

Pray With Me!



TRAINING MANUAL

A Step-by-Step Guide



Pray With Me!

A Workshop on Praying with Kids

Focus

Teachers will learn and experience various methods for teaching children to pray.

Time

1 hour

Audience

Children's ministry directors and leaders using *Walk With Me/Kid Connection* and parents

Room Setup

This workshop involves presentation, group discussion, and prayer stations. You'll want to set up round tables for small groups of four to six participants. If tables are not available or practical, group chairs together in small groups. Set aside extra tables along the perimeter of the room for the prayer stations described in Step 3. You will also need a computer for a PowerPoint presentation or an overhead projector and transparencies.

Preparation

- Begin by praying for the leaders and parents who may benefit from attending the workshop. Ask God's Spirit to draw people who are eager to help kids grow in their relationship with God.
- Send out invitations far enough in advance, using as many ways as you can to present the invitation: phone calls, bulletin announcements, e-mail, and the like.
- Prepare photocopies of the reproducible handouts listed for each step and arrange the prayer stations as indicated in Step 4.
- Make arrangements to provide refreshments, if you choose to offer them.
- Set up the PowerPoint projector in a place that is visible to everyone, and have slide 1 showing as people enter the workshop.
- As a workshop leader, be sure to do your homework! Read over this guide carefully. Run through the PowerPoint or overhead presentation so that you feel comfortable in presenting it. Think of your own personal examples to share at various points in the presentation. Make it your own!

1

WELCOME AND DEVOTIONS

Goal

Begin to think about how we pray with the kids in our ministry or household.

Supplies

- Handout 1, one copy per person
- Nametags and markers
- PowerPoint slides 1-3
- Bible

Time

10 minutes



Welcome everyone and briefly introduce yourself, sharing a little about your passion for kids and prayer. Pass out the agenda (Handout 1) and give a quick overview of the workshop. Open in prayer.



Read the prayer quote on slide 2, and share a story of your own. Have participants introduce themselves to the people at their table and share a quick story of praying with their own kids or kids in their class. If they don't have a story, they may want to share a question they have about praying with kids.

Allow about five minutes for people to finish sharing, and then draw the group back together.



Note that children are honest, open, and humble—they have wonderful things to teach us about faith. Children's prayers are more than just "sweet" or "cute." They are sincere and pleasing to God—expressions of real faith. Close this devotional section of the workshop by reading Luke 11:13.

2

EXPLORING THE ASPECTS OF PRAYER

Goal

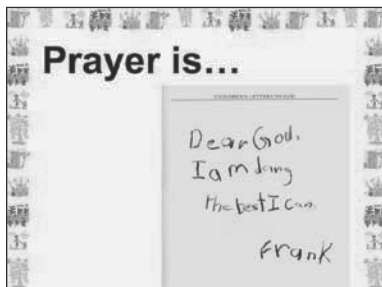
To highlight the importance of prayer in strengthening our relationship with God and forming us to be disciples of Christ.

Supplies

- PowerPoint slides 4-12
- Handout 2, one copy per person
- Pencils
- Board or newsprint, chalk or marker

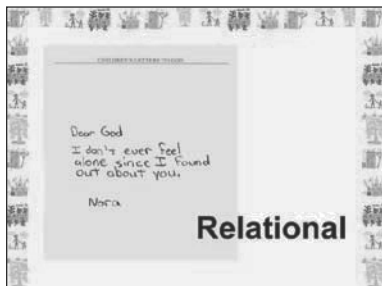
Time

15-20 minutes



4

Begin this section by saying something along these lines: As we begin to think about helping kids grow in prayer, it's useful to clarify our definition of prayer. Using a marker, draw a line down the center of your board or newsprint. On one side write "Prayer is . . ." and on the other, "Prayer is not . . ." Encourage the group to offer ideas until the page is full.



5

Summarize what the group has come up with and then say, Christ tells us something wonderful about the nature of our connection with God in the first line of the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father, who art in heaven." As we pray, our loving, parent-child relationship with God is reinforced.

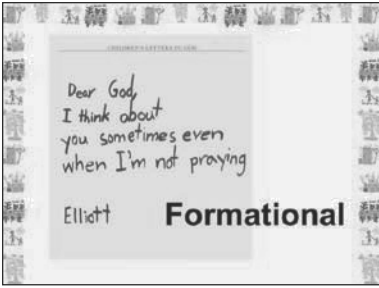


6

The Heidelberg Catechism says it this way:

At the very beginning of our prayer Christ wants to kindle in us what is basic to our prayer--the childlike awe and trusts that God through Christ has become our Father. (Q&A 120 HC)

By God's grace, prayer both strengthens our relationship with God and shapes us as the people of God.



7

Prayer shapes us as we adore God for who God is. We express our gratitude for all that God has done and continues to do in our lives and in the world. We express our needs and concerns. And we offer ourselves to God in service.



8

God's Spirit is also forming us through prayer and Scripture, reminding us of everything Christ said. He is continually working with us and our kids at every age and stage of life to cultivate the love, trust, and obedience that God desires from his people. As we pray we discover these things:



9

- God LOVES me.
- God has an UNFOLDING PLAN for my life and the world.
- I can ask God for direction and he will LEAD ME.
- God LISTENS to my prayers and ANSWERS them.



10

- I NEED God and DEPEND on him every day.
- God will help me CHANGE and GROW to become more Christlike.
- God wants me to OBEY.
- God wants me to SERVE.



11

As we pray we learn to listen to God and to respond to him. We become co-laborers in God's mission! We realize that we are part of the larger body of Christ, the church worldwide, and that God wants us to grow and respond to him together.

Distribute copies of Handout 2 and pencils.



12

Say, In a moment we'll explore ideas for helping kids grow in their relationship with God through prayer. But before we begin, let's pause and reflect individually on some of the ways we've experienced both the relational and formational aspects of prayer in our own lives. Use the timeline on Handout 2 to record some of the important prayer moments in your spiritual journey. If you grew up in a household of faith, focus especially on your childhood years. Perhaps a bedtime prayer routine was established in your home as a child that is still a daily pattern. Or perhaps there was a disappointment in your life that led you to question why and how God answers prayer.

Allow about five minutes for silent reflection before moving on to Step 3. Use discernment as you wrap up this activity. Some people may be eager to share their reflections, while others may consider this activity very personal. Allow for a time of voluntary sharing around the tables only if members of your group know each other well or if it appears that group members have already begun sharing. Conclude the silent reflection by saying something like this: **If you haven't finished reflecting on your prayer journey, that's OK. Tuck your paper away and pull it out again when you have a quiet moment. As we journey with kids in their faith walk, it's important to have these moments in mind so that we can share our stories of God's presence and faithfulness in our lives.**

3 PRAYING WITH KIDS

Goal

To explore ideas for talking about prayer, modeling prayer, and helping kids prepare for prayer.

Supplies

- Handouts 3 and 4, one copy of each per person
- PowerPoint slides 13-20

Time

15-20 minutes

Distribute copies of Handout 3 and say something like this: For the next few minutes we are going to explore some practical ways for talking about prayer with kids and helping them get ready to participate in prayer.

Kids often learn how to pray when they see prayer modeled by others. As the disciples followed Christ, they asked him how to pray, and he responded by teaching them the Lord's Prayer. We often reflect on this prayer to discover what it tells us about our relationship with God and one another, as well as some of the different aspects of our prayer life: adoration, submission, supplication and petition, confession and forgiveness. While we might feel inadequate about our own prayer life or unsure that we know how to model prayer, it's important to consider that we are not alone in this. God accepts us where we are and wants us to grow. He has sent us his Holy Spirit to make that possible.



13

In our noisy, busy, overstimulated lives it's difficult for any of us—kids, adolescents, or adults—to pause and make space for God. So it's important to give kids the time and tools to help them leave the wiggles and giggles behind as they prepare for a quiet time. Handout 3 has some great ideas for helping kids quiet themselves and focus their attention on God. I hope they'll be a springboard to your own creative ideas.

In your groups, assign one person to be the leader, and use the next three minutes to practice one of these methods.



14

Guiding times of group prayer with kids offers a great opportunity to talk with them about how we express ourselves through our bodies in prayer. In her book *Real Kids, Real Faith*, Karen Yust talks about bodily knowledge—that is, how the position of our body when we pray communicates and invokes certain feelings.



If time is short, assign each of the groups one of the examples in Handout 3. If you have an extended amount of time, allow the groups to try all four of the ideas.

Ask the group to show you with their bodies what it looks like to pray and note some of the many different postures of prayer. Then have the group return to their normal seated positions.

Encourage group members to try this activity with kids and encourage them to talk about each posture, using some of the following questions:

- Why do we sometimes kneel when we pray?
- Why do some people stand and raise up their hands?
- When might someone lay flat on the ground or flat on their bed to pray?

Leaders can have kids try a variety of prayer postures—perhaps a different one each week, and ask them questions afterward.

- What did it feel like to kneel today?
- Were you glad to kneel in prayer or would you rather stand?

Suggest that leaders can allow kids to choose their prayer posture as they enter times of prayer. And they can be open to learning from kids, trying out the prayer postures that they suggest.



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This prayer section will be most interesting if you weave in your own stories of praying with kids, and the things that worked (or didn't work) with your kids. Say something like this: **As we pray with kids, it's wise to keep the following things in mind.**



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Kids “catch” prayer as we model it.

- Kids need to hear the emotion in our voices as we pray and see the way our bodies express reverence, joy, or sorrow. This reinforces the relational aspect of prayer.
- Listen carefully, ask questions, and take time to pray with kids as they share concerns and joys. These actions model the love of God and remind kids that God is available and ready to listen, care, and act.
- Advocate for intergenerational prayer in a variety of ways: If your church has a prayer coordinator you can help that person work out a plan to include children praying during worship services. Commissioning or baptism services are ideal times to include children in prayer.

Kids' attention spans are short.

- It's hard for kids to sit through long prayers! Kids need leaders to keep their prayers short so that they'll be able to keep up, and so they'll know that their own short prayers are pleasing to God.
- Break up prolonged times of prayer by pausing to pray for each request as it is offered and by encouraging kids to pray for one another's requests.

Kids need structure.

- Give kids prayer instructions so they'll know what to expect and how to participate.
- Some examples of prayer instructions: “We are going to hold hands and pray around the circle today. If you don't want to pray you can lightly squeeze the hand of the person next to you so the person will know it's his or her turn.” Or, “Today we going on a prayer walk. We will pause in front of different Sunday school rooms and pray for that class. Think about which class you might like to pray for, and when we arrive there we will pause and you will have the chance to pray.”
- While we want to leave room for the Holy Spirit to work spontaneously, we also need to create an environment where kids feel comfortable and secure because they know how and when to participate.

Kids learn through repetition and practice.

- Shy kids or kids who come from homes where the family doesn't pray regularly may be hesitant to join in on prayer times.
- Some examples for incorporating kids in prayer: Use one word prayers like, “Lord we thank you for _____,” and ask kids to say one person or thing that are thankful for. Provide short phrases such as “Lord, hear our prayer,” or “We trust you, Lord,” for kids to pray together after individual requests. Use art, music, or rhythm to help kids engage in kinesthetic prayer.
- If time permits, offer ideas you have used to encourage group participation in prayer.

Kids are building a faith vocabulary.

- Call out some of the common words or phrases that kids might hear adults pray. (Examples include grace, faithfulness, provision, covenant.)
- Use kid-friendly words in prayer along with words that will help kids expand their faith vocabulary. At the end of a prayer, for example, you might say, “Did you hear Ms. Maria thank God for his faithfulness? *Faithful* is an important word that describes God—what do you think it means?”

Kids need to know that God is mysterious.

In his book *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith*, Robert Keeley reminds us that “Life is complex and so is God.” He shares the story of traveling with his wife and kids when the children were young, and listening to Christian tapes throughout the road trip. On one tape there was a story of a young boy who lost his softball. He closed his eyes to pray that God would help him find his softball, and when he opened his eyes again, there it was! Here's Keeley's response to that story:



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“We have all prayed about things that haven't worked out the way we'd hoped. We pray for people who continue to deny God's place in their lives. Friends and relatives get sick and die despite fervent prayers. If we talk about a God who automatically helps children find lost baseballs, how do we face a child who is dealing with much more serious issues? What do we tell a child whose parents are divorced or who has been abused? What do we say to a child whose parent has died?”

—Robert Keeley, *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith*



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“Imagine the kinds of thoughts that go through the mind of a child who listens over and over to messages like the one about the softball. *If God cares enough to find a softball for the little boy whose heart was really turned toward God, then is it my fault that my friend got sick? Is it my fault that my parents got divorced? Didn't I pray hard enough? Didn't I believe enough?*”

—Robert Keeley, *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith*



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Say something like this: **It's important that we let kids know that our Almighty God has a good plan, and that we can always trust him because he loves us. But God's love, at times, is expressed in mysterious ways that we don't always understand. Kids need to know that God always listens to and answers our prayers. Sometimes the answer is *yes*, sometimes *no*, and sometimes *wait*.**

As we share the stories of Scripture we can draw kids' attention to times when God answers prayers in those three ways. We can wonder with them about how Jesus might have felt when he prayed,

“Lord take this cup from me, but not my will but yours be done”; when Paul prayed for his thorn to be removed and God said, “My grace is sufficient for you”; when Hannah waited and hoped as she prayed for the child God eventually gave her. We can talk with kids about their own lives and ours, wondering and waiting to see how God might answer the prayers that we offer.

Distribute copies of Handout 4 for participants to keep for their own reference. Pause for a few minutes to see if there are any questions before moving on to the final step in this workshop. Turn all questions to the group for discussion and sharing of ideas.



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4 PRACTICING PRAYER

Goal

To experience a variety of prayer activities that can be used for praying with children.

Supplies

- Handout 5, one copy per person
- Tape
- Tables or wall space for various prayer stations
- Bell
- Watch (or a visible clock in the room)
- Extra supplies as described in Handout 5

Time

15-20 minutes

Photocopy and cut apart each set of instructions in Handout 5. Create prayer stations around the room by attaching the instructions to the wall (leaving ample space in between each station) or by placing the instructions in the center of each the tables you are using in the workshop. Within each station there may be more than one option. You may want to pick and choose which stations and options you use.

Say something like this: **We are going to conclude our workshop by visiting various stations that guide us through prayer exercises you may want to use with your kids (or with your leadership teams, if you lead the children's ministry at your church).**

Depending on the size of the group, divide participants among table groups or in groups of three. Instruct them to go to one of the prayer stations, read the instructions, and pray together or individually as the instructions encourage. Explain that it's OK for people to walk around the prayer stations individually if they prefer not to join a group. Group members should listen for a bell every five minutes; that's a reminder to wrap up their prayer time and move to another station (if they haven't already). It's unlikely that each group will have the chance to visit every prayer station, so set copies of Handout 5 near the door for people to pick up as they exit.

Join a group to participate in the prayer stations, keeping track of the time and ringing the bell every five minutes. When the time for the workshop has ended, ring the bell a final time and thank everyone for attending.

option option

Pray With Me Workshop

Option to
step 4

Instead of setting up prayer stations, you may want to distribute Handout 5 to each person and have them discuss it around their tables or in groups. Allow time for them to read through the ideas together and talk about how they would adapt them for their kids. Encourage them to do some creative brainstorming to add new ideas to the list. Leave five minutes at the end to wrap up by allowing groups to share the new ideas they've discussed.

End this workshop by encouraging everyone in the group to choose a prayer posture for the closing prayer. Offer gratitude to God for the gift of prayer and the joy of joining kids on their faith journey.

Workshop Outline

Step 1: Welcome and Devotions

Notes:

Step 2: Exploring the Aspects of Prayer

Notes:

Step 3: Praying with Kids

Notes:

Step 4: Practicing Prayer

Notes:

Prayer Experiences

Take a moment to consider important prayer experiences along your faith journey. Record these experiences on the timeline below.



Preparing to Pray

Idea 1: Prayer Postures

This prayer postures exercise can be modified for use in many settings.

This is a Sunday morning “Children’s Moment” (a children’s sermon) for the whole season of Lent.

Goals

To provide a serial worship experience for children throughout the whole season of Lent; to teach the disciplines of silence, devotion, and prayer in an age-appropriate way.

How It Works

Our Children’s Moments generally incorporate many values of Children and Worship. We try to use pictures, stories, and symbols from the Bible and from the worship tradition. We avoid the usual object lessons. Our tone is comparatively low-key and reserved, almost “matter of fact.” We do not ask very many questions, but speak deliberately, directly, and warmly, in an atmosphere of safety and calm security. We assume that children are able and want to worship as much as adults do. This series of movements is about prayer.

Week 1: Let me show you how we make our legs quiet. *Pastor kneels.* I would like you all to kneel like I am and make your legs quiet. Let’s see how long we can be quiet. *Lead them in quietness for a good thirty seconds.* Let’s pray. *Then pray that God would bless them this Lent.*

Week 2: Let’s make our legs quiet. *All kneel.* Now let me show you how to make our hands quiet. *Pastor folds hands.* I would like you all to make your hands quiet just like me. Let’s see how long we can be quiet. *A generous silence, enough to slightly stretch them.* Let’s pray.

Week 3: Let’s make our legs quiet. Let’s make our hands quiet. Now let’s make our heads quiet. *Pastor bows his head.* This is

how I make my head quiet. I want you all to make your heads quiet. Let’s see how long we can be quiet. *A slightly longer silence.* Let’s pray.

Week 4: Let’s make our legs quiet. Let’s make our hands quiet. Let’s make our heads quiet. Now let’s make our minds quiet. This is the hardest thing, to make our minds quiet. Our minds are quiet when we sleep, so to make our minds quiet we close our eyes. Let’s close our eyes and see how long we can be quiet. *Silence.* Let’s pray.

Week 5: Let’s do all four ways to make our bodies quiet. Let’s make our legs quiet. Let’s make our hands quiet. Let’s make our heads quiet. Let’s make our minds quiet. We want to be quiet so we can pray. Let’s see how long we can be quiet. *Silence.* Let’s pray.

Palm Sunday: Stand up with me. Breathe softly along with me. Now let’s raise our hands up in the air. Stick them straight up. Our hands are not being quiet. Sometimes our praying is not quiet praying. I’m going to pray a loud prayer. Hosanna! Say it with me, shout it, Hosanna! That’s a prayer. Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

What It Accomplishes

This proved extremely popular, and the children responded readily.

Who to Contact:

Daniel Meeter, Senior Pastor, or
Kathleen Schellenberg, Children’s
Ministry Director
Central Reformed Church
10 College Ave NE
Grand Rapids, MI, 49503
Phone: 1-616-456-1336
Email: kschellenberg@i2k.com

Idea 2: Be Still

This quieting activity provides a model for entering prayer through Scripture meditation.

Open your Bible to Psalm 46 as you say, **Although God can hear us pray even when it's noisy, sometimes it can be hard for us to concentrate and talk to God when everything around us is busy or loud. David, a Bible-times guy who had a real way with words, knew that. He wrote these words in the Bible in Psalm 46: "Be still and know that I am God." Those words are a great way to help you get your heart and mind and body ready to talk to God, and that's how we're going to use them today. We're going to say the words "Be still and know that I am God" together. Each time we say them, we're going to remove one word until there is only one word left. When we're done, it should be very quiet in the room, and that's when we're going to pray. Close your eyes, fold your hands, and get ready to say the words with me.**

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know that.

Be still and know.

Be still and.

Be still.

Be.

Pause so everyone can listen to the quiet.

Idea 3: Breathe Deeply

Simply encourage your group to close their eyes, take two slow deep breaths, and focus their mind on one thing they are thankful for. This activity may be repeated regularly, replacing thankfulness with one characteristic of God, one person to be prayed for, one concern to bring to God, and so on.

Idea 4: Sing

Sing a slow, prayerful song a cappella or accompanied by music. Use sign language or motions as you sing.

Age Level Tips for Prayer

Preschool

- Associate prayer with good things.
- Offer prayers of thanksgiving and praise.
- Use simple language from experiences kids understand.
- No particular body position is necessary, though kids this age may enjoy adding movements to their prayers.
- Recite simple prayers; in some cases preschoolers may add their own ideas to form prayers.
- Preschoolers need not always close their eyes in prayer.

Kindergarten-Grade 1

- Kids this age can express their love for Jesus in their own words.
- Pray spontaneous prayers. “Talk” to God.
- Prayer can be two to five short sentences of everyday speech.
- Talk with kids about the day: things that made them happy or sad, kindnesses they experienced, how God helped them—and then pray.
- Begin requests for help: “Help me to remember to cross the street carefully . . . to take turns . . . to help others.”
- Draw the themes of the Bible stories into prayers.

Grades 2-3

- Kids this age often include prayer as part of their daily routines.
- Prayers are often self-centered but sincere and offered in faith.
- “Why” and “how” questions about God surface at this age. Encourage kids to ask God those questions in prayer.
- Create litany prayers together; ask kids to compose their own prayers and express them spontaneously.
- Talk about prayer as building a close relationship with God; encourage kids to bring the things they are happy or sad about to God.
- Give opportunities for sentence prayers after discussion of what we are thankful for or other topics that come up in the lesson.
- Acknowledge our need for forgiveness.
- Encourage kids to take an active role in singing and praying during the worship service.

Grades 4-6

- Kids this age are sensitive toward the needs of others; their prayers may reflect a concern for those in need.
- Include intercessory prayer in your class time.
- Help children explore, understand, and appreciate the prayers used in formal worship.
- Continue talking about prayer as a way to build a close relationship with God; encourage a daily time of devotion.
- Encourage preteens to pray for guidance in everyday life and difficult times.
- As they learn more about the character of Christ, encourage kids to pray for the Spirit to help them become more like Jesus.
- Help preteens hear what God is saying to them or asking of them through God's Word.
- Kids this age are more inclined to look inward than younger children and may ask questions and wonder about making a commitment to Christ.

Prayer Stations

Station 1: Praise and Adoration

As we share Bible stories with kids, we want to help them discover ways to praise God for who he is. As we teach the creation story, we praise God for his creativity. When we tell the story of Daniel in the lion's den, we praise him because he is our protector.

Option 1: Praising God's Name

- Scissors
- Posterboard, three sheets
- Tape
- Crayons or pencils

Using three sheets of posterboard, cut out huge letters G-O-D. Display the letters on one wall of your Sunday school room. After the Bible story, have the kids call out what they learned about God in that story. Write their words or phrases within the big letters that spell God's name (older kids will want to write the words themselves). Pause together to praise and adore God using the words and phrases you've recorded. Continue to create a visual reminder of how great the name of the Lord is by adding new words each week. Don't be concerned if you repeat many of them.

Option 2: Singing Our Praise

- CD player and praise CDs
- Children's songbook

There are many songs that can help us sing our praise, such as "Praise the Lord with the Sound of Trumpet" or "I Will Exalt My God, My King." Consider adding dance or motions of various kinds to enhance our praise. Kids love to make up motions and movements to accompany songs of praise!

Station 2: Confession

Option 1: Prayer of Confession

- No supplies needed

Let kids know that confession means agreeing with God. One aspect of confession is telling God who he is to you. This prayer gives children an opportunity to personalize their connection with Jesus.

Complete this sentence:

Jesus you are my _____ (Savior, friend, shepherd, and so on)

You may also wish sing a confession using an a cappella song like "Father, I Adore You."

Option 2: Prayer of Forgiveness

- Blank pieces of paper (for a journal entry)
- Pencils

Another aspect of confession is telling God where you have missed the mark in living for him. You can teach kids this simple prayer that they can share silently or write about in a prayer journal.

God, I have not done all the things you would want me to do. I'm sorry that I wasn't following you when I: _____ . Thank you for forgiving me.

Station 3: Thanksgiving

Option 1: Echo Prayer

- No supplies needed

When leading kids in prayers of thanksgiving you may want to try a responsive prayer like the one below. This type of prayer is great for kids because they begin to learn the vocabulary of faith through repetition. It also blends rote and spontaneous prayer, allowing the kids to experience the unity of believers in corporate prayer while also giving them space to verbalize their own expressions of gratitude to God. Like the prayer below, you can use the Psalms as inspiration for your own responsive prayer to use in the classroom. You may even want to add sign language or other hand motions that allow the kids to pray with their whole body. Echo prayers like these are also a helpful way to involve shy children and teach the language of prayer. Have children complete the sentences with their own thanksgivings.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

I thank you for _____.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

I thank you for _____.

Continue until all the kids have had an opportunity to express themselves.

Option 2: Picture Prayer

- Paper (for drawing)
- Crayons

Younger children may also enjoy drawing pictures of things for which they thank God. Then they can hold up the picture and tell God thanks for that item/person.

Station 4: Supplication/Asking

When teaching supplication we help kids discover that we may ask God for whatever we need for ourselves and for the needs of others (intercession).

Option 1: The Asking Pie

- Handout 6, one per person

In the six-piece pie, write three prayers asking for your own needs and three prayers asking for the needs of others.

Option 2: Prayer Chain

- Scissors
- Colorful construction paper, cut into strips
- Glue stick or stapler

Have children write requests on strips of colored paper and then paste them together in a chain. Pray the requests as you join them together.

Option 3: Jelly Bean Prayer

- Bowl of jelly beans

Keep a jar of jelly beans in your classroom. Pass out three jelly beans per person. Assign prayer requests to the various colors. For example, if you have a black one, pray for yourself. If you have a red one, pray for a close friend, for an orange one, pray for someone who doesn't know Jesus. Pray for the pastor if you have purple, and your parents or family if you have green.

Option 4: Prayer Jar

- Jar
- Paper cut into squares or strips
- Pencils or crayons

Have a prayer request jar where children may write down requests and later have these requests prayed for by members of the class.

Station 5: Listening and Submission

In John 10 Jesus calls himself the good shepherd. We are his sheep, who hear his voice and know what he says. There are many ways to hear Jesus' voice: through the words of Scripture, the wisdom of people near to us, music, art, and silence. Often Jesus speaks in a still, small voice in our minds. We need to explore with our children what it means to listen for his voice.

Option 1: Silent Prayer

- No supplies needed

Ask kids to talk about a lesson or incident from the class. Ask, **How did God speak to you through that lesson? Or, What is God saying to you in this memory verse?**

As kids share, pause between their comments and encourage kids to pray silently to God about the things he is speaking to them. Provide about a shorter amount of time for young children (10 seconds or so) and a longer amount for older kids. Wrap up the prayer time by encouraging kids to find quiet spaces at home and school or daycare where they can listen for God and talk to him.

Option 2: Creative Listening

- Bible or Bible memory verse
- Piece of art or symbol of faith
- Radio set to a classical music station

Display picture of a Bible story like “The Return of the Prodigal” or an object such as a cross, dove, or another symbol from Scripture. Or play a song with meaningful lyrics or instrumentation. Encourage kids to look at, touch, or listen to these pieces of art quietly for a few minutes. Provide a journal and encourage kids to write or pray silently about what God is saying to them through these pieces.

Station 6: Praying for the Children of the World

- World map or globe
- Copy of the book *Window On the World* by Daphne Spragget and Jill Johnstone, optional
- List of the names and locations of missionaries that your church supports, optional

This prayer activity is perfect for Pentecost Sunday. Bring a world map or globe to your classroom. Remind kids that God wants people from everywhere in the world to hear about his great love and come to follow Jesus. If you use this activity on Pentecost, talk about how the message of God's love began to spread in amazing ways.

Point to a place on the map and take turn praying for the children in that country. You may also wish to use Jill Johnstone's book *You Can Change the World* or your denominational missionary prayer lists to pray for people in other countries.

Station 7: Pray the Scriptures and the Promises of God

- Bible

For this prayer station, select a Bible verse for your group to pray back to God. As we lead kids, we want to help them discover that the words of Scripture help shape our prayer lives by giving us words to pray and reminding us of God's promises.

Sometimes memory work will be a promise God gives. Highlight these promises in your prayer time with kids and help them figure out how to pray the verses back to God. This will help them understand that these promises are for them too!

For example, if the memory verse is Matthew 28:20b (“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”), you might ask kids, **What is Jesus promising us in this verse? How can we turn this promise into a prayer?** You may need to offer ideas like these to get them thinking:

- “Thank you God for being with me all the time.”
- “I believe you, God, when you say you'll always be with me.”
- “Wow God, this verse reminds me that you're here with me right now!”
- “Dear God, I get scared at night—will you remind me that you're always with me?”

When kids begin to catch on, you can use Scripture memory as a regular part of your prayer time.

Station 8: Prayer Walking

- No supplies needed

Prayer doesn't only happen when we're sitting still. Prayer walking is a great way to help kids (and adults) incorporate prayer into their everyday lives as an ongoing conversation with God.

As you prayer walk with kids, it's a good idea to pair kids up with parents, grandparents, or other adults. Give them clear instructions like the ones below about where they should go and who or what they might want to be praying for. This might be a stretching experience for kids and adults who aren't used to praying with their eyes open as they walk.

Practice today with your group by taking a prayer walk into two rooms of the church. Be observant of what happens in those rooms and pray accordingly. You may pray as you walk or you may stop in a corner and pray.

—Pray out loud as you walk.

—Keep your eyes open and ask God to help you envision the people who usually meet in this room. Pray for them.

—Thank God for his work that happens here. Be as specific as possible, using the clues of the room décor as a guide.

Your kids may enjoy prayer walking through your church or your church's neighborhood.

Station 9: Musical Prayers

- No supplies needed

This activity involves making up a prayer to the tune of a song you know. This is great for kids who are musical or who love to move around, and it works as an individual or a group prayer activity. It also lends itself to a broader conversation about worship and prayer. Asking questions like **Are all of our church songs prayers? What makes a song a prayer?** and **What other ways can we talk with God?** can spark kids' imagination as they formulate ideas about worship, prayer, and congregational singing.

Take the tune of “God Is So Good,” “Happy Birthday,” or another song that the group knows. Make up as many verses as you can think of and sing this prayer to God.

Station 10: Inviting Jesus In

- No supplies needed

Note: instead of praying this prayer with group members, practice explaining in kid-friendly language the words in this prayer that might be tough for kids to understand. Divide the words among group members and take turns sharing along these lines: “Sin means . . .”

As we nurture the faith of kids, it's important to give them opportunities to respond to the work of the Spirit in their lives. From time to time explain God's plan and then make room for children to ask Jesus to be the center of their lives. Children may pray this prayer when they are ready, but it is also important for children to know what to say if one of their friends wants to become a follower of Jesus.

In their booklet *Kids Gap*, Jenny Almquist and Alvin Vander Griend use the following outline. Be sure to talk with kids about the meaning of words like *sin*, *confess*, *Lord*, and *Savior*. Young kids may be familiar with these words without understanding what they mean. Invite kids to express these ideas in their own words, or repeat the words as you pray them.

- Confess—I know that I have sinned, Lord and often do things that are wrong.
- Repent—Please forgive me, Lord. I am very sorry. I see that I really need you. You are perfect and without you I have no way to you because of my sin. Thank you, Jesus, that you died on the cross for me.
- Receive—I ask you to come into my life. I receive you as Lord and Savior, trusting only you with my life. Thank you, Jesus. Amen

After praying a prayer like this, it is important to praise God together!

Station 11: Prayer of Blessings

- No supplies needed

Scripture includes many blessings we can pray for each other and teach our children to pray. As you teach, keep your eyes open for blessing and draw children's attention to them. Pray these blessings for your children and have them pray blessings for each other. If you see that God has gifted a child in a particular way, pray that that particular gift may grow.

Choose one of these blessings from Scripture and pray it as is or formulate into your own words for another member of your group.

- “May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.” —Numbers 6:24-26, NLT
- “May what our Master Jesus Christ gives freely be deeply and personally yours, my friends. Oh, yes!” —Galatians 6:18, *The Message*
- “The amazing grace of the Master, Jesus Christ, the extravagant love of God, the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you.” —2 Corinthians 13:14, *The Message*

A prayer of blessing is a wonderful way to end your time together.

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