

Prayer and the Child by Ginger Peterson

The relationship between God and the child is a magnificent mystery! It is the joyful work of God and the child alone, a blending of the child's mind and heart lifted to God in response to His call. As parents, we have a vital part in nurturing this relationship. Let's take a look at some of the ways, beginning with a little developmental background.

Developmentally our young child takes in all information sensorially. The child, through age 3 – touches and they know. They touch a rock; we say rock to identify it and that information is stored. They understand what the word rock represents. They are very concrete thinkers – abstractions are still beyond them until about age 6. So how do we as parents help our concrete thinkers to understand God, Who is Spirit? We cannot - but He can! We assist by fostering an environment of prayer in our home so God can reveal Himself in a way perfect for them and so our child can easily enter this loving relationship that He is calling them to. The elementary child is filled with the delights of creation. They have a hunger for knowledge of the world and its wonders. Their curiosity leads them to have vast areas of interest. The elementary child asks “Where did everything come from”? Helping them know that everything is a gift from God delights them. Knowing that these gifts are often transformed by the work of human hands into more than they are on their own for the good of all is an amazing realization. Knowing those apples from the tree, made into a pie by a loving Mom, just for me brings them joy. The older elementary child wonders “What is my place in this world? How can I make it better?” Helping them to know God has a plan for their lives that will bring great joy to them and to the world will guide them in seeking God to ask Him to reveal His plan.

Establishing a **routine** for your prayer together at the Prayer Table is vital. It should be in a quiet place set aside solely for prayer, at the same time each day and given ample time for vocal prayer, silent prayer, and song if your child likes to sing. The length of silent time will grow as your family experiences the gifts God brings to this time! At first though, it might be only a minute. Wiggles are a good indicator that your child's time of silence is coming to a close. You could invite your child to vocal prayer at this time..... ”Is there anything you would like to say to God?” Ending with a song is beautiful. Young children under 6 are often our best Domestic Church vocalists! Songs for the young child should be simple and familiar. Maybe the Alleluia or the Amen from Mass. Simple, one word or just a few, is best. They can be repeated. This allows them to enter into prayer without the distraction of changing melodies and many words. Early elementary age children will enjoy singing all the song with younger siblings joining in the refrain. Older elementary children may enjoy choosing the song and helping direct the prayer time.

Praying with your young child will fill you with joy! Their prayer, however, may look quite different than our prayer as adults. They tend toward prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Because developmentally they are concrete thinkers, still very family oriented and yet filled with wonder - they will often pray in concrete terms. “Thank you, God for my favorite flower.” “Thank you, God for my puppy.” “Thank you, God for my bed.” These prayers, that may be repeated over and over and can seem frivolous to us adults, come from a pure heart, a sincere heart that recognizes God's many gifts of creation. The young child's prayer comes from a place of wonder. We as adults have lost a great deal of our sense of wonder, but amazingly through the gift of our young child sharing prayer – it can be re-kindled in our hearts also. It is an incredible gift from God to us! The elementary aged child might benefit from a journal specifically for prayer. During the times of silence, they may like to draw or journal about God's gifts revealed to them in the quiet of their hearts. This may continue beyond the family prayer time. Allow them the time they need.

Enjoy this beautiful time of prayer! It will bring your family joy, peace and love that will last a lifetime.

