



PARENTS **PARKids** CHRONICLE

Growing in Grace at Grandview Park

TEACH THEM TO PRAY

BY GREG LONG

You may recall that about a year ago I shared the results of the "Parenting Survey" many of you took. Since then my desire has been to address some of the topics you suggested, and in the past year I have already included articles in this newsletter on a few of those topics (family devotions, arguing and complaining, ways to spend time with your children, children and work, children and the media, etc.). This month we address another topic that came up: *teaching your child to pray.* (The following originally appeared in the Sept., 2005 edition of the Parents Chronicle.)

Has your child ever asked you to teach her how to do something? "Dad, will you show me how to throw a ball like you do?" "Mom, can you help me tie my shoes?"

The disciples once asked Jesus to teach them how to do something. The disciples saw Jesus praying one day and said, "Lord, teach us [how] to pray" (Lk. 11:1). They wanted to pray like He did. They must have seen the connection between his times of prayer and the power evidenced in His teaching, preaching, and healing.

Although our children may not ask us "Teach me to pray," it falls upon us as parents to teach them from the Bible not only why we should pray, but also how we should pray. Let's follow Jesus' example:

Jesus Modeled Prayer

Jesus spent time alone in prayer "very early in the morning" before He traveled around Galilee preaching (Mk. 1:35-37). He spent the night praying before He chose the 12 disciples (Lk. 6:12-13). *Do we as parents regularly spend time alone in prayer? Do we lead our family in prayer before traveling, ministering to others, or making decisions?*

After a long day teaching (and feeding) the 5000, Jesus "went up on the mountain by himself to pray" (Mt. 14:22-24). *Do our children know that we spend*

time in prayer even when we are physically and emotionally exhausted?

Jesus laid his hands on little children and prayed for them (Mt. 19:13-15). *Do our children hear us praying for them?* Rob Seyler once spoke at church of hearing his dad pray for him and the impact that had on him. I was challenged to pray more often for my children so that they hear me.

In the Garden, Jesus cried out to the Father "in anguish," being "deeply distressed and troubled" (Mt. 26:36-44; Mk. 14:32-41; Lk. 22:39-46). He told the disciples to "watch and pray" so that they might not be overcome by temptation. In spite of the suffering that He knew was coming, He yielded to the Father's will. *Do our children see us pray when we are troubled? Do we pray according to the Father's will, or simply ask for things selfishly (James 4:3)?*

Jesus Taught Prayer

The model prayer. Jesus taught the disciples how to pray by giving them a model prayer (Mt. 6:9-13; Lk. 11:2-4)—not so they would repeat it but so they would use it as a "template" for their prayers. *Do we teach our children how to pray? On the back of this newsletter are some suggestions for doing just that.*

Warnings concerning prayer. Jesus warned against praying hypocritically simply "to be seen [and heard] by others" (Mt. 6:5-6). *Do we teach our children not to pray simply to impress others?* He also warned against heaping up "empty phrases" (or vain repetitions) (Mt. 6:7-8). *Do we teach our children to avoid repeating the same phrases or prayers over and over without thinking about them?*

Parables about prayer. Jesus used parables (stories) to teach people about prayer. He told of a friend who, in spite of his annoyance, finally gave in to his friend's request (Lk. 11:5-13). He told of an unjust judge who was worn down by a woman's persistence and finally gave in to her request (Lk. 18:1-8). *Do we teach*

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our children that, unlike the people in these stories, God is a kind and loving Father who wants to give "good gifts" to his children who ask?

A Lesson from Paul on Prayer

Paul the apostle often told the Christians to

whom he wrote that he prayed for them "always" (*pantote*) or "constantly" (*adialeiptos*) (Rom. 1:9-10; 1 Cor. 1:4; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3-4; 1 Th. 1:2-3; 2 Th. 1:3, 11; 2 Tim. 1:3; Phile. 4). These words mean that Paul regularly prayed for these Christians. *Do we teach our children to pray regularly for other Christians? We have found it helpful to create a prayer notebook with names and pictures of family members and fellow church members to help us pray more consistently for them.*

Conclusion

As Rick Osborne points out in his book *Teaching Your Child How to Pray* (p. 17-19), when we teach our children to pray, they learn about the joy (Jn. 16:24), peace (Phil. 4:6-7), courage (Ps. 138:3), wisdom (James 1:5), and grace (Heb. 4:16) that are available to them through prayer. And what parents don't want that for their children?

OK, so we should teach our children how to pray. But how are we supposed to pray? Perhaps you have been taught the "ACTS" method: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. I think this is a very helpful tool to remind us the "parts" of prayer, but most children will have a hard time understanding those words! Greg Asimakopoulos, in his article "Way to Pray," suggests ways to make these words more meaningful to children. But just as a toddler must take a first step before she can walk or run, each of these components of prayer has an accompanying "first step."

Adoration = "I love you!" Asimakopoulos says, "When we help our kids understand how much God loves them, they'll be more inclined to express their love to him. Along with saying "I love you" to your kids daily, why not encourage them to tell the Lord how they feel about him every day?" *First step: In order to help them truly adore God, we must teach children who He is and what He has done. Then they will naturally want to say, "Wow, God, you are great! I love you!"*

Confession = "Please forgive me!" He continues, "Our calling as parents is to move beyond coaching our kids to apologize to a sibling or a friend to explaining that all misdeeds ultimately are an offense against a holy God. We're to help our kids seek the Lord's forgiveness by encouraging them to ask to be forgiven." *First step: We must teach them about God's holiness, our sinfulness, and the forgiveness found in Jesus Christ.*



Thanksgiving = "Thank you!" We can encourage children to thank God for things in "their world." For example, "God, thank you for helping me learn to use the potty." "Father, thanks for helping me not to be afraid last night when I had a bad dream." "Thanks for helping me remember things for my test at school." "Thank you that our family got to go on a picnic today." "Thank you for keeping us safe in the car." *First step: We must cultivate a spirit of thankfulness in our children by being thankful ourselves and teaching them to express thanks to others.*

Supplication = "Please!" The author says, "Our task is to help our kids see that a prayer using 'please' is one God applauds. After all, Jesus encouraged us to ask, seek, and knock for what we believe we need. He also challenged his disciples (and us) to think of themselves as children who readily ask their Heavenly Father for all the necessities of life." *First step: It will be much easier to teach our children how to respectfully make requests to God if we are also teaching them how to politely make requests to adults.*

Think how wonderful it will be when our children experience for themselves the truth of Ephesians 3:20—that God is "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think"!

From "Way to Pray" by Greg Asimakopoulos. This article first appeared in the Spring 2005 (Vol. 17, No. 3) issue of *Christian Parenting Today*. Used by permission of Christianity Today International, Carol Stream, IL 60188.

READ MY QUIDS

HUH?

- *On a large folding cardboard sunshade for car windows:* Do not attempt to operate vehicle with sunshade in place.
- *On another sun shield label:* May fade in direct sunlight.
- *On a Halloween Batman costume:* This cape does not give the wearer the ability to fly. [But does it give the wearer the ability to beat up bad guys? "BIFF!" "POW!"]
- *On a pair of jeans:* Wash and dry separately.
- *On a bathroom scale:* Permanently adjusted. [If something is "permanent," how can it be "adjusted"?]
- *On bottles of Rave shampoo:* To unclog pump, run under warm water. [Can I just jog?]
- *From the Indigo PC Owners' Manual:* Hardware dos and don'ts: Do not dangle the mouse by its cable or throw mouse at coworkers.
- *On a stir fry pan:* Do not use mental tools for prolonging the life of the pan.
- *On a paper-towel dispenser:* Pull down. Tear up.
- *On a box of Toilet Duck bowl cleaner tablets:* Bowl water is not harmful to children or pets. However, as standard practice, it is not recommended that pets drink water from the toilet. [I guess children are free to?]

- *On a restroom paper-towel dispenser:* If no paper, use manual feed wheel. [Wouldn't that be rough on the hands?]

From *The Bride of Anguished English* by Richard Lederer (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 150-151.



I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW A LOVING GOD CAN LET
BACK-TO-SCHOOL HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

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