

Why We Must Teach Our Children the Purpose of Prayer

Everyone has a purpose. You are not an accident.

Similarly, *everything* has a purpose. This extends to spiritual activities, including prayer. Knowing something's purpose allows you to give yourself over to it without inhibition.

Prayer allows you to talk with God. When you pray, you connect with God. Jesus modeled this throughout His earthly ministry. He often pulled away from the crowd to be alone with God. In fact, we read: "In the morning, rising up a great while before sunrise, He went out and departed to a solitary place. And there He prayed" (Mark 1:35, MEV). Prayer positions you Godward. It forces you to scrutinize your motives, desires and attitudes. Apart from asking God for help, the sacredness of praying increases your likelihood of making sound decisions.

The director of our children's church asked five-year-old Emma to pray. She said, "I don't know how to." He said, "Just talk to God like you would to a friend or an ordinary person."

Closing her eyes, Emma prayed: "Hi, God! How's it going? OK. Bye, God." Her innocence was cute. But it captured the meaning of prayer—talking to God.

Prayer gives you strength. Prayer allows you to tap into God's strength. It also provides a forum for you to request something from Him. Jesus taught that you should "ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Luke 11:9–10, MEV). This verse provides a focused understanding of a dimension of prayer. We are free to ask God

for His help. When you feel weak, discouraged or beaten down, prayer gives you strength.

Do you remember the famous story of Daniel in the lions' den? Daniel was an adult at the time. As a foreigner he had risen to a very prestigious government job as one of three administrators overseeing the entire country of Babylon. Daniel's leadership ability was so good the king was set to promote him over his two colleagues, and they were not too happy about it (Dan. 6:3–4). Out of jealousy they pressured King Darius to establish an irrevocable law that punished its violators by having them thrown into a lions' den. Anyone found praying to anyone other than the king over a 30-day period would suffer this tragedy (Dan. 6:6–7).

Daniel prayed to God for strength to deal with this oppressive law (Dan. 6:11). Eventually he was thrown into the lions' den, but he survived a nightlong stint. The lions didn't harm him. Through this and other miraculous experiences, Daniel knew the purpose of prayer. Prayer is talking to God about anything that you're facing.

Children Must Establish a Pattern of Prayer

Good habits come from good training or the adoption of good patterns. Good patterns provide focus and strategy to achieve your goals. The champion boxer Muhammad Ali said: "I hated every minute of training, but I said, 'Don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.'" To master the habit of prayer, children need to develop patterns.

Set a place of prayer. The moment Daniel became privy to King Darius's decree, "he went home to *his upstairs room* where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before" (Dan. 6:10, NIV, emphasis added). Daniel had an established place where he prayed. God is omnipresent. He is everywhere at once. But to help your child develop power in

prayer, you must instill this habit.

Heartfelt prayer is best done in a private space with limited distractions. If you don't have that luxury, take a page out of the playbook of Susanna Wesley, who threw her apron over her head and spent an hour in prayer daily. The apron provided her with a measure of privacy from the moving about of her nineteen children. There are times my wife and I are sitting down in our living room and Marlinda will say: "I'm going upstairs to pray." I do the same thing. As empty nesters we have a couple of extra bedrooms that we use as private prayer spaces.

Your regular prayer place could be a bathroom, a kitchen, or even a corner of a bedroom. Several years ago I was in ministry with a popular Christian singer. She said as a child she shared a bedroom with her sister. This did not give her all of the privacy she desired, especially when it came to prayer, so she asked her father if he could turn a portion of her closet into a prayer room.

Set a time of prayer. Equally important to setting a place for prayer is setting a specific time to pray. Let's go back to the Scriptures to understand a different, yet necessary, prayer pattern.

Children must give the same level of discipline to prayer. Your vision for your child to have power on bended knees is fabulous. To achieve it, however, calls for him to develop habits and personal disciplines that begin with an appeal to be a better kid. Help him see that he's called to be an awesome disciple of Jesus even while he's a kid. Similar to Moses, your child is no *ordinary child* (Acts 7:20). None of our children are. They are God's children—King's kids.

Help your child to set a daily time of prayer just as you help them to know when to brush their teeth or practice their piano drills. You have to remind them until it becomes a habit.

Teach them to set a prayer time and to guard it. I encourage you to start a prayer time that is doable—fifteen minutes a day until you can do more. Do the same with your child. Remember that doable for a little one may be five minutes. Start off with one minute and then build to five over time. The power of prayer is not the length of prayer. It's the sincerity of the heart and the authentic connection one has with God. Let that be your focus!

Set an agenda of prayer. Your child is going to want to know: "What should I pray about?" Once again we can draw our answer from Daniel's story of the lions' den. I want to keep that Scripture in front of you so that you see its value. I'll emphasize a different part of the passage this time.

Teach your children that they can cut out a picture of something that helps them visualize one of God's unmet promises for their life or a need in the family. A picture of something they are passionate about can also help them find the right words to use in prayer.

Perhaps you can help them develop a prayer board—like a vision board. It could be as simple as a poster board with cutouts representing things your child longs to see God do for them. This activity will bring you two closer and also help your children see prayer as something practical. Their prayers can also be basically their thanking God for His blessings. Maybe on the prayer board you can paste a picture of grandma, who is in need of God's healing. {eoa}

Excerpted from Raising a Child Who Prays by Dr. David Ireland (Charisma House, 2016).

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