

Apply These 4 Ideals When Teaching Your Child About Faith and Prayer

According to James, God responds to faith. He is moved by faith. This is not a mystery. We don't have to search for some secret formula that gets God to respond to our prayers. We've been told: Faith moves God!

In fact, the Bible teaches elsewhere: "And without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He exists, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

Faith means to have a bold trust in God. Faith doesn't have to be gigantic or packaged in an adult-sized frame for it to be potent. Just as Jesus taught, it can be as small as a mustard seed and still move God (Matt. 17:20). A mustard seed is about the size of the tip of a ballpoint pen. That's tiny. Yet when it is mixed into our prayers, the result is huge. St. Augustine, a third-century theologian, said, "Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe."

Be mindful of four things when you try to instill the role of faith and prayer in your child. Each is simple. But when they are packaged together, your child will be able to activate his kid power.

1. Faith comes from relationship.
2. Expectancy activates faith.
3. Faith requires focus.
4. Patience is a friend of faith.

Faith Comes From Relationship

You cannot have faith in God without a good relationship with Him. Although this sounds basic, many Christians ignore this truth. They want God's help, but they don't want to take time to build a strong relationship with Him. God wants relationship with you because, similar to you, He wants to be loved. Jesus taught: "'You shall 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). This is the greatest commandment issued by God because it represents the greatest thing we can ever do—to love and serve the Lord. Faith is built on this premise!

Imagine that you and I were next-door neighbors, but whenever I saw you, I seldom took the time to ask things such as: "How's your wife? How are the kids?" Or if we ran into each other at the neighborhood supermarket and I gave off body language that said, "I have no time to chat," yet then you saw me linger in the next aisle, talking to a total stranger.

How would you feel if after basically ignoring you on a daily basis I frequently asked to borrow your lawn mower or a cup of sugar? You'd would feel used and taken advantage of, right?

That is how some of us interact with God; our entire relationship with Him is one-sided. Faith is *not* built on asking God for His help only when we need it. It's built on the trust we develop over a time-tested relationship.

We need to spend time with God by reading the Bible, worshipping Him privately (and publicly), and even journaling our feelings and thoughts about Him.

These actions help feed our relationship with the Lord.

By experience the psalmist David was able to write: "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your

heart" (Ps. 37:4). When you are delighted with someone, you want to spend as much time with them as possible.

You can model this for your children by having a daily devotional time. When they ask you, "Why do you read your Bible every day and sing worship songs that we hear on Sundays?" tell them. They need to know that God wants you to talk to Him because you love Him and not just when you want something from Him. Frame the conversation in age-appropriate terms. Ask something like, "How would you feel if your friend Debbie only texted you when she wants to borrow something?"

Don't let the opportunity pass by. There are tons of ways to illustrate that faith grows from relationship. Use your own relationship with God as the source of the lesson. Your child knows you. They know your authenticity and sincerity. They have benefited from your honesty.

Your words carry tremendous weight. Your child also knows some of your struggles and many of your needs. Explain how your relationship with God gives you confidence to approach Him with bold requests.

Then talk about how He answered prayers in the past. Don't ignore their real questions. For example, my daughters sometimes asked, "What happens when God doesn't answer one of your prayers? What do you do?" I would tell them, "I don't know why God didn't answer my prayer." Theologically this is called an appeal to mystery. But your kid doesn't care about that. What he does care about is this: "God thinks differently than I do. He has reasons that are too complicated for my small mind to fully understand. But since I love God so much, I'm not angry with Him. And since God loves me so much, I know that everything will work out for my best."

Your honesty will be refreshing. Years ago, a feature in the *New Yorker* on billionaire Ted Turner reported that as a teenager Turner was religious. He even wanted to be a

missionary. Then his younger sister became gravely ill. He was 15 when Mary Jane, then 12, contracted a form of lupus that attacks the body's tissues and immune system. Wracked with pain, she vomited constantly. Turner told the reporter that her screams filled the house. Ted regularly came home and held her hand, trying to comfort her. He prayed for her recovery; she prayed to die. After years of misery, she passed, and Ted lost his faith. "I was taught that God was love and God was powerful," he said, "and I couldn't understand how someone so innocent should be made or allowed to suffer so."

Turner's theology had holes. He wasn't taught what to do when our prayers are not answered. Don't let your kids fall victim to a loss of faith. They may never recover.

Be honest. Honesty is the proof of a strong, emotionally healthy relationship.

A mother who worked from home prided herself on her professional image. One key to that image was her voice mail greeting, which was often a client's first contact with her. She said, "I worked on making it sound upbeat and enthusiastic, and thought I had succeeded until a friend left this message: 'Judy, this is Pam. I love your greeting, but do you know that you can hear your little boy in the background saying, 'Mommy, I gotta go potty'?"

Be honest, even when honesty is embarrassing, this will prove invaluable to the spiritual formation of your child.

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