

Building Faith

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Do You Pray for Your Children? How to Start

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“What matters most is that your prayer is authentic, spoken from the hopes and fears of your heart. God knows you and delights in your voice.”

My First Prayer for My Children

When I was pregnant with my first child, I was flipping through a mother's prayer book in a library used book sale. One of the prayers said something like this: "Lord, I pray for all the children of the world, that they might know love. I pray that they might have the food, water, shelter and education that they need to flourish. For these young children are the people who will become my child's friends, classmates, and neighbors. One of them may become my child's spouse."

As I read these words, I became teary, suddenly understanding deep in my heart how interconnected we are with God and with one another. I sat down on the floor when I realized that some of the children being born that year would be taught that other children were their enemies. I was profoundly impacted by the idea that my child's existence depended on the existence of others. And their existence depended upon her.

I picked up that book because I was uncertain about how to pray for my daughter, who had not yet entered the world. Since that day, I have been praying for my own child and the children of the world. That baby is now sixteen. The prayer – from a book I have never been able to find again – has inspired my ministry of equipping parents to practice faith with their families. My work with other parents and Christian educators is one of God's answers to my prayer for the children of the world.

One Simple Way to Pray for Your Children

In talking with parents of children of all ages, I have realized that many of us are looking for advice and encouragement, much like I was as I picked the book off the library shelf. With this in mind, I offer a few thoughts, especially for parents who may be new to prayer.

Types of Prayer: The acronym ACTS is often used to remember four common types of prayer: Adoration (praising God), Confession (admitting our mistakes), Thanksgiving (expressing gratitude), and Supplication (asking for God's help). These types of prayer can be specifically applied to prayers for children. I have found that parenting my two daughters has given me new a new perspective on each type of prayer.

Adoration: Praising God

Begin each prayer by naming the wonderful things God has done and the marvelous things God has created. From the moment we first hold our child, smelling their delicious heads, wondering at their toes and fingers, we are awestruck. Furthermore, parenthood opens our eyes to the wonders around us. My toddlers were fond of bringing me treasures from creation: roly-poly bugs, green frogs, pine cones, cakes made of sand, and all kinds of rocks.

As they grow older, they inspire a new sense of awe as we marvel at their growing independence, the growing complexity of their thoughts; we welcome their more sporadic, but heartfelt hugs. At each and every stage, children inspire us to marvel at all that God does.

Confession: Admitting Shortcomings

During prayers of confession, we have the opportunity to ask God to forgive us for our individual and communal sins. Parenthood brings gifts as well as new challenges. Challenges that we do not always respond to well. Through confession we recognize our shortcomings, our impatience, our tendency to compare ourselves and our children to others. Our desire to provide for our children may lead us to prioritize work before family. Screens may help us unwind, but may distract us from real conversation with our kids.

Confide in God, confessing those things you regret having done and those things you regret having left undone. Confession is also a time to recognize the everyday things we do which negatively impact the children of the world. There are systems and structures in place which cause children to suffer from hunger, poverty, abuse, injustice, oppression, and neglect.

Thanksgiving: Gratitude for God's Blessings

Parenthood may also bring the uncomfortable realization that there are many things outside of our control: health, job loss, accidents, and the actions of others. For this reason, parenthood often increases our gratitude to God for life's necessities and joys. Give thanks for health, safety, food, shelter, joy, laughter, community, and love.

Supplication: Requests for God's Help

During supplication, we ask for God's help. From the moment we learn of our child's arrival through the time they graduate and beyond, the list of things to ask God for on behalf our children is long. We ask for our children to do well in school, or overcome illness. We pray for our children to be content. We pray that they will make good choices and find true friends. We make specific requests about the challenges in their lives.

More Tips for Getting Started with Prayer

I suggest recording the things you pray for in a prayer journal. I have a prayer notebook which goes back to my girls' toddler years. As I look back through it, I am reminded of the times God answered prayers directly, and also the ways God provided strength and comfort during times of challenge

and grief. The prayers of gratitude and adoration I have recorded remind me of God's love and presence throughout the journey of parenthood.

Parents, be encouraged. There is no one right way to pray. What matters most is that your prayer is authentic, spoken from the hopes and fears of your heart. God knows you and delights in your voice. God wants to hear your hopes and fears. I pray you find the blessing of prayer as you pray for your children.
