

Twenty years have passed since my first class of five year olds memorized The Lord's Prayer. Since that class I have collected all the thoughts and sermons on prayer that have passed my door, especially those directed toward parents, grandparents and Sunday School teachers. Following are those that have stuck with me the longest.

- ◆ **MAKE A LIST OF PRAYER PARTNERS.** One of the best gifts a parent can give a child is a Christian support group. List the phone numbers of three adults and two children. Have your child pray with each person once a week for at least a month. If you can't think of adults you trust ask your pastor for help. Praying with others becomes a habit which is exactly what we want.
- ◆ **APPEAL TO THE CHILD'S DESIRE TO BE POPULAR.** Jesus **DREW** all men to him. There is nothing that will make a child more popular than Jesus in His Heart. This is **REAL** popularity, Christian popularity, not the sicko second best brand pushed by network television. Becoming like Jesus happens only thru prayer, asking him daily to put His Holy Spirit deep inside us.
- ◆ **MAKE PRAYER EMOTIONAL.** Fear, **anger** and loneliness are among the desires that cause millions of children daily to give in to temptation. Scripture states clearly that we are to pray **BEFORE** we fall into temptation which means praying about our emotions. Prayer is especially critical to the children of divorce. (I was told this by an 82 year old man on a prayer line. His father had abandoned him and his mother in an unheated shack in the middle of a North Dakota Winter at 30 degrees below zero. He was only two at the time but said he was cold all his life, the cold of being abandoned by a parent. The only thing that would warm his heart were the first two words of The Lord's Prayer...Our Father...which he changed to My Father.
- ◆ **PRAY ABOUT SCRIPTURE.** Prayer and scripture can't be separated. You can't understand scripture without praying for God's help and you can't pray rightly without scripture. A good way for a child to understand this is to choose a scripture and pray about it seven days in a row. Trust that God will be faithful to defend his word.
- ◆ **PRAY IN THE MORNING.** David did. If he had not he would not have known what God wanted him to do that day. If we want God's guidance we have to get in touch as early as possible. By the time a child is 8-10 years old evening prayers are no longer enough. They need to know that God would much rather guide than forgive. He would rather talk with us early in the morning, **BEFORE** we get tempted, before we get hurt, before we sin.

- ◆ **PRAYERS OF REPENTANCE.** Before insisting your child repent stop for just a moment and ask yourself if he has offended God or you??? Millions of children have been driven from the church by parents who used God as a lever to get THEIR way. Still, prayers of repentance must be taught. They are like brushing your teeth, spiritual hygiene that can't be missed. Each night for at least a week ask each child if THEY can think of anything they did that day that they should take to God for forgiveness and cleansing. Then if there is a need ask your child to forgive you. Your humility could give him the courage he needs to go to God.
- ◆ **PRAY ABOUT YOUR DOUBT.** It is good if children are able to recite their Sunday School lessons, but it is not good enough. Our real job is to help them drag their doubts out into the open and take them before God...to pray over them until they have been REPLACED with real faith. Even when a child has no real doubt asking him or her questions often leads to a deeper more lasting conviction than just giving answers for free.
- ◆ **PRAY FOR OTHERS.** The first word of The Lord's Prayer is OUR not MY. It is also one of the conditions of Job's healing. It is VERY important but it CAN'T be forced. A child's heart is his own. We can ask who he would like to pray for and we can pray with him but TELLING a child who to pray for can easily lead to EMPTY PRAYERS, the words only kind...the kind that is worse than no prayer at all. If a prayer is to count it truly must be HEARTFELT.
- ◆ **PRACTICE, PRACTICE...PRACTICE.** Focusing on each of the above thoughts for a month at a time is a great start but don't stop there. Build yourself a family altar, a small table with an open Bible and a pillow. Fold this list and keep it in the back of the Bible. When you have completed the list ask your pastor to borrow his favorite book on prayer and share what you learn with your children. They will truly be the salt of the earth, strong and filled with the joy of being alive. They will be the leaders of the church and the world.

My little collection of helps in teaching children to pray has grown because of the kindness and interest of others. If you have something to add please feel free to visit my website www.teachustoprayer.ws and leave a message. If you see something you like make as many copies as you have children. Everything is free. In the end we all must ask ourselves one question: *"If we have not taught our children to pray what have we taught them???"*