

Teach Your Child How to Pray With Holy Spirit Power

I was not expecting this. My plan was to spend a few minutes in the prayer room that night following a powerful day at the Global Leadership Alliance Conference in South Korea. As soon as I entered the room, I was enveloped by the familiar sound of intercession—cracked voices, desperate pleas, and deep sobs.

“God, give me Egypt!” came the prayer from a corner of the room. Another voice sobbed, “Lord, send me to Pakistan!” In the same moment I heard a third voice coming from a tiny prostrate figure plea, “Use me in Turkey.”

When I looked to see who was praying, my knees buckled as they hit the floor. My eyes flooded with tears. Instead of the customary die-hard gray-haired intercessors, I was shocked to see little children—some as young as seven years old. Since it was nighttime, the kids had on their pajamas. One was fitted with Superman-looking nightwear; another looked like a little princess. But they were all eagerly seeking the Lord. The image of these pint-sized intercessors crying out before God became etched in my mind. It was *their* little voices that pleaded for Egypt, Pakistan and Turkey.

I could hardly concentrate on my own prayers because my mind was racing a million miles a minute. These little kneeling warriors had exposed my ignorance about kids and prayer. My preconceived notions of chronological age and spiritual growth were being debunked—no, decimated. These children *knew how to pray*. They knew how to plead their cases before God’s throne of grace. There was no doubt; God’s throne room was just as accessible to His little subjects as it was to the adults in His kingdom.

My question now turned to: “How did they learn to pray so effectively? Who made sure they knew their way around God’s throne room?” Receiving their spiritual legacy must have been extremely important to their parents or grandparents. The word *legacy* is often a reminder of what you don’t have. What you haven’t yet accomplished or will never attain. It conjures up an image of a boatload of cash stockpiled for your children and grandchildren, to be handed over when you pass on.

For some that picture is the only one they associate with *legacy*. But for most people, even believers that are well-off, another image comes to mind—the next generation. Such was the case with these little intercessors. Someone had left them an invaluable legacy. With a little bit of effort, you can do the same for your children.

The apostle Paul had to point out Timothy’s spiritual legacy. It was a vital part of who he was. It helped shape him as a man, a Christ-follower, and an emerging apostle. Timothy’s actions prompted Paul to write: “Remembering the genuine faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and that I am persuaded lives in you also” (2 Tim. 1:5, MEV). Young Timothy became the recipient of a trans-generational legacy. Two generations of praying women shaped him from the inside out.

Timothy’s home life, created by the faith of his grandmother and mother, left an indelible mark on him. His grandma and mom were praying women. And their behavior shaped his. The stark reality is that you cannot take someone where you’ve never been yourself. To raise praying children means that you must first have a measure of proficiency yourself. You only have them for a few years—their developmental years. Most people who become followers of Christ—nearly 85 percent, according to the International Bible Society—do so between the ages of four and 14. That means that as parents, we have a brief, remarkably fruitful window—the 4/14 window to teach our children how to pray. Don’t miss that window of opportunity

even if you feel unqualified because of a weak prayer life.

My wife and I are pastors who have served in ministry for over 30 years. When our now-adult daughters were children, teaching them to pray wasn't always pretty. Our kids were resistant. My methods were weak and boring. Our attitudes were less than stellar, to say the least. It looked like an unfixable train wreck. Tears, heavy hearts and sullen faces were the family portrait during those moments.

Raising a child who prays is much more doable we thought, even in our fast-paced and broken culture. So we kept at it. We prayed until we discovered creative methods to teach them the discipline and delight of praying. In one of those teachable moments we prayed for family members starting from the tallest to the shortest. The next day we flipped it, starting from the shortest and completing our petition with the tallest person's needs. They were engaged. They became hooked on the benefits of prayer, however, once they personally saw answers to *their* prayers roll in. We kept the fun prayer exercises going but after a while that was unnecessary because they had developed their own personal prayer life. We did it! Marlinda and I had successfully left a legacy of prayer for our children. You can do the same.

Money, houses and material things have a limited shelf life. If you can leave those things behind for your family, do it. But remember, any good definition of *legacy* must include "pointing the way to a better life." Your kids deserve more than material things.

In fact, it would be poor stewardship if you only left them that. What would your family tree look like if you left your heirs a *gift of prayer*? They would be equipped to skillfully handle the emotional drain brought on by terrorism, the threat of global warming, the powder keg of racial unrest and the other social maladies yet to dawn the stage of history. The power of prayer equips you to address anything and everything

life or the devil throws at you. Gift your children with the gift of prayer! {eoa}

David D. Ireland is the senior pastor of Christ Church, a multisite church in northern New Jersey with a membership of 8,000. He is a diversity consultant to the NBA and author of 20 books, including *The Skin You Live In: Building Friendships Across Racial Lines*, and his newest *Raising a Child Who Prays*. For more information please visit: , @DrDavidIreland and .