

THE POWER OF FAMILY PRAYER

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with

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On a small ranch in Wyoming a man went out to protect his cattle from an approaching tornado as his wife and child looked on. With a sudden turn, the tornado moved directly toward him. His wife excitedly turned to their son and said, “Johnny, quick! Get on your knees and pray!” Johnny instantly fell to his knees and began to say: “Now I lay me down to sleep...” It was the only thing he had ever said to God! This fictitious story reminds us of the importance of teaching our children to pray. Without proper understanding, they cannot pray effectively. Many of them learn to recite a model, but don’t comprehend how to communicate with Jesus Christ. We need to help them realize that God desires a relationship with them.

Relationship is the core of effective prayer. Each of us has been given the ability to come before God’s throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16) at any time to communicate with our Creator. This is one of the truths that makes our faith unique, but it can be difficult for young minds to grasp. On an earthly level, we are not accustomed to this kind of unlimited access to those in authority, but God is different. We can approach Him in an instant. He wants to hear from us and is pleased when we call! He will never put us “on hold,” tell us He will respond later, take His “phone” off the hook or let an answering machine take our message.

Jesus Christ wants a relationship with us that is built on time spent in His presence and through reading His Word. On a personal level, we can speak to Him about anything and everything. And yet, although prayer is simple, its principles must be learned. Even the disciples asked their Master to teach them to pray.

There is no underestimating the importance of prayer in a family and its influence in the lives of young children. I feel this very strongly because it was so decidedly absent from my own early childhood experience. The little girl that I once was grew up in a troubled home where daily prayers were unknown and the sounds of joyful praise were never heard. I’m aware of what family-centered spiritual training can mean to a child because I “discovered” it for myself when I was about eight years old. What a contrast to the rich spiritual heritage of my husband’s family! He has often told me how his grandmother used to gather the six children around her for daily devotions. She prayed, “Lord, it is my most urgent request that each of these children will come

to know You personally. If one of them fails to make that commitment, it would have been better that I never had been born.” This is the priority she gave to her spiritual responsibility. Her prayers made such an impression on Jim’s dad that he referred to them throughout his life. This is the example our children need to see in us. But it is more than a model. Prayer and reverence for God must permeate every aspect of our lives and become a natural part of our family life. These are things that God has commanded us to do as parents (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). It was that commandment that led to the preparation of this guide. I pray it will be a rich blessing to your family. As you read through each section, remember to seek the Lord’s guidance and wisdom. The more you learn about prayer, the more sensitive you will become to His power working in your family. I am certain that God will bless your efforts!



Shirley Dobson

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Foreword

“Dad, I’m so hungry. May I have some bread?”

Does that sound like a prayer to you? Or is it more like a child asking his father for what he needs? God invites us to come to Him as a little child. It’s as simple as saying, “Daddy, I need you.”

God holds the key to all your longings: provision, protection, belonging, compassion, forgiveness. And He wants to provide them for you . . . just ask Him. He strengthens and encourages you and your family through your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Prayer—corporate family prayer—is the power source from which that faith derives its life. Families that pray together lay hold of the very power of God to cope with the challenges of daily living.

This guide contains a bundle of suggestions and helpful resources. It offers practical, motivating ideas and encouragement designed to help families unite and witness the power of God. You’ll see that prayer is really quite simple and that it is the single most important experience your family can share. In addition, activities and unforgettable testimonies of real people reveal just what can happen when we pray.

Prayer can be as dynamic and varied as your own imagination and creativity. Mealtime and bedtime are great starting points, but God has so much more in store for you as your family learns to talk to Him. Prayers can be spoken aloud, sung, staged, danced or even painted. The possibilities are endless as you turn your family’s heart toward the Lord. You’ll want to begin a journal of requests in order to refresh your memory and jump-start your words of Thanksgiving.

God wants your family to shine like lights in a rapidly darkening and dysfunctional world. He desires each member to have his or her eyes open to realities that others refuse to see. He longs for you to walk with Christ through a larger, more wondrous world than some are capable of imagining. Take the roof off and establish a direct link between your home and the heart of the King of all creation.

No greater or more crucial task has been entrusted to us as parents than that of teaching our children to pray. Your children have already had practice when they’ve said, “Dad, may I have some bread?”

Why Pray?

There are numerous reasons why we should pray. The following offer biblical support for our need for prayer. Read through them and underline these verses in your Bible to remind you why you ought to pray.

1. **We are instructed to pray in the Bible.** This is the primary reason we are to pray.
 - Matthew 5:44
 - Matthew 6:5
 - Romans 12:12
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:17
 - James 5:16

2. **Jesus prayed regularly.** We should follow His example.
 - Luke 11:1
 - John 17
 - Matthew 11:25-26
 - Luke 3:21
 - Luke 5:16
 - Luke 6:12
 - Luke 9:18-28

3. **Prayer is how we communicate with God.** Through prayer, we can worship and praise God, confess our sins and repent of them. We can also submit our requests, learn His will for us and seek His help.
 - Philippians 4:6
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:17

4. **Through prayer, God allows us to participate in His works.** Prayer plays a part in bringing others to faith in Christ. Prayer can heal nations and grant us strength to endure trials.
 - Isaiah 40:29-31
 - Hebrews 4:15-16
 - 2 Chronicles 7:14

5. **Prayer gives us power over evil.** Physical strength and power are of no use in the spiritual realm. Even the physically weak can be strong in prayer.
 - Mark 9:29
 - 1 Timothy 4:8
 - Matthew 26:41

6. **Prayer is always available to us.** Nothing can keep a believer from coming before God. Nations may condemn and forbid God's Word, but prayer has no barriers.
 - Psalm 139:7
 - Romans 8:38-39

7. **Prayer keeps us humble before God.** Through prayer we realize that God is in control and we can do nothing apart from Him.
 - Jeremiah 32:17
 - John 15:5
 - Romans 8:28
 - 1 Peter 5:5-7
 - Colossians 3:12
 - James 4:6-7

8. **Prayer grants us the privilege of experiencing God.** Prayer gives us an experiential basis for our faith.
 - Acts 1:3
 - Acts 26:25
 - John 14:16-17

9. **Answered prayer has the potential to be incredible witness to unbelievers.** Skeptics will always have criticisms and doubts regarding answered prayer, but some will see the power of God at work and as a result, may be drawn to Christ.
 - James 5:16
 - Colossians 4:2

10. **Prayer strengthens the bonds between believers.** Scripture instructs us to pray for one another and to confess our sins to one another. Through this process we come to better understand the needs of others and are able to empathize with them.
 - Jude 20
 - 1 Timothy 2:1-2
 - 1 John 5:15-16

11. **Prayer can succeed where other means have failed.** Prayer is not a last resort, but it can often make a difference where other methods have failed.
 - Proverbs 3:5-6
 - 1 Chronicles 16:11
 - James 5:13-15

Who Prays?

Prayer is a matter of matching words and actions. A life of prayer is a committed life, a life lived consistently under the shadow cast by a bright but unseen light. True prayers are not merely said—they are lived and breathed. They spring out of the heart, bubble up through the soul and find escape through a hundred different gateways of expression. We walk them as well as talk them. They are part of who we are in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. Gary Smalley, in his book *Homes of Honor*, tells us that healthy families are distinguished by six unmistakable characteristics: the members have a high degree of appreciation for one another; they spend a great deal of time together; they communicate openly; they share a strong sense of mutual commitment; their common life is marked by a high degree of spiritual orientation; and they are able to deal with crisis in a positive, constructive manner. It seems to me that this profile perfectly describes the group dynamics of a family that regularly seeks God together; a family where mom, dad, sister and brother share their needs and concerns with one another, vocalize their petitions together in prayer, and watch vigilantly for the Lord's answers. Talk about bonding! It's hard to imagine a surer method of building family solidarity.

Statistics on Americans Who Pray

- 88 percent pray
- 82 percent believe in the healing power of prayer
- 78 percent say prayer is an important part of daily life
- 63 percent pray often
- 25 percent pray occasionally
- 65 percent believe that they have had prayers answered specifically
- 79 percent say praying helps speed recovery
- 24 percent say they have been cured through prayer
- 49 percent have prayed for guidance in finances¹

The majority of Americans have prayed for their families, but how many of them live lives of true prayer? Although 95 percent of Protestants and 96 percent of Catholics pray, only 26 percent of American adults say that they are completely satisfied with this aspect of their spiritual experience.²

The Scriptures Compel Us to Pray

- “. . . The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).
- “Therefore we do not lose heart . . . For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).
- “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and

pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

- “. . . if My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Note: All Scripture references throughout this manual are taken from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

The Impact of Prayer on Families

Before civil government existed, there were families. Before the church was established to point people to God, there were families. The family is the basic building block of society. If the family is strong, the whole culture has a sturdy foundation. Today, however, the American family is under attack. Many elements in the culture tend to break down its authority and stability. Never has there been a greater need to strengthen the entire structure of the family. Prayer strengthens families and leaves a lasting impact on the ones we love.

The following excerpts from various sources describe the life-changing impact of prayer on families. The power of intercession speaks clearly in each of the following testimonies:

Healed From Multiple Sclerosis

“Everyone was very loving and sincere. The minister prayed a simple prayer. He didn’t mention my Multiple Sclerosis, he just prayed for a healing. It wasn’t a charismatic kind of prayer and it wasn’t spoken in tongues. It was so simple that I can’t even remember what he said. The prayer was only a few minutes long and when it was over, there was no warm feeling, no thunderclap, nothing at all. I kept thinking I’d feel something, but I didn’t feel any different physically or emotionally . . . The next day I went to the Boston clinic for three days of neurological tests. I was shocked to learn that the results indicated that there was nothing wrong with me . . . Doubters can say my Multiple Sclerosis is in remission, but I’m a registered nurse and I know it doesn’t go into a twenty year remission. Those tests were done in 1993 and it’s now 2013. In that time, I’ve never been hospitalized. I’m as healthy as a person could be.”³

A Bundle of Joy From Above

In 1975, Ann was diagnosed with precancerous condition of the cervix. Her cervix had scarred shut from a biopsy. In 1978, she was diagnosed with Asherman’s Syndrome (uterine walls had grown together) and cervical stenosis (cervix completely sealed).

“They operated with lots of special equipment, including a laser, to try and correct the problems . . . I was told I’d never have a baby . . . Bob and I were visited by my brother Tom . . . Tom and his wife laid their hands on me and prayed . . . three or four weeks passed and I got pregnant . . . I never had a single problem during my pregnancy . . . Bob and I had a baby girl, and we named her Kathryn. I remember crying when I heard my daughter cry.”⁴

A Glorious Family Blessing

“In the 1930s Stalin ordered the purge of all Bibles and all believers. In Stavropol, Russia, this order was carried out with a vengeance. Thousands of Bibles were confiscated and multitudes of believers were sent to the gulags where most died for being ‘enemies of the state’. Years later a team was sent to Stavropol. The city’s history wasn’t known at the time. But when the team was having difficulty getting Bibles shipped from Moscow, someone mentioned the existence of a warehouse outside town where the original confiscated Bibles had been stored since Stalin’s day.

After much prayer by the team, one member finally got up the courage to go up to the warehouse and ask the officials if the Bibles were still there. Sure enough, they were. Then he asked if they could be removed and distributed again to the people of Stavropol. The answer was ‘yes’. The next day the team returned with a truck and several Russian helpers to load Bibles. One of the helpers was a young man—a skeptical, agnostic, hostile collegian who had come only for a day’s wages. As they were loading Bibles, one member of the team noticed that the young man had disappeared. Eventually they found him in the corner of the warehouse weeping. He had slipped away hoping to take a Bible for himself. What he found inside shook him to the core. The inside page of the Bible he picked up had the handwritten signature of his grandmother! It was her personal Bible. Of the thousands of Bibles still left in the warehouse, he stole the very one belonging to his grandmother—a woman persecuted for her faith all her life.”⁵

Prayers of Children Were Heard

“Missionary Morris Plotts tells an extraordinary story that occurred during the Mau Mau uprising in East Africa in 1956. A band of roving Mau Maus massacred the entire village of Lauri—including women and children—and headed for Rift Valley Academy, a Christian school less than three miles away, where the children of missionaries in the field were being boarded and educated. The Mau Maus were armed with torches, spears, bows and arrows, and clubs, determined to destroy the school. Before they arrived, however, a fast running messenger brought news of the massacre to the academy. The children were terrified upon hearing what had happened at Lauri, but there was nowhere to flee. Their only resource was prayer.

In the night, the teachers and children saw torches approaching the school and soon a ring of the torches surrounded the structure, cutting off any avenue of escape. Angry curses could be heard coming from the warriors as the circle closed tighter and tighter. Finally, the warriors drew close enough to begin throwing their spears, but instead, they suddenly stopped, then began to retreat and finally fled into the jungle.

A rescuing army that had been sent in response to an emergency call arrived shortly afterward, but the Mau Maus were nowhere to be found. The army spread out in a search of them and eventually captured the entire band. Before a judge, the leader of the Mau Maus admitted the massacre at Lauri and their intent to attack the school at Rift Valley. ‘Why didn’t you?’ asked the judge.

‘We were on our way to attack and destroy all the people at the school. But as we came closer, all of a sudden between us and the school, there were many huge men, dressed in white with flaming swords. We became afraid and we ran to hide.’”⁶

The Lord Revealed His Plan

“My husband’s great-grandparents, Frank and Hattie Yadon, lived on a farm in a remote canyon near Twin Falls, Idaho in the early part of the century. They had found the Lord during a visit from one of the itinerant preachers who came through the area about once a year. The rest of the time, Frank and Hattie depended upon God through daily prayers and intercession for all their needs, whether for provision of basic necessities, healing, catastrophes or spiritual refreshment. As they gathered around the dinner table for the evening meal, Hattie would look around at their six rowdy youngsters and pray, ‘Lord bless all of the preachers and missionaries around this table!’ Five of those six children became either missionaries or preachers, and seventy years later, five generations of Godly families involved in ministries across the world are the result of Hattie’s simple, faith-filled prayers.”⁷

Cleaning Ladies Offered Healing Comfort

“The first time the cleaning ladies at South Park mall prayed with Ralph Porell Sr., they asked God to watch over Bonnie, his injured granddaughter lying near death in the hospital. The last time, Bonnie joined the prayer circle. Next to a cleaning cart in the middle of the mall, Bonnie bowed her head and prayed with her grandfather, mother, Lizzie Thomas, and Bessie Jenkins. Together for the first time, they thanked God that Bonnie survived being struck by a car on a rural Cabarrus County road January 4.

Bonnie, 15, suffered a fractured skull, facial fractures, broken collarbone, and other injuries. After 3 months in the hospital, she wore the right t-shirt to meet her new friends. “Expect A Miracle,” it said.

Who can say for sure whether those few moments did anything more than comfort an elderly grandfather? All I can report is that Bonnie is out of danger, and that her mother, Barbara, wanted me to be there when the family came back to thank the cleaning ladies. Bonnie still has speech, vision, and memory problems. She’ll likely repeat the ninth grade. She undergoes speech and cognitive therapy. No one knows whether she’ll fully recover.

But the family quit doubting soon after the accident. They paid little attention to doctors and nurses who said early on that Bonnie might not survive. “That’s when I stopped listening to them,” said Barbara. “I said, ‘You don’t have any say here.’”

It’s God who has the say, she believes. That’s why she took such comfort in the prayers of family, friends, and even cleaning ladies she did not know. “I just had a peace in my heart, that God told me she was going to be all right,” said Barbara. “I could feel the prayers. It’s a peace that passes understanding.” It is the peace that brought together this unlikely group in the middle of a mall.”⁸

A Family Receives a Miracle

“Just after Alison Thompson’s first birthday, doctors found a tumor the size of a grapefruit on her liver. No one thought she would survive. Her family prayed. Hard. So did her entire church

congregation. Almost immediately, the youngster's tumor began shrinking to the size of a golf ball, and doctors surgically removed it.

Today Alison is 11, and the only signs of her ordeal are long scars crisscrossing her abdomen and a sacred collection of guardian angels hovering about the family's Bradenton home.

'What we went through wasn't a tragedy; it was a miracle,' the youngster's mother, Teresa, said. 'I really believe prayer played a large part in her recovery. I think it guided her doctors' hands and everything they did.'

Although skeptics abound, a growing number of researchers, physicians and scholars are discovering what spiritual leaders have said all along: Prayer can be a potent medicine."⁹

God Didn't Let Grandpa Down

The year was 1942. My grandparents, Frank and Irene Wheeler, who were missionaries in China, had been under house arrest for five months during the Japanese occupation. A small window of time had opened up for them to leave, and the last boat out of Canton was getting ready to depart. As Frank, Irene and their 12-year-old son, David, waited to board, David, my father, noticed everyone else was wearing a yellow ribbon. Tugging on his father's sleeve, he whispered, "Dad, everybody has ribbons except us." Suddenly an official came up to Frank and announced, "Others can do. You can't go." Apparently the yellow ribbon had indicated that certain papers had been signed, and Frank hadn't known about it. As the terrible realization dawned that they were going to miss the last boat to freedom, Frank bowed his head in simple desperation and prayed, "Lord, if you've ever helped us, help us now." A few moments later an official put his hand on Frank's shoulder and said, "We have decided you can go." Grandpa, a pioneer of faith, was a true friend of God. He knew when he needed help the most, God would be there—and He was.¹⁰

What if God is Silent?

In his book *Why Don't I Get What I Pray For?* - John Cowart writes:

If a fisherman who believes God answers prayer goes fishing early one morning and prays really hard all day to catch fish, but does not even get a nibble, what does that mean? Once, while interviewing some children for a newspaper article on kids' views of God, I posed this question to the group. The question did not faze the seven-year-old theologians. "It's because the fish prayed harder," answered one little girl blithely.¹¹

Why is it that sometimes we pray so hard for a specific thing, only to feel as though God has ignored us? It often seems that our requests go unanswered. At times like these, is the Lord avoiding us or are we missing something? Let's take a closer look at what we may be experiencing:

1. He always hears our prayers. Even when He is silent, keep praying!

There are times when the lesson we need to learn is persistence. More than anything, the Lord desires a personal relationship with His people and prayer is a significant part of this. He wants to comfort us and fellowship with us. If He always answered our prayers immediately, exactly as we were expecting, there would be no need for us to spend time with Him. He is personal and wants us to come to Him whenever we have needs or hurts. Time in prayer should not be our last resort, but our first response.

- Psalm 23:4
- Psalm 119:76
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-6
- 1 Peter 3:12

2. God may answer our prayer, but it may not happen immediately. The Lord works in His way and in His time.

- Isaiah 55:8-9

One of the side effects of our fast-paced culture is that we often expect an instant response. But the Lord is not our servant. He will not be accountable to man; He is sovereign God. He never answered Job's excellent questions about his sufferings. James tells us that there may be times we are suffering in order to build endurance (James 1:2-4). If we become angry at God for allowing us to go through trials, we may miss what He would like us to learn through the experience. God teaches us through His Word, but we *learn* by applying this knowledge to the circumstances of life.

3. We may have a problem that is hindering our relationship with the Lord.

Prayer is more than just asking God to do things—it's about a relationship. We need to consider that something may be interfering with our connection to the Lord. Of course, he still hears our prayers and in His sovereignty He is certainly capable of answering the supplications of sinners. But there may be times when our behavior puts a wall between us and our fellowship with God (Psalm 66:18). This is one of the reasons the apostle Paul used when warning certain Corinthians not to participate in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

4. Our prayer may not be in line with God's will. He knows what is best for us and will not always give us what we ask for.

Simply put, we may be praying for something that is completely out of the will of the Lord. This is a difficult reason because His will in a given situation is not always clear. We are not to lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5), but have faith in the fact that "God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Even the apostle Paul prayed three times and God did not meet his request because He had other intentions (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

5. God may be in the process of answering our prayer, but we are too preoccupied to notice.

One thing we find in the Bible is that the Lord is full of surprises. There may be times when we are expecting a specific response to our prayer, but God has other plans for how He will answer us. We need to constantly be aware of what is going on around us and determine if the Lord is already at work on our behalf.

6. God knows us and will supply all our needs, not necessarily our wants.

Prayer is not our ticket to getting “stuff” from God (James 4:3). There is no formula that we can follow that will guarantee the results that we are seeking. Certainly, the Lord may choose to bring material blessings upon us, but we must be careful of our motives. Matthew 6:19-20 reminds us to store up treasures in heaven, not on earth. If we are praying out of selfish desire, we can be sure that such behavior is not in line with the will of God.

7. Facts should drive our faith, not our feelings. We need to cling to His promises.

Even though we may not see answers to our prayers, it is important that we have faith and God is working in our lives and has heard our supplications.

- Joshua 1:5
- Matthew 11:30
- 2 Corinthians 5:7

Conclusion

Of course, this list is not exhaustive, but it does give us some reasons for why we sometimes have difficulty in dealing with God’s apparent silence. It’s also important that we keep in mind that there are no specific steps or keys to getting the Lord to answer our prayers the way we’d like them answered. There is no secret “recipe that will twist His arm and grant us complete and satisfying answers to our prayers.

In *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby states that: “You can respond to the silence of God in two ways. One response is for you to go into depression, a sense of guilt and self-condemnation. The other response is for you to have expectation that God is about to bring you to a deeper knowledge of Himself.”¹²

Ultimately, it can be said that there are only two answers to prayer: “Yes!” and “Trust Me!” As God’s Word puts it, “we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). In other words, we need to *trust* Him even when we can’t *track* Him.

In addition, we shouldn’t always assume that there is a problem with us that is somehow restraining God’s power. He loves us in Christ and wants what is best for us, in spite of our shortcomings. Our role is to seek to strengthen our relationship with Him. If we humbly come before Him and trust Him in our daily lives, He will bless our dedication.

In his book *When God Doesn’t Make Sense*, Dr. James Dobson makes several astute observations on this topic. Perhaps it is best if we end this section with a portion of that text:

“I’ve been trying to say with this discussion that our view of God is too small—that His power and His wisdom cannot even be imagined by us mortals. He is not just “the man upstairs” or “the great chauffeur in the sky,” or some kind of wizard who will do a dance for those who make the right noises. We dare not trivialize the One about Whom it is written,

‘Praise be to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.’ –1 Chronicles 29:10-13

If we truly understood the majesty of this Lord and the depths of His love for us, we would certainly accept those times when He defies human logic and sensibilities. Indeed, that is what we *must* do. Expect confusing experiences to occur along the way. Welcome them as friends—as opportunities for your faith to grow. Hold fast to your faith, without which it is impossible to please Him. Never let yourself succumb to the “betrayal barrier,” which is Satan’s most effective tool against us. Instead, store away your questions for a lengthy conversation on the other side, and then press on toward the mark. Any other approach is foolhardy—because your arms are too short to box with God.”¹³

Teaching Our Children to Pray

You’ve noticed it, I’m sure. These are difficult days for the family. How do we create a safe environment for our kids? How do we protect them from the evil influences of a culture gone awry, a society cut loose from its moral and spiritual moorings? How do we proof them against drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex?

The answer isn’t far to seek. It’s waiting for us at home. And prayer is the key. Family prayer, family worship, family devotions—that’s where we’re going to find the hope, the security, the salvation we’re seeking. Families that pray together don’t just stay together. They lay hold of the very power of God and mold the generation that shapes the future.

Teach Us to Pray

Whether they know it or not, our children are appealing to us today in the words of the disciples: “Teach us to pray!” It’s their greatest need. Built into all of us is a longing to cry out to a Power greater than ourselves, to acknowledge our dependence upon God and to sense His love and care. I’d suggest that even the youngest member of the family feels it at some time or another. How are we going to help our children fulfill this holy longing? How are we going to respond when they come asking, “teach us to pray”? What will we teach them—is there a lesson plan handy? And how will they learn?

Children learn by example. Remember Moses' exhortation to the children of Israel: "Impress [these principles and commandments] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). In other words, a brief bedtime prayer is not enough. A quick, formalized family devotion may be fine in its place, but it can't do the whole job. We must live our convictions and demonstrate our dependence upon the Lord day in and day out, from morning to night. Consciously model your faith in the reality of prayer. Never miss an opportunity to speak openly of your love for Jesus in front of your children or to refer to your need for His help in any given situation. This is where the first small seeds of spiritual understanding are sown. This is how genuine trust in God begins to grow in the heart of a child.

Children will learn from being in God's presence. As children are ushered into the presence of God and enabled to experience His grace and goodness for themselves, they will inevitably make it happen. We can model the attitude of and the behavior; we can set the stage, create the mood, and invite the players to participate; we can do prayer with children in a hundred different ways. We can open a door, lead our families to threshold and point the way inside. But in the final analysis we are always left in blessed dependence upon the glorious mystery of God's absolute sovereignty. He alone has the power to draw "all men"—and that includes our sons and daughters—to Himself. This is eminently an endeavor of which it must be said, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it."

The need for prayer in a child's life is urgent. In fact, prayer is the heart of a spiritually healthy family. Let's take the challenge and teach kids to pray! The call is clear and parents are positioned to respond as no one else can. In our eagerness to teach children, we need to make sure that they know God exists and wants to know them through a personal relationship. When your child is ready to be reconciled to God, do not neglect to share the ultimate prayer of salvation through Jesus Christ. Together, we can raise up a generation.

The Ultimate Prayer

The most important prayer we can share with a child is the prayer of salvation. We need to be able to communicate God's message of love in a manner that children will understand. This message is simple enough for kids to comprehend, yet profound enough for scholars to ponder for a lifetime. God has taken the initiative in reconciling us to Him. Through the life, death and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, He has shown us what infinite love is.

His word tells us that everyone inherently has knowledge of two things: that He exists and that there are moral principles. Furthermore, the Bible goes on to tell us that we have fallen short of God's perfect standards. This sin, to use God's terminology, has short-circuited our relationship with our Creator. A holy and just God cannot allow sin in His presence. However, rather than leave us in this predicament of separation from Him, the Father designed a plan of reconciliation—He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the price for our transgressions.

This is the plan that we need to share with our children, and prayer is its foundation. Through it we embrace God’s provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. The significance of Jesus cannot be underestimated. As He said Himself, “I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). In addition, the apostle Peter said, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Children must be given this understanding from an early age.

How to Lead Your Child to Christ

Things to Consider Ahead of Time

- ❑ Realize that God is more concerned about your child’s destiny and happiness than you are. “The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise . . . He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).
- ❑ Beforehand, pray specifically that God will give you insights and wisdom in dealing with each child on his maturity level.
- ❑ Don’t use terms like “take Jesus into your heart,” “dying and going to hell,” or “accepting Christ as your personal Savior.” Children are either too literal (“How does Jesus breathe in my heart?”) or the words are too cliché and trite for their understanding.
- ❑ Deal with each child alone and don’t be in a hurry. Make sure he or she understands. Discuss. Take your time.

A Few Cautions

When drawing children to Himself, Jesus said *allow* them to come to Him. Only with adults did He use the term *compel*. Do not compel children. See Mark 10:14 and Luke 14:23.

Remember that unless God Himself is speaking through the Holy Spirit to the child, there will be no genuine heart experience of regeneration. Parents, don’t get caught up in the idea that Jesus will return the day before you were going to speak to your child about salvation and that it will be too late. Look at God’s character—He *is* love! He is not dangling your child’s soul over hell. Wait on God’s timing. Pray, with faith, believing. Be concerned, but don’t push.

The Plan

(Prepare ahead of time and know the Scriptures to use.)

1. **Tell your child that God loves him.**
Recite John 3:16. Recite it again with your child’s name in place instead of “the world.”
2. **Remind your child that he needs the Savior.**
3. **Deal with sin carefully.**
Say – there is one thing that cannot enter heaven—*sin*. Be sure he or she knows what sin is. Ask your child to name some sins (Things common to children—lying, sassing, disobeying, etc.). Sin is *doing* or *thinking* anything wrong according to God’s word.
 - ❑ Ask, “Have you sinned?”

- If the answer is, “No,” do *not* continue. Assure your child that when he or she does feel like they have sinned, to come and talk to you again. Some parents may want to have prayer, thanking God “for this young child who is willing to do what is right.” Make it easy for them to talk to you again, but do not continue. Do not say, “Oh, yes, you have too sinned!” and then name some. With children, wait for God’s conviction.
 - If the answer is “Yes,” continue. Your child may even give a personal illustration of some sin they have done recently or one that has bothered them.
 - Tell them what God says about sin: We’ve all sinned. “There is none righteousness, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). “For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Because of that sin, we can’t get to God, “For the wages of sin is death . . .” (Romans 6:23); so He had to come to us.” . . . But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).
4. **Explain that the gift of salvation is free.**
Relate God’s gift of salvation to receiving Christmas gifts—we don’t earn this gift or pay for it; we just accept it and we are thankful for it.
5. **Encourage your child to make a definite decision.**
Explain that Christ must be received if salvation is to be possessed but, remember, *do not force a decision*. Ask your child to pray, out loud, in their own words. Give them some things they could say if they seem unsure. It is best to avoid having the child repeat a memorized prayer after you; let them think, and make it personal.** Now be prepared for a blessing! After salvation has occurred, you pray for your child out loud. Pronounce a blessing on them.
6. **Explain to your child that God will never leave them.**
Show your child that one can keep a relationship open with God through repentance and forgiveness (just like family and friends), and that God will always love them. “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).
7. **Teach your child “family” responsibilities (The Big Five):**
Tell your child that they are now a member of God’s family, and therefore has some responsibilities as a family member: (1) To pray, (2) To know more about God (reading the Bible), (3) To love God’s church, (4) To love others (The Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”), and (5) To give to God’s work.

**If you wish, you can guide your child through the prayer, here is some suggested language:
Dear God, I know I am a sinner [have child name specific sins he or she acknowledged earlier, such as lying, stealing, disobeying, etc.]. I know that Jesus died on the cross to pay for all of my sins. I ask you to forgive me of my sins. I believe that Jesus died for me and rose from the dead, and I now take Him as my Savior. Thank you for loving me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

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Talking to Teens About Spiritual Things

One dad recalls a meeting he had with other fathers about how to communicate with young people about spiritual issues:

I was involved in a “Rite of Passage” planning session with six other dads. Our conversation centered around how we could discuss spiritual concepts with our children, to prepare them to take their places in the church as godly men and women. However, several of the fathers stated they had never before talked with their children about spiritual matters.

You might understand the response of those men. Even if you have carefully and conscientiously nurtured faith in your children through their early years, adolescence brings changes. As a young child, your son or daughter may have accepted everything you said without question. Now there seems to be nothing but questions. In short, the season of “sermons” is over; the days of discussion have arrived.

The reason is simple: Teens want to be treated as adults. So, in order to talk with them about spiritual matters, we parents need to relate to our teens as grownups. The best place to begin is by building on the existing relationship.

Building on the Relationship

1. Spending time with your teen.

Time communicates value to teenagers; when we spend time with them, we know they are important to us. Teens want (and need) some privacy and “space,” but keep planning family activities that include them.

2. Listen more than lecture.

The time for instruction is mostly past; now it’s important to listen to our teens so we can better understand how they think. Listening creates opportunities to find out what they know, what they think, what they feel and what principles guide their lives. Here are a few ideas to help you listen more closely:

- Ask open-ended questions that start with words such as how, what and why. For example: “When your prayer wasn’t answered the way you wanted, how did you feel? Why do you think God answered the way he did?”
- Ask your teens to define what’s important in their culture. Ask about particular words in songs or popular phrases they use.
- Praise them for their accomplishments, such as earning good grades, reaching a tough goal or making a hard decision that showed good judgment. Avoid the trap of seeing—and talking about—only their mistakes and shortcomings.

3. Express encouragement and affection, physically and verbally.

We can show our support in simple ways: a hug, a pat on the back, a kind word or compliment. Just using good manners can communicate love and respect, which are important to our young men and women. We can say “Please,” “Thank you,” and “I’m sorry” to them as well as to anyone. Being our children makes them no less deserving of our consideration.

4. **Have fun together.**

A ballgame. A meal at a restaurant. A drive in the country. Shopping at the mall. These are places where you can enjoy casual, non-threatening conversations and just get to know each other better. Here’s one suggestion: Schedule a weekly “date night” with your teen, with the understanding that it is for fun and will be free of heavy conversation. But be sure to blanket your time with prayer in advance.

One father made a breakfast appointment with his teenage son because he wanted to tell his son about the hopes, dreams, and prayers he had for the boy. But the father also found out that the son wanted more time—and breakfasts—with his dad. Thus began a wonderful habit. Each week, father and son went out for the breakfast, where they discussed spiritual issues and other important things. But they also spent a lot of time talking about the sports page. Communication comes easier when it is part of an on-going relationship.

5. **Be vulnerable.**

Teens respect honesty, and being open with them will encourage them to be open with us. Vulnerability is not a weakness; it is part of being human. Our children need to know we have problems, too. The good news is that our troubles give us opportunities to talk with our teens about how to rely on the Lord and his strength.

6. **Live consistently. Values are caught, not taught.**

Children look for consistency between our words and actions, especially when it comes to our relationship with God. So we need to ask ourselves: How is my relationship with Him? What words would the Lord use to describe my relationship with him? How often do I pray? What do I ask God for? What happens when I pray?

7. **Learn about their world.**

Teens often think that adults are out of touch with the issues they face (and sometimes they’re right!). One way to understand their world is to read some teenage magazines. Then we can follow up on our research by asking our teens’ opinions on topics we come across. The more we know their world, the more we will know them.

8. **Be a friend.**

One way we parents can show respect to our teens is to show sensitivity and other affirmation when they are having troubles. We need to resist the urge to tease them when they are bothered by something important to them, such as a relationship with the opposite sex. Ephesians 4:29 tells us that we should only say “what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”—and that verse doesn’t have an exception clause for our children!

9. **Pray specifically for your teen at least once a week.**

We must set aside time to pray for our children. Some parents find it helpful to fast and pray for their kids one day a week. We can help our teens see the power of prayer when we ask them every week what we can pray about for them. They may be concerned about a tough exam or a friendship that's run aground. They might even talk about a temptation that they are struggling with.

At the end of the week, remember to tell your teen you were praying for him or her. Together, you will see how God answers your prayers.

Talking Spiritual

As your relationship develops, you will find more and more opportunities to discuss deep, spiritual matters. Here are some key topics and questions to cover—but don't be limited by this list. Be prepared to talk about any questions, doubts or discoveries your teen has.

1. **Your teen's personal relationship with God.**

Try asking your teen, "If God were to describe your relationship with him, what words would He use? What makes you feel this way?"

2. **Purity and holiness.**

Ask, "How would you describe 'purity' to your best friend? Why? When I say the word 'holy', what comes to mind, and why?"

3. **Prayer.**

Ask, "How does prayer fit into your daily life? If prayer is spiritual breathing, what chokes it out of your schedule? What is the biggest question you have about prayer?"

4. **Relationships.**

As an icebreaker, you might say, "Describe a relationship between a boy and a girl that honors God. What limits are important for you to maintain in a relationship that glorifies God? Whom do you know that sets a good example in a boy-girl relationship? What makes it good?"

5. **Honor.**

Ask your teen, "How do you honor a friend of yours? Why? How does that friend honor you?"

"Impress Them on Your Children"

God gave parents the responsibility to talk with children about Him, to pray with them and help them grow in their own faith (Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Psalm 78:1-8). When we talk with our teens about spiritual things, our honesty, patience, vulnerability and willingness to make time for them can open the doors to the life in Christ we hope for them and the relationship God himself desires.

Talking in Your Teen's World

Parents can wonder if the teen in their family has come from another country—or maybe another planet. That’s how hard communication can seem, even in the best relationships. How can you encourage open, honest discussion with your teen? Try some of these ideas.

1. **Plan your communication.**

Good communication requires a proper mood and setting, as well as good timing. Some parents find that going for a long drive with their teen once a week is a great way to create discussion time. Not only is there a “captive audience,” but your conversation may feel less intimidating because you are talking side by side, not face to face. The two of you may be in a much better position, literally, to have a great discussion.

2. **Have a discussion, don’t preach a sermon.**

A conversation is like a tennis game: To keep the match going, the ball must be hit back and forth. Rather than dictating conclusions or discounting their ideas, use questions and thoughtful responses to coach your teen’s thinking and help them learn to think and speak clearly about important issues.

3. **Engage them in non-threatening, thought-provoking conversation.**

Ask your teen’s opinions on different issues. Talk about the news you hear or read, or open a discussion about a TV program you watch together. Remember: If you respect your teen’s opinions, it’s likely they will respect yours (even if they don’t say so).

4. **Make it easy for your teen to be honest.**

One couple created a report card so their son and daughter could grade them on their relationship. It looked like this:

- Dad (Mom) shows me he (she) loves me ____
- Dad (Mom) is fair in his (her) decisions ____
- Dad (Mom) is interested in my feelings ____
- Dad (Mom) admits when he (she) is wrong ____
- Dad (Mom) spends enough time with me ____
- Dad (Mom) controls his (her) anger and words ____
- Dad (Mom) listens to what I say ____
- Dad (Mom) is fun ____
- Dad (Mom) trusts me ____
- Dad (Mom) respects me ____
- Dad (Mom) enjoys being with me ____
- Dad (Mom) provides spiritual leadership ____
- Dad (Mom) makes me a priority in his (her) life ____
- Overall grade ____

On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 is best), what kind of relationship do you want with Dad (Mom)? ____

On the same scale, where are you today in your relationship with Dad (Mom)?

If your Dad (Mom) could change three things to raise his or her grade to a 10, what would they be?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-7, God instructs parents to teach children about following him. In what three areas of your spiritual walk would you like your dad or mom to help?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

This approach opens the door for great conversations. But be careful when using this process. This isn't a time to defend your position; you can only ask questions to clarify a response. Remember: "Do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged" (Colossians 3:21).

Note: Some of the ideas in this section are adapted from the books *Faithful Parents, Faithful Kids*, by Greg P. Johnson and Mike Yorkey (Tyndale) and *Raising Responsible Kids*, by Jay Kesler.

Teaching Youth the Ultimate Power of Prayer

Before the sun splashed its orange hue on the walls of the marble quarry, the stonecutters made their way to their latest assignment . . . to finish removing the promising slab of white marble without breaking it into smaller pieces. The stone's color was good, few blemishes could be detected, and it appeared to be of appropriate size.

Carefully, they removed the stone from the quarry; a buyer made an offer, and off it went. Still just a large slab of marble. Not much to look at.

The artist, however, burning with a vision, took hammer and chisel and began to transform the chunk of marble into a masterpiece of exquisite beauty and grace. From the formless rock, Michelangelo brought forth the majestic statue the world knows as "David".

What does it take to transform us from our "formless slab" condition into the piece of art that God destined for our lives? God uses the chisel of prayer to form, shape and smooth us into His workmanship. Different chisels work different purposes, but all of them work together to shape us.

Teenagers and adolescents, empowered with a thoroughly taught and well-practiced prayer life, can become modern-day heroes and heroines of the faith. Sculpted and polished by a close relationship with their Creator, they can have futures that are filled with boundless opportunities. A young person, fervently praying with the abandonment and fearless faith of youth, will truly

accomplish incredible things for God throughout his or her life. In addition, having established a strong personal prayer life, your teen will have already begun a strong foundation for his or her future family. Teaching prayer to your teenager is your investment in the ongoing godly traditions of your family's faith, in the kingdom of God, and in the future of our nation and world!

Remember: *More is caught than taught!* A child who grows up hearing his parents pray, sees them on their knees and calling out to God, is familiar with the sounds and fragrance of prayer in the home, will be much more likely to develop a strong prayer life. Pray for and with your teenage. Watch it become second nature to them, as they, too, develop a life of prayer.

P.R.A.Y.

Let's observe four tools—Praise, Repent, Ask, and Yield—which can bring about incredible change and growth in our lives. Together they blend to constitute the body of prayer, which enables us to be transformed. In talking to your teen about prayer, you can use these tools to help explain how prayer works.

Praise

This is the exciting part. When we worship God, we are moved from being self-centered to being God-centered. Praise moves us quickly into God's presence, where we are surrounded by His holiness, love and peace. As we honor God, we confirm a relationship with Him, one of dependence yet full of power through His Holy Spirit.

Almighty God, You are worthy of my highest praise! . . .

Repent

This is the serious part. We've all done things that are displeasing to God. Sin, or disobedience to God, builds an instant wall in our relationship with Him. To be intimate with Him, we must confess all ungodly thoughts, words or deeds, sincerely and humbly telling God we are sorry. Then, resting in His forgiveness, we resolve with all of our hearts to turn away from our sin. We give Him our rags, He washes away the darkness and hurt, and gives us His riches.

Lord, I come before You with repentance for my sin and disobedience to You . . .

Ask

This is the powerful part. We've moved into God's presence with praise and worship, and we've removed all obstacles between us and God. Now we can call upon Him with our needs and share the deepest secrets of our hearts. His Word promises that He'll listen and answer! In trouble? Afraid? Helpless? Sick? Stuck? Open your heart. Call on God. Ask Him for help. His ear is tuned specifically to the sound of your voice.

Heavenly Father, I know that You will answer me when I call upon You . . .

Yield

This is the peaceful part. To yield means to let God be God. We know of His great love for us, so we have to trust Him when we pray, that His answers will be perfect for our circumstances. Yielding involves waiting and listening for God to “speak” to us—in a quiet prayer time, the still of the night, in our consciences during a time of hard decisions—any time! When our hearts are soft and surrendered to Him, He’s able to guide the course of our lives, drawing us ever closer to Himself.

Loving God, I give myself wholly to You. Be the Lord of all of my life . . .

Formless slabs of granite, soft impressionable human hearts—all have unlimited, spectacular potential when placed in the hands of a Master artist. As you model a life of prayer, watch as God’s destiny is fulfilled in your family and for generations to come.

Get the P.R.A.Y. Bracelet

The P.R.A.Y. bracelet from the National Day of Prayer is an excellent teaching aid for this lesson plan.

The bracelet is designed to solidify the practical application of the lesson plan by keeping the call to prayer close at hand. The letters on the wristband will remind the wearer to pray throughout the day.

Wearing a P.R.A.Y. bracelet, your students will be constantly reminded of the powerful message of God’s love and salvation. What’s more, they’ll be motivated to share the Good News with their friends. (A helpful explanation card is included with each bracelet.)

Call (800) 444-8828
For information on group pricing

Benefits of a Daily Relationship With Jesus Christ

The benefits of following Jesus are numerous. God wants each of us to experience these wonderful blessings, if only we will come to Him in reverent submission. Below are several reasons why we should be willing to see a daily relationship with Christ.

1. A spiritual connection that will last forever.

God wants you to experience His joy on a regular basis in this life as well as throughout eternity. When you accept Christ, you receive spiritual vitality through your daily relationship with Him.

- Psalm 16:11
- Jeremiah 31:3
- Matthew 25:46
- John 3:14-16; 3:36; 4:13-14; 5:24; 6:39-40; 10:27-28; 17:1-3

- Romans 5:21; 6:22-23
- 2 Corinthians 4:17-5:1

2. Assurance of God's unconditional love.

Christ bridges the gap between you and God. Through a relationship with Jesus you are assured of His unconditional love for you. No matter what you have done or will do, as long as you have a relationship with Jesus, God will love you. He is always present and ready to help those who put their trust in His Son.

- John 3:16; 16:27
- Romans 5:8; 8:35-39
- Ephesians 2:4-5; 3:17-19
- 1 Timothy 1:14
- 1 John 3:1; 4:7-10

3. Meaning and purpose in life.

Through a relationship with Christ, we realize that God is intimately aware of every aspect of our lives. We can trust that He will guide and direct us as we submit to Him and pray that He will lead us. Things may not turn out as we would like them to, but we know that the Lord is in control and His will is “perfect and pleasing” (Romans 12:2).

Furthermore, Christianity is grounded in historical and rational truth. As the apostle Paul put it, our faith is “true and reasonable”. As such, it provides meaningful answer to the most difficult questions in life. This includes a coherent moral foundation that clearly indicates right from wrong.

- Acts 1:3; 26:25
- 2 Peter 1:16
- 1 John 1:1-3

4. Strength to face each day.

Regardless of your circumstances, God will grant you strength when you seek His help. As you seek to serve the Lord, He will empower you to serve Him. Through difficulties, will still arise, a firm foundation in Christ gives you the ability to face and overcome the challenges of life—everything from financial difficulties to dealing with family members and humanity in general.

- Isaiah 41:10
- John 16:33
- Philippians 4:13
- 1 Timothy 1:12
- 2 Timothy 4:17

5. Peace.

God's peace does not exempt you from trials. Rather, it calms you and places your confidence in the Lord. As you experience difficulties and feel as though you are out of control, rest in assurance that God is sovereign and always in control (Genesis 18:14).

- Psalm 29:11
- John 14:27; 16:33
- Acts 10:36
- Romans 5:1
- Ephesians 2:14-17
- Philippians 4:6-7
- Colossians 3:15

6. You become part of the body of Christ (the church).

When you receive Christ into your life, you become part of a worldwide family of believers. Through participation in a local Christian church, believers are able to support one another on a regular basis.

- Romans 12:4-5
- 1 Corinthians 12:13-14

Pray Through the Scriptures

It's good to be reminded *why* we should pray and *what happens* when we do. Now let's remind ourselves *how* we should pray. The best place to start is the Bible. Nothing can address our needs or concerns like the Word of God. The leaders, churches, families and forgotten of our nation desperately need our prayers. The daily decisions, temptations, loneliness and pressures they face, are often overwhelming. Please take the time to look up the following Scriptures and pray through them for your family. Meditate on the precious and powerful words of Scripture as you lift up your loved ones.

- Children will grow in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men—Luke 2:52
- Parents and children will hunger for the Word of God—Psalm 119:103
- The fruit of the Spirit will be evident in our families—Galatians 5:22-23
- As families we will be “salt and light” in our neighborhoods and communities—Matthew 5:13-16

- Parents will raise their children, training and instructing them in the ways of the Lord—Ephesians 6:4, Deuteronomy 6:4-7
- You children won't succumb to peer pressure, but rather will set an example in speech, life, love, faith, and purity—1 Timothy 4:12
- Your family would honor God so He would make your paths straight—1 Timothy 2:1,2
- You will have strength to live a life worthy of the Lord and conduct business accordingly—Psalm 1:1-2
- Your children would be strong, courageous and set apart for God—Joshua 1:7-8
- In times of trouble your family would turn to the Lord for mercy—Isaiah 55:7

Remember as you spend daily time in the Word, to always pray for your family as you read and meditate on the Scriptures.

Lasting, Loving Lessons of Family Night

Looking for a great way to gather the family together for a memorable time of laughs and learning about the importance of prayer? Discover the joy of Family Night from the Heritage Builders ministry. Family Nights are times set aside to bring your family together and learn a biblical truth using object lessons. We have included four Family Night activities related to prayer in this guide.

To learn more about these great activities for kids, read the *Family Night Tool Chest Books*—a fun-filled way to pass on important Christian values to your kids using ordinary objects like the tube of toothpaste. The authors encourage parents to make learning interesting and kids will have no trouble understanding the importance of taming the tongue, being obedient, resisting temptation and more. You can find these terrific books at www.HeritageBuilders.com.

Suggested Approach

Pick out a night each week that you will come together as a family to learn about prayer. At the dinner table or bedtime, ask the children, “If you could learn to get whatever was good for you whenever you asked, would you be interested?” Then tell them that you are also interested and together you will learn about the power of prayer over the next four weeks.

Tips

- Review the suggested Family Nights, which are written for the 4- to 13-year-old level. Judeo-Christian bookstores have children's books written on the subject of prayer for all age levels. Read the verses and look at the commentaries making personal notes on points you want to bring out or questions you may want to ask.
- Small children may need activities explained at their level. Object lessons may take more than one night to complete.
- If you have several children, the younger ones may color or do crafts during the discussions and then later participate in the object lessons with the older children.

- ❑ If you have teenagers and younger children, have the teenagers help teach and present the object lessons.
- ❑ Have fun! Don't force the children to sit and participate. They may wander, draw or play with the dog, but they will be listening. The object lessons and questions will engage them. Enjoy their questions and their answers. If you make it fun, they will want to do it again!
- ❑ Make the treat time special, different toppings on ice cream (nuts, chocolate chips, caramel, spray on whip cream—watch the fights!)
- ❑ You can appoint a “Prayer Warrior” (usually works best to be the youngest since they go to bed the earliest) to bring your family together each night to talk about the day's events that need prayer, thanks or intercession. Use *My Family's Prayer Calendar* to suggest prayer topics, verses and activities for each day of the year. Or use Post-It notes to write in your own topics or prayer needs and place on the calendar to use as a prayer journal.
- ❑ Pick a family theme song for Family Night and play it to bring the family together. Promise Keepers has many great songs that can be used, or the National Day of Prayer offers a *Let Us Pray* album that has many great options, as well.

Family Night Lesson #1: What is Prayer?

Goal

To teach children what prayer is and that God listens to our prayers.

Suggested Scripture References

- ❑ 2 Chronicles 30:27
- ❑ Psalm 5:1-3

Materials Needed

1. Two tin cans
2. 10-20 feet of string or fishing line
3. 2 paper clips
4. Treat (ice cream or root beer float)

I. Open in Prayer (Mom or Dad)

II. Lesson and Discussion

Ask each child the following questions:

- ❑ Who is your best friend?
- ❑ What makes them your best friend?

Answer:

They are your best friend because you spend time together and can talk about anything and everything—and will love you the same, no matter what you tell them. (A best friend has been described as a person who knows enough about you to destroy you, but doesn't.)

Discussion

This is what prayer is: time you spend with God talking and listening to each other just as you would your best friend. God loves you unconditionally. Nothing you tell Him will make Him stop loving you or loving you less. You can be real with God! He knows and shares your innermost wants, desires and needs. Because God has made it possible to have a personal relationship with Him, you can have personal, intimate conversations with Him, the Creator of the universe.

Point

Prayer is spending time with God and having intimate conversations with Him.

III. Activity

Help the children make a small hole, big enough for the string, in the bottom of each can. Fit the string through the holes in the cans and then tie a paper clip to the string to hold it securely inside the can. Stretch the “phone line” across the room, resting it on top of two chairs for support and pillows to keep the line in place. Have one child speak into one of the cans to see in the other person can hear their voice in the other can. They should not be able to hear anything. Remove the chairs and pillows and have the children speak and listen again. This time, they should be able to hear.

Question #1:

Why couldn't you hear the first time?

Answer

Because there was clutter (the chairs and pillows) on the line, and the line could not vibrate. Once the clutter was removed, conversations were possible.

Question #2:

Is it easy to talk with Mom and/or Dad when they are mad at you for doing something wrong? Even though they are unhappy with you, do they love you less?

Answer:

It's not easy to talk to someone when you're out of fellowship with them. It's the same thing with God. Our communication with God is blocked when we're out of fellowship with Him.

Discussion

1. Unconfessed sin can block communication with God. Unconfessed sin may be like the chairs. When we pray and enter into the presence of a holy God our communication may be blocked by unconfessed sin. We must confess our sin and ask for God's forgiveness when we pray.
2. Busy-ness of life can block communication of God. We must take time to be with God and talk with Him daily.

Question #3:

Can you think of someone you were close to and then one of you moved away? What was your conversation like when you first got back together?

Discussion

It was probably awkward, because you have so little time together that you do not have the same interests or experiences anymore. It is said that if you want to know what someone will be like in five years, look at what they read and who they hang around with. So it is with God: the more time we spend in His presence, reading His Word and talking to Him, the more we become like Him.

3. Not listening to God can block communication with Him. Conversation is a two-way process. In prayer we must listen as well as praise and petition God. God talks to us in prayer and we need to listen. He tells us, “Be still, and know that I am God.” We need to be still in His presence and listen to the messages He lays on our hearts.

Activity

This activity is intended to teach your children about blocked communication with God and restored fellowship with Him. Of course, no one can truly portray themselves as the Lord, but for the purposes of the object lesson, Mom can represent God in a role-play situation and leave the room. Dad should stay in the room with the children and call for her, but she should remain silent and out of sight. Then Dad should suggest that the kids talk with her. The children can try to tell Mom about their day, but she will not answer. Dad may now challenge the children with this question, “Is there something you can think of that you may have done today that makes it hard for Mom to feel close to you?” Dad may explain that they need to ask Mom to forgive them for things they may have done that day that were not pleasing to her. After they do this, Mom starts talking with them and returns with hugs for the children and shares ice cream or root beer floats with them. What the children have just experienced are the effects of unconfessed sin, confession and reconciliation. Make sure that although God always hears their prayers, He expects them to confess and seek his forgiveness.

Discussion Over Treat

Have Mom appear and acknowledge that she heard everything. Explain to the kids that this is just like prayer. Read or paraphrase 2 Chronicles 30:27.

Point

Even though we cannot see God, He hears our prayers.

Memorize

Talk to God, pray

Talk to your best friend, everyday

IV. Close in Prayer

Family Night Lesson #2: Why Pray?

Goal

To teach our children why they should pray and help them want to pray.

Suggested Scripture References

- Luke 18:1
- Philippians 4:6
- Matthew 7:7-11

Materials Needed

1. Empty, short plastic water bottle
2. 25 pipe cleaners
3. Bag of candy
4. Bag of stones

I. Open in Prayer

II. Lesson and Discussion

Ask your children the following question:
What things do Mom and Dad want you to do?

Answer

They would like to have us brush our teeth, talk to them, etc.

Question

Why do parents want you to do these things?

Answer

Parents ask children to do certain things because these things are good for their children. Brushing your teeth makes healthier teeth and gums and avoids the pain of tooth decay. By not teasing others, you won't hurt peoples' feelings or even get your own feelings hurt. Talking to parents lets Mom and Dad know when you're hurting so you can be comforted. Good communication with parents also tells them when you are happy so they can help you celebrate.

Point

So it is with God: He wants us to pray because it is good for us. It's like spiritual breathing, and it sustains our relationship with God.

Activity

Have the children sit across from each other and have a contest to see who can hold their breath the longest. After a winner has been determined, ask the first child who took a breath why they took a breath. Then emphasize the point that we need to break spiritually in the same way that we need to breathe air.

Read

- Luke 18:1
- Philippians 4:6

Discussion

God wants us to pray because He is more interested in our relationship with Him than He is in our circumstances. He wants us to spend time in His presence so He can reveal more of His character to us, and we in turn can become more like Him.

III. Activity #1

Divide up the 25 pipe cleaners between the children. Place a short plastic water bottle in the middle of the table. Then have the children name character traits that they can ask God to give them. For example, they might ask for courage concerning a tough situation they are facing. With every mention, have them push a pipe cleaner down into the plastic bottle. Mom or Dad can demonstrate by pushing a pipe cleaner down far enough that the top disappears below the water bottle top. As more pipe cleaners are added, you need to use another object to cram the pipe cleaners into the bottle to ensure the pipe cleaners “mold” to the shape of the bottle.

Possible Character Traits

Strength	Humbleness	Mercy
Wisdom	Guidance	Self-Control
Hope	Healing	Reverence
Peace	Gentleness	Obedient heart
Joy	Patience	Contentment
Kindness	Understanding	Servant’s Heart
Long-Suffering	Salvation	Goodness
Confidence	Forgiveness	Love

Question

What have we just identified?

Answer

These are some of the character qualities that represent God!

Discussion

Through our prayers, we receive these character qualities. The more time we spend in His presence, the more we become like Christ.

IV. Activity #2

Now take a sharp knife and cut off the bottom of the bottle. Carefully pull the pipe cleaners out of the bottle in one piece—notice they have taken the shape of the bottle!

Point

The more time we spend in His presence in fellowship through prayer, the more we conform to Christ's image. (Just like how the pipe cleaners took on the shape of the bottle.)

Discussion

The more time we spend with God, the more we become like Him. And through the power of the Holy Spirit, our thoughts become His thoughts, our desires become His desires, and our prayers become His prayers. This is what it means to pray according to God's will.

V. Activity #3

This is a fun game you can play with your children to teach them about seeking, knocking and asking at God's door in prayer. Send them out of the house and tell them that you are going to play a game similar to Trick or Treat. Tell them that they must knock on the front door and the back door in the hopes of seeking out a treat. Mom or Dad should alternate answering the front door and the back door. The children must check the door by knocking, then go to the next door if it is not answered after two knocks, and back and forth again. They must persistently circle the house. If the door is opened, they should ask for "something good". Sometimes no one should answer the door. Other times, Mom should answer and give candy. When Dad answers a door, he should give stones. After a while, you can bring the kids together and discuss why it was strange and funny that Dad gave the kids a stone. Dad can explain that he would never do that in real life. Then relate to the children that if they asked their Heavenly Father for "something good", He would especially never give them "something bad".

Question

What were the three steps you had to take to get the candy?

Answer

1. You had to find (seek) which door would be opened.
2. You had to knock to let Mom or Dad know you were there.
3. You had to ask to receive.

Read

Matthew 7:7-11

Question

Why do you think the Bible says seek, knock, and ask?

Answer

1. **SEEK**—When you do not know the will of God, you must seek His will in prayer until you find it. You can seek His will spiritually, materially, physically, socially, etc.
2. **KNOCK**—When you know the will of God and are praying in His will, keep praying and believing—this is the prayer that moves mountains.
3. **ASK**—In order to receive you must ask, just like you had to ask to receive at the door! You will receive what you ask for when it is in the will of God.

Discussion

We need to continually and conscientiously come to God for all our needs and desires and not give up after a few half-hearted efforts with conclusion that God cannot be found. None of us naturally seek God (Romans 3:10). Yet, we all have daily needs: food, shelter, clothing, warmth, confidence, strength, courage, comfort, love, guidance, wisdom, understanding, forgiveness, salvation, etc. So, if we want God to meet our needs, it requires effort on our part. In the game, you had to seek to find which door would be opened and when it would be closed. Many times “we have not because we ask not” (James 4:2).

Question

Why did Dad give you stones?

Answer

To show you how absurd it is to think that if you ask your father for “something good” that he would give you something bad. When you ask God for things, sometimes God knows that what you are asking for is really a “stone”. In that situation, God will not give us what we asked for because it is not “something good” for us. The closer we come to God, the more we will start seeking and asking in accordance to His will.

Point

Pray to God to ask for:

- Power to do His work
- Strength to overcome sin
- Provisions for daily living
- Passion for loving Him.

Memorize

“We need to pray each and everyday, to live life God’s way.”

VI. Close in Prayer

Family Night Lesson #3: How to Pray

Goal

To teach our children how to pray.

Suggested Scripture Reference

- Matthew 6:9-13

Materials Needed

A simple incomplete model of a car, plane, etc. for each child.

I. Open in Prayer

II. Lesson and Discussion

Start by giving each child a model. Have them put it together and talk to them while they are doing it. Ask questions like: How many times bigger do you think the real thing is? Does this model work like the real thing?

Question

Is the model the real thing?

Answer

No, it is a representation of the real thing. Jesus was teaching on prayer and used what is called The Lord's Prayer to help us understand how to pray. It is a great model for us to use when we pray.

Read

Matthew 6:9-13

III. Activity

We will now look at The Lord's Prayer and break it down into 10 important parts of a prayer. Let's look at each part, understand why it is important and how to use it. Without using any of the words directly from the prayer we will rewrite one for our family using The Lord's Prayer as a model. Let's start:

1. *Our Father* (Intimacy focus)

The Lord's Prayer does not begin with "Oh God" or "Dear God" but "Our Father". The "our" suggests that we are speaking to someone we know personally and who is very close to us. We have an opportunity to have an intimate and personal relationship with our heavenly Father. The ancient Greek word for Father is "Abba", the equivalent to our expression for "Daddy". What could possibly be more intimate?

So take time at the beginning of each prayer just to love your heavenly Father. Think about His nearness, His comfort, His compassion, and His unconditional love. Do not just rush into the part of your prayer when you ask Him for things. Be still and know that He is God and that you love Him.

Question

What words can you use that mean Our and Father?

Possible Answer

“My Daddy”. Write the answer down as the beginning of your family prayer.

2. *Which art in heaven* (Sovereignty focus)

Next, we acknowledge the nature and character of God, especially as it relates to His sovereignty. This phrase speaks of His absolute authority. First, He is omnipotent (all-powerful). Then, He is omniscient (all-knowing). In addition, he is omnipresent (everywhere at once). This means He can do anything, He knows everything and best of all, He’s right here, right now.

It’s time to get excited about God. Think about who God is. This is called meditation. Not all prayer needs to be spoken out loud. Our thoughts about God’s greatness now will provide fuel for praise that will come shortly.

Question

What words can you use that express His sovereignty?

Possible Answer

“I know how great and powerful and all-knowing You are.” Write down your family’s answer.

3. *Hallowed by Thy name*. (Worship focus)

When we are instructed to hallow the Lord’s name, the Greek word used is “hagiozo” which means to set apart. That’s what worship is—a setting apart of all God’s nature and character, as revealed by His many names for praise and adoration.

Now it’s time to exalt God and praise His holy name. All of our opening moments in prayer have led to this season of praise and worship. Praise God for Who He is, reflecting on His many names in Scripture. You can even sing your praises.

Question

What words can you use that express worship?

Possible Answer

“My Lord and Savior, I understand You are set apart and are holy.” Write down your family’s answer.

4. *Thy kingdom come*. (Awakening focus)

The word kingdom refers to rulership, fullness, reign or dominion. We can pray for God's reign to awaken our lives, our family's lives, our neighbor's lives, and that the fullness of His kingdom plans would be revealed. We can ask for revival across our land and to the ends of the earth.

Question

What words can you use that express God's forthcoming kingdom?

Possible Answer

"Lord open our hearts and spiritual eyes to long for Your coming fullness." Write down your family's answer.

5. *Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.* (Provision focus)

The ultimate "will of God on earth" is the advancement of Christ's kingdom (Revelation 11:15). This can only happen through the evangelization of the lost. The Apostle Peter wrote, "The Lord is not . . . willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9)

Take time during these moments to pray for lost loved ones, neighbors, and even people of distant nations. Ask God to use you to help advance His kingdom globally.

Question

What words can you use that express the advancement of God's kingdom?

Possible Answer

"Lord, I pray today for those who don't know you, both here at home and around the world." Write down your family's answer.

6. *Give us this day our daily bread.* (Provision focus)

Every follower of Christ has two very basic needs: first, spiritual nourishment (which comes from God's Word); and secondly, physical nourishment (the food we need to live). In addition, we have other basic physical needs like shelter, clothing, and various necessities to help us effectively serve the Lord.

Take time to feed on God's Word. You may want to develop a daily Bible reading plan. Fifteen minutes a day will take the average reader through the whole Bible in a year. Then, give your personal needs for provision to the Lord.

Question

What words can you use that express request for daily needs?

Possible Answer

"Lord, you know my personal needs, physical, emotional, and spiritual, and I bring them before you now." Write down your family's answer.

7. *And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.* (Forgiveness focus)

Personal confession of all known sin is vital to effective prayer—especially as it concerns our relationship with others. We need to identify and confess all

grudges, resentment and bitter thoughts. Like the Psalmist, we need to ask God to “see if there is any offensive way in me” (Psalm 139:24).

Now is the time to come clean in all matters of personal conduct. Prayerfully deal with all sin, especially regarding relationships with others.

Question

What words can you use that express forgiveness?

Possible Answer

“Lord, cleanse me of all the things that I have done wrong in your sight and help me to forgive those who have wronged me.” Write down your family’s answer.

8. *And lead us not into temptation.* (Guidance focus)

It is clear that God does not lead His people to sin. What He is suggesting by this petition is that we pray for God’s guidance to help us make right decisions that keep us from sinning. Few prayers for a believer are more important than seeking God’s guidance for our walk with Him. Examine your plans and activities for the immediate and foreseeable future. Bring each matter before the Lord for clear guidance.

Question

Now what words can you use that express guidance?

Possible Answer

“Lord, help me to make the right decisions day to day as I go into the future. Please lead me in a way that honors You in my words and actions.” Write down your family’s answer.

9. *But deliver us from evil.* (Warfare focus)

The previous petition follows immediately with “but deliver us from evil.” A better rendering of the Old English text is “deliver us from the evil one.” This is the reminder that all prayer, to some degree is spiritual warfare. Here we employ our spiritual weapons (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) to take a stand against the evil one. It’s time to put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18) and confront obstacles and strongholds in our lives and communities through Bible-based warfare prayer.

Question

What words can you use that express help in spiritual warfare?

Possible Answer

“Lord, I come in your name and power to confront the evil one and all his plans against me, my family, our community, and this nation. Give me boldness to pray against these strongholds.” Write down your family’s answer.

10. *For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.*

(Assurance focus)

Our final index prayer ought to lead to a meaningful concluding season of praise and rejoicing. These final words remind us of our assurance in the Lord that He is eternal and His glory and power is forever. Thus, the “Amen” of our prayer isn’t just a word, but a declaration of praise that confirms with assurance that God has heard all our petitions.

Question

What words can you use that express assurance?

Possible Answer

“Lord, I want to praise You and rejoice in Your presence. All authority, power and glory belongs to You. Amen.” Write down your family’s answer.

Put your whole prayer together and read it as a family. End your time of prayer in the same manner you began, with moments of praise and worship. Don’t hesitate to include expressions or songs of rejoicing.

Memorize

Prayer has many parts, yet from your heart is where it starts!

IV. Close in Prayer

Family Night Lesson #4: The Power of Prayer

Goal

To teach our children the power of prayer

Suggested Scripture References

- 1 Timothy 2:1-4
- 1 Peter 5:7
- Acts 12:3-16
- James 5:16
- Psalm 55:22

Materials Needed

1. Four or five feet of rope
2. Old, stuffed sock
3. A target game scored by points
4. Safe toy gun that shoots
5. Targets
6. 3 x 5 Cards to label targets

I. Open in Prayer

II. Activity #1

Tie an old, stuffed sock to a four or five-foot rope. Have two children stand five to ten feet apart. Both children should be facing the same direction. The child in the back gets the rope with the sock tied to it. The objective of the game is to have one child “cast” the sock toward the back of the other child. Once it hits the floor, the other child must turn around and try and catch the sock before it can be reeled in hand over hand (not jerked). You make have to drop the sock several feet short.

III. Lesson and Discussion

Question

When you pray for something, do you pray truly believing that God will answer? Or do you just cast your request out, hope God wills it to be so, but never go looking for an answer?

Read

1 Peter 5:7

Question

How do we “cast” our care upon Him?

Possible Answer

Through our prayers.

Question

What are the cares they are talking about?

Answer

Our worries, stresses, and daily struggles.

Discussion

Just like the sock, we often “cast” in prayer our worries, stresses and daily struggles to God but do not truly give them to Him or anxiously look for His answer. This may mean we do not trust God with our lives. Henry Blackaby states:

Our problem is that we pray and never relate anything that happens to our praying. After you pray, the greatest single thing you need to do is to turn on your spiritual concentration. When you pray in a direction, immediately anticipate the activity of God to answer your prayer . . . Things start to happen in the day that are not normal for your day. You see them as distractions and try to get rid of them. You fail to connect them with what you have just prayed.”

Point

We need to pray in true belief and trust God to answer

IV. Activity #2

Set up a game like darts or even make your own with a bulls-eye and point system. Have the children each take a turn and keep score. Play several times and have fun.

Question

How did we know who won? (The one with the highest score won.) How did we determine the score? (We had to go looking for the results.)

Question

What other things are there in life that require us to act and then look for results?

Possible Answer

Target practice, horse shoes, bean bag games, etc.

Read

Acts 12:3-16

Question

What happened to Peter?

Possible Answer

He was thrown into the prison for teaching about Jesus.

Question

What did the church body do?

Possible Answer

They prayed *earnestly*.

Question

What do you think *earnestly* means?

Possible Answer

Deep sincerity or the true belief that God would answer their prayers.

Question

What happened when they prayed earnestly?

Possible Answer

Their prayers were answered? Peter was freed.

Question

What happened when Peter showed up at their door?

Possible Answer

They were amazed!

Discussion

Just as the earnest prayers of the church significantly affected the outcome of the events, so we need to pray with confidence. We should not be surprised but rather in awe of His answers!

Point

We should pray believing that God hears our prayers and will answer them as long as they are in accordance with his will. His will is found in what He tells us in Scripture and it always coincides with His nature.

V. Activity #3

Using a dart gun, Nerf gun, or some homemade rubber band gun, set up a shooting range and label the following targets: people, character qualities, salvation and any other things you value. Then have a shooting range contest.

Question

How did the “bullet” know where to strike?

Answer

We pointed the gun and directed the bullet.

Discussion

That is how it is with prayer. God has chosen to accomplish His work on earth through you and me. He does that through the power of the Holy Spirit through our prayers! We direct the power of God as we intercede, step in on the behalf of others and pray to change situations or hearts. (Example of situations: healing, safety, etc. Examples of hearts: people coming to salvation, change of heart to forgiveness, release of a burden, strength to endure, etc.)

Point

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).

No prayer—No power

Little prayer—Little power

A lot of prayer—A lot of power!

Memorize

We need to pray by the hour to direct God’s power.

IV. Close in Prayer

Suggested Ways Your Family Can Learn About Prayer

This section is designed to provide ideas and lessons that equip and enable you as parents to teach your family the importance of personal prayer, repentance, and corporate prayer.

- ❑ After watching the news on television, turn the set off and spend a few minutes praying for the needs of those whose stories were told that day. Examples might be victims of crime and those who attacked them, those whose homes or property were damaged by natural disasters or the restoration of peace to people at war.
- ❑ Work together as a family to write your own family prayer for the nation, based on things you're thankful for and the expectations and desires you have for the country. Encourage each family member to include prayer for the nation in their daily personal time with God.
- ❑ When you pack your child's lunch for school, include a prayer for him or her and remind them to pray for someone else in the family before they eat lunch.
- ❑ Have a nightly family devotional time and talk about stories from the Bible where prayer changed peoples' lives. Memorize passages like 1 Timothy 2:1-2 with your children and discuss the importance of praying for your extended family and friends.
- ❑ Take the entire family to a local nursing home. Spend time praying with the residents. Be sure to pray for the needs of the nursing home, its staff, administrators and residents.
- ❑ Research historical figures such as Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Robert E. Lee, Booker T. Washington, William Penn, Squanto, Clara Barton and Abraham Lincoln. Learn how faith and prayer worked in their lives.
- ❑ Have a neighborhood family potluck. Give each family a prayer topic for after-dinner prayer time.
- ❑ Teach young children the importance of prayer with the *My Prayer Coloring Book*. This exciting resource explains The Lord's Prayer phrase by phrase using illustrations.
- ❑ Encourage your children to pray through the newspaper. Give different sections to each child. Ask them to cut out the headlines where prayer is needed for 1) guidance, 2) forgiveness and 3) thanksgiving. The reasons behind their choices could be discussed prior to a time of prayer for each headline.
- ❑ Designate a different area of concern to pray for each day of the week after dinner. For example: on Monday, pray for the government; on Tuesday, pray for the church; Wednesday, pray for schools; Thursday, pray for the family, etc.

Exciting Ways Your Family Can Observe the National Day of Prayer

- Help your children decorate their bikes with red, white and blue streamers, balloons and flags. They can ride the bikes to your NDP observance, if possible, or have a parade around your neighborhood.
- As a family project, decorate the exterior of your house with red, white and blue streamers, balloons and American flags. Display an *NDP Poster* on your front door, or mount it on cardboard, attach it to a stake and plant it in your front yard. Be prepared to tell anyone who asks why you're proud to observe the National Day of Prayer.
- Fill in an *NDP Prayer Guide* and give one to an older child to acquaint him with the names of local and national elected officials and the offices they hold. Emphasize the vast responsibilities these officials carry and their special need for prayer.
- Create a special prayer calendar with your children that builds up to the National Day of Prayer and continues throughout the year. Or, use *My Family's Prayer Calendar* as a teaching tool for your children.
- Take a walk around your neighborhood and pray for each home along the way. Leave an *NDP Sticker* on the doorsteps with a note telling the family you prayed for them as part of the National Day of Prayer. Invite another neighbor family to join you in your prayer walk.
- Find out if your community is having an NDP observance and organize a special family outing around the event. Parents can take a day off of work, excuse the children from school and attend the event as a family. Then enjoy a picnic lunch together at a park or your own back yard. Invite another family to join in eating an all-American meal, including hot dogs and apple pie. Spend time praying and searching the Scriptures for prayer-related passages.
- Add an *NDP bookmark* to all your correspondence before the NDP. Send the *NDP Prayer Guide* to all your relatives and friends as a reminder to observe the National Day of Prayer. Purchase *NDP Stickers* for wall and purse calendars as a reminder that the first Thursday in May is the National Day of Prayer.
- Put an *NDP Sticker* on your car. Offer them to your neighbors, as well.
- Make placemats to use during the week prior to NDP. Children can draw pictures of Bible characters or patriotic themes and use *NDP Stencil*. Write favorite Scriptures on the placemats to help children memorize them. Cover mats with wipeable clear plastic so they can be used several times. Share them with your friends and family members.
- Have a family contest and award *NDP T-shirts* to the children who can:
 - Locate all 50 states on a blank map
 - Name the president, vice president, your congressmen and senators
 - Identify the original 13 colonies

Event Planning Timeline for Celebrating the National Day of Prayer

The National Day of Prayer is a vital part of our national heritage. Since the first call to prayer in 1775 when the First Continental Congress asked the colonies to continue to pray for wisdom in forming a nation, the call to prayer has continued throughout our history, including President Lincoln's proclamation of a day of "humiliation, fasting and prayer" in 1893. In 1952, a joint resolution by Congress, signed by President Truman, declared an annual, national day of prayer. In 1988, the law was amended and signed by President Reagan, permanently setting the day as the first Thursday of May. Each year, the president signs a proclamation, encouraging all Americans to pray on this day.

Prayer has great significance for us as a nation. Specifically, the National Day of Prayer enables us to recall and teach the way in which our founding fathers sought the wisdom of God when faced with critical decisions. It stands as a call to us today to humbly come before God, seeking His guidance for our leaders and His grace upon us as a people. The unanimous passage of the bill establishing the National Day of Prayer as a set day, each year, signifies that prayer is as important to our nation today as it was in the beginning.

It also provides a superb opportunity to teach your family to pray together by focusing on the needs of your loved ones, the country, and our leaders. Here is a sample timeline that will help you prepare your family to have your own National Day of Prayer observance.

January

- Along with this *Family Prayer Guide*, if you haven't already ordered the *National Day of Prayer Complete Event Kit*, do so this month. You can find the order information online at www.NationalDayofPrayer.org/shop

February

- Review suggested event ideas listed in this guide.

March

- Pray that God will open your family's heart to learn about prayer and draw closer to Him.

April

- Go on family prayer walks.
- Begin the Family Night Activities.
- Help your children send notes of encouragement and appreciation to your pastor and leaders.

May

- Invite neighbors for dessert and prayer. Use the *NDP Prayer Guides* and give out *NDP Stickers*, *NDP Brochures* to your guests.
- Finish the Family Night Activities.
- Send notes of encouragement and appreciation to your pastor and leaders.
- Make Family Night Activities and *My Family's Prayer Calendar* a part of your weekly family activities emphasizing the importance of prayer beyond the NDP.

Conclusion

Draw Your Family to God Through Prayer

In our prayers we admit reliance on God to face the many issues where we can find no other answers but in Him. While the needs in our family are often overwhelming, the opportunities to impact our loved ones with prayer are endless. God is continually working through the prayers of His people. He transforms hearts through prayers. Oh, how desperately we need to be transformed. Let it begin in your heart—and in the heart of your family. May God bless your efforts.

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