

## The ABC's of Prayer

*Helping children talk to God can be as easy as A-B-C. Use this simple guide to add some spark to your family's prayer life.*

By Karen H. Whiting

**Adore God.** Start the day by showing God love and honor. Greet God in prayer with words that show you love God and know he is wonderful. Talk about words that describe God, such as all-powerful, loving, and creative, then use those words in adoration.



**Believe in God's abilities.** Before we ask for God's help, we must believe he can help. Over breakfast, talk about God's ability to solve problems. In prayer, tell God you believe he can do everything!

**Confess sins.** Get your hands dirty, then wash them. Talk about how God washes our hearts when we confess sins. Have each person think about something he or she did that hurt someone, then ask for forgiveness.



**Delight in God and his Creation.** Romans 1:20 teaches that when we look at what God made, we learn about God. Take a nature walk and thank God each time you stop to look at something he made.

**Express the need for God.** In humility seek the truth of Christ's words in John 15:5: "Apart from me, you can do nothing." Talk to your child about why you need God. Ask your child why he needs God. Together thank God for always being with each of you.

**Focus on one need.** There is no need to rush through a wish list of all the problems you want God to solve—he already knows. A mind crowded with problems will feel stressed. For today, think of the need weighing on you the most. Let God give you peace about that one problem.

**Give thanks to God.** Help your child think of the blessings in her life and thank God for each one. Write them in a journal. This helps develop an attitude of gratitude.

**Humor lightens the heart,** so tell God the funny things that happen, too. Look back and find the funny side of frustrating moments and laugh. God, who created monkeys and cuckoo birds, likes to laugh with us.



**Invite the Holy Spirit to guide each of you.** Take your child on a blindfolded walk, guiding him around obstacles. Discuss how God sent the Holy Spirit to guide us around problems, including ones we may not even see.

**Journal as a form of prayer.** Let your children write or draw a prayer. Encourage them to write whatever God puts in their minds. Have younger children tell you what they want to say and record their words for them.



**Keep knocking.** Read about the poor widow who kept knocking in Luke 18:1-8. Make a doorknob hanger with a prayer request on it and tell your child to pray about that request every time he sees the hanger.

**Love God and express that love in words.** Expressing love for God and remembering his love helps us look beyond our problems and hold on to his promises. As you pray, fold your arms across your chest as though you are hugging—and being hugged by—God.



**Mean what you say.** Honesty is important in any relationship, especially your relationship with God. Read Psalm 102 and talk about how it's okay to tell God how we feel, even when we are sad or angry. Practice being honest with God as you pray.

**Never give up,** but persevere in your prayers. If you've got an unanswered prayer, continue taking it to God. If you're dealing with a difficult situation, ask God to give you the strength to deal with it. Trust that God will answer your prayers in his way and in his time.



**Offer yourself and your talents to God.** Make a list of your child's talents, from a great smile to a nice singing ability to being a fast runner. Then pray with your child, asking God to show her how to use these abilities to serve him. Use one of those talents for God today.

**Praise the Lord.** Rejoice for what God has done and will do. Sing or listen to a praise song as part of your prayers.



**Quietly listen and wait for God's response.** Read Psalm 46 and then sit still and let your heart feel God's love. Listen for God to speak to your hearts. Share anything God may have told you, reflect on memorized verses, or read a passage from the Bible. Help your child discover that God speaks through his Word.

**Repent.** Repentance is an act of regret and turning away from sin. To stop doing the same bad things takes strength. Help your child make a "God can help me" sign and post it in her room as a reminder to ask for God's help to resist sin and repent of wrongdoing.

**Seek God's help for others.** Our concern for others touches God's heart. Write the names of people who need God's guidance and comfort. Pray for each.



**Trust God and expect answers.** Read the words on a penny about trust. Talk about how trust grows just like a pile of coins can grow, a little at a time. Post a paper on your refrigerator to jot down answers to prayer, and watch the paper fill up!

**Unite your will with God's.** God knows what is best. Talk about your prayer requests and why they might or might not be in God's will, then pray for God to show you his will and to help you accept his plans for you.

**Value yourself.** As you end your prayers today, realize that God values you. Read Psalm 139 as a reminder of how much God loves you.



**Worship God.** Think of worship as blowing kisses to God. Take turns saying something great about God. Blow kisses toward heaven after each praise.

**X-ray hearing; that is, listen intently.** Prayer is a two-way communication, so stop and listen for God's voice in your heart. Read about how Elijah listened and heard God whisper in 1 Kings 19:11-13.



**Yearn to learn from prayer and be changed by it.** Even as you end today's prayer time, yearn for the next time. Think of God as a friend you can't wait to talk with again. Make a plan to pray again soon.

**Zealously share.** Share joy by sharing love with others. Share answers received, telling others of God's greatness in providing answers.



Prayer is a continuous adventure in drawing closer to God and developing a relationship with him. It involves the desire to know, listen, and serve God, as well as sharing experiences and needs. Master these basic skills and make your family's communication with God a joyful celebration of his goodness.

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# Bring Faith to Life

*Discover how to use your child's individual learning style to inspire spiritual growth*

By Cynthia Ulrich Tobias, M.Ed.

Our "identical" twin boys were only 6 the Easter they each made a special card for me. Robert, the compliant, easy-to-please son, had drawn a beautiful picture of the cross with a Bible and lily and the words: "To Mommy—Christ is Risen. Happy Easter!" Michael, our wonderful, strong-willed son, presented a card that was plain on the outside. But inside there was a colorful character and the words: "Happy Easter from Jabba the Hut." These two boys are the same age with the same parents growing up in the same household, and yet they are so different in their outlooks and perspectives, you'd never know they shared the same genes. If twins can be so different, it's crystal clear that no two children in any family are alike.

As parents, we have been given the sobering charge of shepherding and guiding each of our children down the right path. But while the destination is the same for each child, the path is not. Because each of our children think differently, they also learn differently. Thankfully, we can trust that God, who designed our children as unique individuals in the first place, will give us the insight to discover our children's natural learning styles.

Learning styles are the inborn traits and preferences that affect the way we perceive our environment, take in and process information, and decide what's important. These preferences impact everything—the way we learn to read, to drive a car, to speak a new language. It's not surprising, then, that learning styles come into play in your child's spiritual development. Teaching techniques that work wonderfully for one child might do very little for another. One child might thrive on reading through a children's Bible with you, while another would rather sing through a rousing version of "Father Abraham." In other words, your child's spiritual development is affected not only by what she learns, but by the way she learns it.

Although there is a great deal of research behind the concept of learning styles, it doesn't take an advanced degree in education to identify and understand the learning styles of your children, no matter how old they are. With a little time, effort, and observation, you'll be able to determine how your child learns best and use that understanding to deepen your child's love for God.

## **Auditory**

Your child chatters almost constantly. She often repeats what you say like an echo, and she gets in trouble for talking out of turn during school. Highly auditory children seem to learn best by hearing—but not necessarily by hearing someone else. They need to hear themselves talk. But that need to hear information out loud means she may be the first to memorize her Bible verses, list the 12 disciples, and name all the books in the Old and New Testament. Why? When she says these things out loud, or even sings them, she's listening to the rhythm and sound of the words. When asked to remember information, she'll think of the sounds and tell you all she knows.

If you find yourself constantly trying to keep your child quiet, try giving her more important things to talk about. Discuss spiritual ideas, like God's love, and ask for her input to give her

the chance to process these important spiritual concepts. After Sunday school or family devotions, ask her to give you a summary of what she's learned. Look for ways your child can use her voice without distracting others or being disruptive, such as volunteering to read the Bible story in Sunday school.

## Visual

I had just finished a 45-minute presentation to a group of high school student leaders when one of the senior boys came up and proudly showed me a beautifully detailed picture he had drawn while I was talking. He saw me frown, and quickly explained, "If you ask me a question about anything you talked about, I can look at my picture and answer it. It's all in here." He went on, "All my life my teachers have told me to put my pen and paper down and look only at them. But if I can't draw or doodle, I can't remember what they say." If you have a child who is a visual learner, it doesn't simply mean he needs to see what he's learning in a book or on the chalkboard. He may need to make his own picture in order to remember what he's been told. You may want to encourage your visual child to highlight passages of Scripture in his Bible, draw a picture, or write notes in the margins of a workbook.

## Kinesthetic

On any given Sunday, you can look over the church congregation and see parents trying in vain to keep their children quiet and still. The children seem restless and fidgety. But the fact is, many of us are born with the need to stay in almost constant motion, especially when we're bored. As adults, we've learned to move with a subtlety that doesn't distract others (adjusting our position, holding a pen or pencil, smoothing our hair, etc.). Most children have not yet learned the art of moving in ways that don't get them in trouble. If you have a child who is especially fidgety, he may be a kinesthetic learner. Help him move while he learns—he can squeeze a ball, tap a foot under the table, shoot hoops while he memorizes facts or Bible verses. If you ask your child about the Bible story you told him while you made cookies, he'll remember that you talked about the Israelites fleeing Pharaoh while he was vigorously mixing the batter. You may be amazed at what your restless youngster picks up when he seems busy doing something else.

## Analytic

Do you have a child who always seems to need more information? Questions like, *How do you know? Where did you find that? Why are we doing it that way?* can often be an indication of a naturally analytic mind. A child with an analytic nature tends to focus on specifics, and he automatically pays more attention to details than children with a more global, big picture, get-the-gist-of-things perspective. This can be especially challenging if you, as the parent, are not particularly tuned in to the analytic side of things. But the details that seem unimportant to you can be just what capture the attention of your child.

Our son Michael is an analytic learner. From the time he was very young, he has focused in on the smallest scriptural inaccuracies in church programs or children's pageants. Until Michael informed us (when he was all of 5), none of our well-churched family realized that the tomb of Jesus was provided by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Mike had watched the Nest Entertainment New Testament videos\*, and his mind absorbed almost every detail of the stories. The only children's Bibles that have appealed to him are those that include maps, charts, and interesting and entertaining background information. If you have an analytic child, be prepared to answer a lot of questions, or at least provide your child with resources—Bibles, videos, picture books, encyclopedias—that will help him find the answers on his own.

## Global

Our son Robert is the exact opposite of his brother; he is the classic global/big picture child. If we provide him with an accurate and detailed definition or concept, he waits for the magic phrase: *In other words*. Suddenly the smile on his face lets us know he understands. It isn't that Robert misses the details—he just focuses on the details that reveal the big picture.

Unlike his brother who searches for maps, Robert quickly thumbs through a reference Bible to find the summaries, paraphrases, and highlights of the stories. Instead of trying to figure out what's missing in a program or presentation, he is totally absorbed in the experience itself, enthusiastically cheering and participating in the performance whenever possible. Your global thinker might appear to be ignoring you when you're in the midst of a long Bible story. If so, feel free to skip the details and head straight for the action. If the story is familiar to your child, consider letting him tell you the story. You'll be amazed at the details he considers crucial.

There's no doubt that each child is a unique and complex package. Still, it can be tough to know when your child is relying on her natural learning strengths and when she's just not paying attention or being lazy. The Bible offers help in Proverbs 3:5-6, which starts, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not unto your own understanding." I believe this verse means there are other ways of understanding and making sense of things besides just mine.

At the same time, don't allow your child's learning style to become an excuse for misbehavior. The next part of the passage says, "In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths." If our children are using their learning styles, personalities, and temperaments in a way that brings honor and glory to God, it's okay. If, however, a child's behavior does not honor God, no matter what learning style he's using, it's not okay. It's important that children still respect parents and teachers. It's also important that they think of others as they express their individuality.

Our Designer and Creator has given each of us some wonderful traits and gifts. When we discover the unique ways our children learn, we can better instill in them a deep love for the One who gave them those gifts in the first place.

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# Praying for Keeps

*Lift up your children...for life!*

By Kathy Kelly

Four years ago, a major spiritual battle began in my home, and I was not prepared for it. Four years ago, my first child was born.

When I became a mother, I knew I wanted to instill a love for God in my children. I assumed I'd have plenty of time to read Bible stories and do cute projects to bring those stories to life. But by the time my second child was born, I realized that motherhood was much more time-consuming and difficult than I ever imagined.

My firstborn was a handful, and I lacked the ability to cope with raising both an active toddler and a newborn. I wondered how I would nurture a strong foundation of faith in my children, and I worried about leaving them vulnerable to the strong temptations in our secular culture. Finally in desperation, I began fervently praying for my kids.

Now, as the mother of three, I realize that prayer is where I should have started all along. I began to feel less alone as a mom, knowing my children were in God's hands. I felt like I was helping my children grow closer to God, and that God was already at work in their hearts. I began to feel that I couldn't fail because the King of all Creation was on my side.

I then started to discover many biblical examples of parents who brought their fears and concerns to God in prayer. Their stories inspired me to get specific in my prayers. Now instead of just pleading for God's help in moments of frustration (okay, I do that too!), I also focus my prayers on five areas of my children's spiritual formation.

You can use these same biblical examples to guide your prayers for your children. Here's how:

## Pray for spiritual freedom

### **Luke 9:37-43**

A desperate father begged Jesus to free his son from the life-threatening possession of an evil spirit. The boy's father knew Jesus could free his son from that bondage.

Most of us will never experience demon possession, but we all struggle with our sinful nature. Our children need constant prayer coverage in this area. They will face temptations every day, but God's strength will help them resist.

Pray for your children to develop wisdom, self-control, and compassion so they will make godly choices throughout their lives. Pray that they will not be slaves to their sinful desires but will instead know the freedom that comes from following God.

One of the first things I prayed for my children was that they would come to know Christ as their Savior at an early age. Even when my oldest child, Nathan, didn't yet understand the concept of salvation, he often prayed that Jesus would live in his heart because he heard others talk about it often. Thankfully, I have since had the thrilling experience of leading Nathan to Christ, and I will continue praying that my two other children will also give their lives to Jesus.

## **Pray that God will use them**

### **First Samuel 1:11**

Hannah's heart-wrenching plea was that God would give her a child after years of infertility. But Hannah didn't stop there. She also prayed that God would use the child, promising to make any necessary sacrifice to ensure that God's will was accomplished in the life of her anxiously-awaited little one.

We harbor all sorts of hopes and dreams for our children. Yet we tend to forget that God gives our children dreams of their own. Sometimes those dreams are a far cry from what we imagine for our kids. But when God places a desire in a child's heart, wise parents keep their minds open.

I know a couple who ignored this principle, and the results were devastating. Their teenage daughter Tonia (not her real name) was a committed Christian who felt God leading her to a Christian college, perhaps to enter the ministry. But her parents wanted her to be a doctor.

After months of intense conflict, Tonia finally agreed to attend a secular university. As the semesters passed, Tonia became less and less active in church. Eventually, her entire family stopped attending. The last I heard, Tonia had turned away from God completely, pursuing an ungodly lifestyle. How different things might have been if her parents had let their daughter follow the passion God had placed in her.

## **Pray for purity**

### **Job 1:4-5**

Job was greatly concerned about his children's purity. He offered sacrifices and asked God to cleanse his children from sin, even though he wasn't aware of any specific sins they had committed.

Culture is saturated with sexual images and messages, so our children need God's help if they are to maintain pure hearts and minds. As our children grow up, they need to know where we stand on sexual issues. They need to know their purity is precious to us and to God, and that their sexuality can quickly turn from a blessing to a burden if it's not handled with care and respect. Our prayers can help.

As a college freshman, I heard about a couple that was committed to praying for their daughter's sexual purity. When she became a teenager, they gave her an expensive jar of perfume that could be opened only by breaking the jar.

They explained that this jar represented her purity, and shared their hopes and prayers that she would remain a virgin until marriage. At a time of intense temptation, this girl was saved from committing sexual sin by remembering her parents' gift and the prayer it represented. The prayers of this young woman's parents saved her from making a terrible mistake.

## **Pray for God's blessing**

### **Mark 10:13**

In Jesus' day, people understood that his blessing would make a difference in the lives of their children. In Mark 10:13, parents brought their children to Jesus, asking him to bless them—despite the disapproval of Jesus' disciples.

When we think about everything children seek to accomplish, we must remember that their paths will be made smoother when God blesses them. Whether at school, in their relationships, or in their first attempts to minister to others, our children need to know that God is with them, watching over them, and caring for them.

Recently, I saw a perfect example of this in the life of a friend's son. Nick, a shy teenager, took a step of faith in joining a weekly "tract blitz" in which his church youth group hit a neighborhood, offering tracts and prayers to people in the area.

The day of Nick's first outing with the group, his mom prayed that God would bless him that day. She later told me, "He came home and said his group had been teased by other teens in the neighborhood. He said, 'That didn't bother me and it's not going to make me stop. I'm going to pray for them because they don't know Jesus.'" Nick has always been sensitive about teasing, so it was amazing to hear his response. His normal fears were replaced by a desire to see others touched by Jesus. Now that's a blessing!

## **Pray for their protection**

### **Genesis 32:9-12**

Jacob was terrified. After years of estrangement from Esau, the brother whom he had grievously wronged, Jacob was about to meet him again. Afraid that Esau would take revenge on Jacob's family, Jacob prayed for God's protection.

From dangers in our homes, schools, and neighborhoods, it seems like our children face constant threats. But we can rest in knowing God will always watch over our children as their loving heavenly Father.

My pastor recently gave an example of how God answered his prayers for the physical protection of his children. Jordan, his young son, had been playing in the hall outside of the pastor's office. When Jordan's play turned to silence, his dad popped out of the office in time to see Jordan putting his finger into an electrical outlet. Despite the pastor's terrified "No!" Jordan's finger went in—but nothing happened. My pastor later noted that Jordan could have been electrocuted, but wasn't. God's protection was evident.

While we can trust that God wants only good things for our children, it's also important to remember that God doesn't promise a life without pain and suffering. So we need to pray for more than just physical safety for our children; we need also to pray for comfort, understanding, mercy, and a forgiving spirit. When our children experience pain—physical, emotional, or spiritual—we can help them turn to God for refuge and restoration. God's protection extends beyond the physical realm and into our hearts and minds as well.

THESE SPECIFIC PRAYERS can give shape to your prayers for your children. Pray alone, with your spouse, or with your children. Pray for one area each day or pray for all of them every day. What matters most is that you remember you are never parenting solo—you have the Master parent in your camp.

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