

3 Powerful Ways Our Children Teach Us How to Pray

As I type these words, my daughter is snuggled up next to me with her head resting on my stomach. She's been mostly quiet, but throughout the past few minutes, she's softly spoken a thought: "I loved seeing the ducks today." A question: "When am I going to Madison's house?" A praise: "I love you, Mommy. You're the best mommy in the world."

In just minutes, she has shared her heart, sought clarity about the future and expressed authentic praise—sounds like a pretty solid understanding of prayer to me. No wonder Jesus told us we must change to become childlike (Matt. 18:3). He wasn't just being cute. He was giving us an important spiritual secret.

So ... what is a childlike prayer? Three key characteristics come to mind that would enrich our communion with God:

1. **First, children are completely self-absorbed.**

When my son bursts into my bedroom each morning, he's already in midsentence, all his thoughts about dinosaurs and the ice age and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony spilling out into space.

He doesn't stop and think, "Wait, I can only talk to her about adult things, not these silly things on my mind." Of course not. I want to hear what's on his mind. Those things will probably change as he matures, but the only way to build a relationship is to begin where we are now.

The future you cannot approach God. Only the you whom you are today can.

To pray genuinely, to connect with the heart of our Father, we must simply begin with where we are now. The biggest obstacle to intimacy is waiting until we feel prayerful or spiritual or

trying to get our thoughts neat and tidy before we begin. In Paul Miller's life-giving and supremely practical book, *A Praying Life*, he explains, "If you don't begin with where you are, then where you are will sneak in the back door. Your mind will wander to where you are weary" (Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*).

Isn't this true? If your mind wanders to your son's struggles in school, start there! If your mind drifts to financial anxieties, start there! There is really no sense in trying to pretend with God. He already knows all our thoughts, so any attempts to mask our fears or selfishness are silly and sort of offensive, if you think about it. Who are we to think we can fool Him? Jesus calls this hypocrisy. Instead, let's come to Him like a child approaches her loving father.

2. Children express all their thoughts out loud.

Anyone with children is familiar with the common scenario of having a small (or not-so-small) child blurt out some embarrassing comment in public: "Why does that lady have such a big tummy?" "Mommy, my bottom itches!" As we mature, we learn to keep these thoughts to ourselves, but praying out loud definitely helps us cultivate a childlike attitude in prayer in several ways.

For one, praying aloud encourages us to express our innermost selves to God freely, which cultivates intimacy. While we're wise to filter our words for people, the one place we're encouraged to "pour out our hearts" is with God. It's foolish to vent our feelings to others, but it's godly to vent them to God. He's the only one who is never tainted by our mixed bag of emotions. It's not gossip when you're talking to God.

We're wise to go to the throne before we go to the phone.

Praying out loud also keeps our mind from wandering (as much). Let's face it: We're praying one minute and making a mental grocery list the next. We're hopelessly distractible. It's

much easier to focus when audible words are coming out of our mouths. It also helps give perspective to what we're praying. Some things seem one way in our minds, but when they're spoken into the air, we can see them more clearly. This is especially true concerning confession.

It's easy to think a confessional thought about something we've done; it's quite another thing to say it out loud.

3. Children are frank about their faults.

That is, kids call spades, spades. They haven't learned the deceptive art of dressing up difficult situations with sophisticated words. A critical component of childlike prayer is confession, and the English word "confess" is a translation of the Greek word *homologeō*, which literally means "to say the same." That is, we agree to say the same about something that God says about it. In other words, I'll call it what He calls it.

This is powerful in prayer. Often in our adult sophistication, we become brilliant wordsmiths and create clever names for our sin. We love to rename it to make it sound better. For example: an affair. An affair is a special event I attend with my spouse. The correct word for having sex with someone else's spouse is "adultery."

God our Father has names for things. He is clear. When I say, "I'm just struggling with feeling like no one appreciates all the hard work I do. I really deserve some recognition," that is called pride. When I say, "I'm just struggling because she has this big beautiful house while we're just barely making ends meet," that is called envy.

Why is this critical? Because until we name it, we can't ditch it! We can't repent of a "struggle." We can only repent of sin. As long as we dress it up in flowery language, we'll never be rid of it. God doesn't command us to call sin, sin because He wants to rub our faces in it. He has no interest in

humiliating us; He wants to free us.

He knows that as long as we call it something lovely, such as an “affair,” we won’t understand the seriousness of sin—that it takes us far, far away from Him. Remember, this isn’t a game. Sin isn’t cute.

I don’t want to cuddle up with what Christ died to free me from. Sin only leads to death. It only leads to destruction, bondage, grief. He wants me, His child, to be free.

We deal frankly, confess openly, speak honestly, refusing to go through religious motions or hide our true selves. We come just as we are, runny-nosed, self-absorbed children in need of the Father’s love and care. Let’s learn from those littles all around us and come to God with candor, as His kids. {eoa}

Kari Patterson reaches thousands of women worldwide through speaking events and her popular blog, “Sacred Mundane.” She’s a pastor’s wife, homeschool mom, Bible teacher, mentor and passionate seeker of truth. All royalties from the sales of her book, *Sacred Mundane*, will benefit World Vision’s work with women and children in need. Her online home is [. She is also active on Facebook \(sacredmundane\) and Twitter \(@sacredmundane\).](#)

This article was excerpted from Sacred Mundane: How to Find Freedom, Purpose and Joy (Kregel Publications, ©2017).