, NIV).

“Dr. James Dobson, psychologist and author writes, ‘There is a brief period during childhood when youngsters are vulnerable to religious training. Their concepts of right and wrong . . . are formulated during this time, and their view of God begins to solidify.’” Rick Osborne, *Teaching Your Child How to Pray*, p. 28. Many psychologists believe that our brains are wired for prayer. Every culture discovered in the world has a belief and practice of some variety of religious faith and practice. We give our children piano lessons or teach them to play volleyball to enrich their lives. Why not teach them to pray! Let us fasten our children to Christ before Satan traps them. Osborne says, “God loves our children. He has fought and won the greatest custody battle in history!” *Ibid.*, p. 35.

“Tommy, what would you like to say to God before you crawl into bed? Would you like to thank Him for the nice new yellow truck that you got today? Perhaps you’re sorry about the way you treated your little sister this morning. You could ask Him to forgive you. Let’s kneel here together and talk to God for a few moments. You may repeat after me: . . .” My very first memories of prayer were at my mother’s knee. I would repeat after her but it wasn’t long until I was formulating my own prayers. “The work of education and training should commence with the babyhood of the child; for then the mind is the most impressible, and the lessons given are remembered.” *Child Guidance*, p. 26.

Adapt your instructions to the age of the child. Keep it simple and sincere. “Johnny, let’s talk a moment about prayer. Prayer is like ‘talking to a friend.’ Remember you can talk with God any time, anywhere, about anything. Jesus loves to have children come to Him. When we make mistakes, we can tell Jesus we are sorry. He is always glad to forgive us and remember He loves us even when we don’t do right.”

Teach your children that prayer is like a key that unlocks doors to heaven’s treasures. (See *Steps to Christ*, p. 94.) David said, “Since my youth, Oh God, You have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds” (Ps. 71:17, NIV).

A praying family produces praying children. The most important fact for your children to learn about God is that His love is unconditional. And how do they learn this? It is by our unconditional love toward them. Be a prayer mentor. Teach prayer by your example. Allow them to see you in prayer. Many times when I was a boy, I would run into a bedroom to get something and discover my mother on her knees. That place suddenly seemed hallowed to me. Tell your children stories about answers to your prayers.

Teens and Prayers: I distinctly remember one time when I was a very wayward teen of hearing my mother crying and praying in the next room. I knew she was praying for me. This experience led me to do some very serious thinking about my life. One time when I was a teenager, we faced a very real crisis in our home. Our mortgage holder was about to foreclose on our property and take away our house and my father’s business. It was during the depression and my father could not make the payments on our house. We were about to lose everything we had. During the Roosevelt

administration the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) was instituted — a plan to save the homes of the people. One morning, Mother called us children — four of us — into the bedroom and explained the seriousness of our situation. She said she was going to ask the man who held the mortgage on our property to accept the FHA offer. So, we all prayed. An hour later, Mother came home all smiles. “God heard our prayers and our home is saved!” As a teen, this experience impressed me greatly. It encouraged me to practice personal prayer which became a practical part of my life.

Sally, age 10, knew she had made a big mistake. She has been assigned the task of caring for her little brother, Ronnie, two years of age, while Mother ran to the store. But she forgot and went roller skating with a neighbor girl. Mother came home and found Ronnie on the floor crying with his lip bleeding. He had fallen out of bed. Sally felt terrible. She knew she deserved to be punished. She cried and said, “I am very sorry, Mother. I’ll never do it again!” Mother hugged Sally and said, “I forgive you, Sally. But I must take away your rollerskaters for a week to help you remember.” Sally learned something about God’s grace and justice. We teach our children to pray by modeling God’s grace. As children see us, as parents, struggling with our sinful natures, falling, repenting, and confessing to God and to children when necessary, they learn that God is a forgiving God and that we all learn by falling, confessing and trying again.

“The lesson to be taught the children is that their errors and mistakes are to be brought to Jesus. . . . Teach them to ask His forgiveness daily for any wrong that they have done. . . [and He will] pardon and receive them, just as He received the children . . . when He was upon earth.” *Child Guidance*, pp. 494, 495.