

# Helping Your Child Grow in Spirit-Led Intercession

“Lord, I just thank you for this wonderful day today, and I pray we’d have a wonderful day tomorrow. Amen.” This typical bedtime prayer was repeated often when I tucked my children into bed at night. After several nights in a row, I asked them if they had anything else they wanted to talk to God about. If I made suggestions, they were very open to adding them, but rarely initiated deeper conversation with their Maker.

I contemplated that perhaps they needed training when it came to prayer. We certainly spend a lot of time teaching them how to put their clothes away, the toothpaste cap back on, and saying please and thank you. Scripture supports this idea of learning to pray. The disciples said in Luke 11:1b, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”

Jesus then proceeded to teach them the Lord’s prayer. This model prayer includes several elements. As a teen I learned at church camp the acrostic A-C-T-S which is taken from the basics found within the Lord’s prayer. Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. These are big words for my 5-year-old daughter, twin 8-year-olds, and 11-year-old son. I asked God to help me teach them to pray in a way that would go deeper than their surface prayers for a good day, but at the same time not be insincere, fancy words they repeated with little understanding. We tried to break it down this way:

Adoration. How could they praise God each day in a way that wouldn’t get rote or mechanical? I got a piece of construction paper, and we spent a night brainstorming things about God that were good: powerful, loving, awesome, holy. They had fun coming up with words about God. Then I asked them some of the names for God found in the Bible. With a little coaxing they thought of: Rock, Shepherd, Jesus, King of Kings. Soon we had

filled the page with different ideas. I bought a cute white frame and hung the list up in their room. At bedtime they could each pick one of the things on the list to begin their prayer.

Confession. This part turned out to be the most surprising. None of them could recall any bad thing they had done that day. I was floored. I had a long list for each of them fresh on my mind. I tried to hold back as long as I could. I turned to one of them, "What about hitting your sister today?" "Oh, yeah." Then on to the next child, "Remember how you threw that fit and got in trouble this morning?" "I had forgotten about that." They were all very willing to confess their sins to God and even excited that they had something for this part of prayer. They just needed some training and direction.

Thanksgiving. This one comes most naturally when children pray. They were always grateful for the "wonderful day." Now we tried to be more specific. What are we thankful for? Yes, we had trips to the park, friends over, and new toys to thank God about. However, we talked about some basic things that we often take for granted. Freedom to worship, our own copy of God's Word, clean water, food, eyes to see, legs to run. Their tender hearts were telling their Creator that they had much to appreciate. They don't always remember these blessings in day-to-day life when surrounded by ads and commercials tempting them to want more. However, at night when their hearts are soft, they often recognize God's provision when a loving parent reminds them of all He has done.

Supplication. Big word. I told them we were basically just asking God for things. We can ask for things we need or want, but we also want to pray for others. A friend of mine shared a great system that she used to help her kids remember what they were praying for each day. We made another poster for the wall that looked like this:

Monday – Missionaries. Here we wrote the name of two specific families we know and support. We prayed for their children and tried to remember to share any details about their families we got in regular prayer updates in their emails or letters.

Tuesday – Teachers. Each child prayed for their own school teacher. We also put the names of their piano teacher, Sunday school teacher, or coaches. If they didn't know what to pray, we asked God to give their teachers wisdom and endurance.

Wednesday – Widows and orphans. We prayed for specific ones we knew. We prayed for Great-Grandma, a woman at church, and for little Alex and Robelina who we support through an organization that provides opportunities to sponsor needy children. Our son got to meet Alex last year on a mission trip to Guatemala. It was incredible for him to meet the boy we had prayed for on so many Wednesdays.

Thursday – Those who don't know Jesus personally. Each child had plenty of people who were school friends, neighbors, or extended family members that they hope they will get to see in heaven one day. It made the celebration that much sweeter when we saw a Japanese family we had been praying for in our neighborhood come to know Christ.

Friday – Friends and Family. We listed out the cousins, aunts & uncles, grandparents, and each child picked one or two special friends. Living in Ohio with my family in Texas and my husband's family in Canada, praying for family helps my kids feel more connected with people they may only get to see once a year.

After we implemented our new approach to prayer, we found our kids' prayer lives growing stronger. It wasn't a perfect system. However, they are learning that prayer is talking with God about anything and everything. They are remembering who He is, where they fall short, what they are thankful for, and asking for God's help for others. Even without looking at the

lists on the wall, we've moved past talking generically about a "wonderful day" to deeper connection with Christ.

But we're still working on that toothpaste cap.

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