

Teach Us to PRAY

HOW TO MAKE THE LORD'S PRAYER A PART OF YOUR FAMILIES LIFE

I am the son of a pastor, so prayer was a regular part of my childhood. By the time I got to kindergarten, I knew how to “God is great and God is good” my food by day and “pray the Lord my soul to keep” by night. I knew those familiar prayers by heart, but to be honest, I had no idea what they meant.

When I had kids of my own, I realized that my experience was not unusual. My girls could recite our family prayers but had no real sense of what we were saying or why we were saying it. My wife and I recognized that we needed to be more intentional about the way we were planting prayers in our children's hearts.

Jesus gave his disciples a model for intimate conversations with their heavenly Father (Matthew 6:9-13). The Lord's Prayer provides parents with a wonderful teaching tool for helping our children understand the purpose of prayer and more about our amazing God who loves to talk with his children. Here are some ideas to guide you and your children through a discussion of the Lord's Prayer.

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN

Amazingly, Jesus invites us to approach the Creator of the universe as if he were our earthly parent. The word Jesus uses for father is *Abba*, a tender name similar to daddy or papa. In other words, we are to approach the Lord informally as if we were crawling up into a loving parent's lap. Obviously, children's understanding of “father” is going to be based on their relationship with their

earthly father. The importance of making that relationship a healthy one can't be minimized.

Thinking about God as a parent can help children see God as someone who cares deeply about them. God is holy and mysterious but not distant. God loves us more than we can imagine. Because of this, we can pour out our hearts to God with confidence. Talk with your child about the idea of God as our father, as someone who loves us. What does that feel like? Or the next time you lead your kids in prayer, try saying, “Dear Daddy in heaven...”

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

Just because God loves us doesn't mean we should forget his awesome power and majesty. This line in the prayer reminds us to come to God in a spirit of reverence and respect. Talk with your children about how they would act if they were in the presence of the president of the United States or the queen of England.

Consider setting aside a special place in your home that is just for prayer. Of course your children should know that they can talk to God anywhere, anytime. But a special place set aside for quiet conversations with God can reinforce the idea that talking to God is also something extraordinary.

THY KINGDOM COME

God is a ruler and God has a kingdom. The kingdom of God includes our world and all the galaxies of the universe. Best of all, it includes heaven. This part of the Lord's Prayer reminds

us that one day all of God's children will live in a place where we will experience perfect love and happiness, where God will “wipe away every tear from our eye.” Encourage your children to talk to God about heaven. Be open to their questions about death and eternity.

But this part of the Lord's Prayer also tells us something about how we are to live right now. God sent Jesus into our world so we would know what God is like. Jesus also taught us what kind of people we are to be if we want to follow God and live in his kingdom. He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

The perfect joy and peace of heaven is something we should strive for right here on earth. Help your children think of ways your family can make your community more like heaven. Bake some cookies and bring them to a lonely neighbor. Use a soup can or special bank to save coins and then give them away to a charity that feeds children. Every time we bring God's love to the life of others, we are offering them a glimpse of God's kingdom.

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

The disciples knew that God was in control of the heavenly realm. Jesus wanted them to know that God was just as much in control of what was going on in the world (even when it didn't seem like it). When we ask that

God's will be done on earth, we ask him to help us live the way he wants us to. That includes being kind to others, forgiving those who hurt us, and resisting the temptation to sin. Have a family meeting and think about ways each of you can do God's will. Write your ideas out and post them on the fridge to remind you of ways to be a family who follows God.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

This phrase is about much more than food. "Daily bread" means the things we need to survive, like clothes, shelter, food, and water. But the "daily" part of the phrase is as important as the "bread" part. When we pray this prayer, we are asking God to provide enough, not too much. In a culture that preaches that more is better, Jesus' words remind us that we need to be content with what we have and seek joy in God, not possessions.

When you pray with your children, thank God for giving you the things you need. Ask God to give you and your family a sense of satisfaction with what you have and to help you be generous with your surplus. If your family is struggling financially, this part of the prayer can be a wonderful source of comfort and a promise that God will

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always provide for his beloved children. Give your children opportunities to pray for your family—mealtimes, family devotions, or bedtime prayers can be a wonderful time for them to express their trust in God's provision.

AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US

Just as our faces, hands, and feet get dirty, so do our hearts. And just as our bodies need a bath or shower every day, so do our insides. Asking for forgiveness means asking God to wash away the things we've done or said that have hurt God or other people. That's great news. But this phrase also challenges

us to be forgiving as well and that isn't always easy.

If your children are old enough, have them join you in writing down what each of you did that day that runs counter to God's way of life (you can write down the answers for younger children). Fold the papers in half as you say, "Lord, we are sorry for the things we've done today that hurt you." Then, grab a trash can and ask each person to tear his paper into tiny pieces and throw it away. Assure your children that God's love and forgiveness means their sins are now gone, torn up and forgotten to the heart of God.

Now, ask your children if they are willing to be as forgiving with people

who have wronged them. Have your children write down something another person has done that hurt them. Then pray together, "Lord, help me to forgive the people who hurt me." Then, take those papers to the trash and throw them away, too. Talk about how it feels to be forgiven and how it feels to forgive.

AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

God will never abandon us when we find ourselves in difficult situations.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 35

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