

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

A Study for Children and Adults on Prayer

Family Devotional Guide

By Sally Michael

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Our vision at Truth78 is that the next generations know, honor, and treasure God, setting their hope in Christ alone, so that they will live as faithful disciples for the glory of God. Our mission is to inspire and equip the church and the home for the comprehensive discipleship of the next generation.

We equip churches and parents by producing curricula for Sunday School, Midweek Bible, Intergenerational, Youth, and Backyard Bible Club settings; vision-casting and training resources (many available free on our website) for both the church and the home; materials and training to help parents in their role in discipling children; and the Fighter Verses Bible memory program to encourage the lifelong practice and love of Bible memory.

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PREFACE

“Lord, teach us to pray,” are the words of Jesus’ disciples in Luke 11:1. But they are also the words of every Christian who desires to connect with his Heavenly Father through life-giving prayer. They should be the plea of every Christian parent who desires to lead his children into a fuller, deeper relationship with God.

It is through prayer that we come to know our Father better. Through prayer we can unburden our hearts and receive His consolation. Through prayer, we understand the knowledge of His will, and learn to bend our stubborn, rebellious hearts. Through prayer, we confess our offenses against a holy God, and receive His forgiveness and the strength to walk in holiness. It is through prayer that mere men can touch the throne of the Almighty God.

Yet prayer is often greatly neglected. This may be the result of a heart grown cold...or it may simply be due to experiences of frustration in prayer due to a misunderstanding of how to pray. For all who wish to grow in prayer, take heart from the following words from Andrew Murray:

Do not expect, when you trust Christ to bring you into a new, healthy prayer-life, that you will be able all at once to pray as easily and powerfully and joyfully as you fain would. But just bow quietly before God in your ignorance and weakness. That is the best and truest prayer, to put yourself before God just as you are. “We know not what to pray as we ought”; ignorance, difficulty, struggle marks our prayer all along. But, “the Spirit Himself, helpeth our infirmities.” How? “The Spirit” deeper down than our thoughts or feelings “maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”¹

¹ Andrew Murray, *Into His Presence: Daily Devotions for Prayer* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1997).

INTRODUCTION

In the Hebrew system of education, religious instruction took place in the context of relationship. Parents taught their children diligently as they sat in their houses, as they walked by the way, as they lay down, and as they arose (Deuteronomy 6:7). In other words, instruction was continual—everywhere, at all times. Instruction in the Scriptures took place in the course of everyday life.

While instruction in the Scriptures can and should happen in a church setting, it can never replace the humble, face-to-face context of loving relationships in the home. It is in this relationship of trust and love that head knowledge becomes heart knowledge. Anyone can share information with a child, but when a child learns something from a trusted and loved person, the child is more likely to embrace that knowledge as truth—especially if that truth is demonstrated in everyday life as it is modeled by trusted mentors.

God has placed a unique call on parents to pass on His glorious deeds and the wonders He has done to the next generation (Psalm 78:4). This is a sacred trust. God is calling His people to make Him known to their children so that the next generation will set their hope in Him (Psalm 78:7). Although both parents share this mantle of responsibility and privilege, fathers, as the spiritual leaders of the home, are especially appointed by God to initiate this teaching. Twenty-first century fathers often feel defeated in this task. Many short-lived efforts to gather the family together for devotions fizzle out, and fathers feel an acute sense of failure in their spiritual leadership again and again.

This need not be the case. Although the enemy rages against the consistent and sincere attempt to impart the teachings of God to the next generation, God Himself works to preserve His Word in every generation. He has promised to be the Christian's strength in every weakness. Humbly look to Him each day to give you the resolve and wisdom to instruct your children.

This guide has been prepared to encourage families to formally gather around the Word of God daily in a simple act of faith—reading God's Word, discussing it, and praying that God will cause His truth to penetrate the hearts of the hearers.

Continue to review, reinforce, and apply the truths from His Word as you gather around the supper table, ride in the car, tuck your children into bed, and when you rise to start each new day.

How to Use this Guide

This guide has been prepared as a companion piece to the intergenerational curriculum *Lord, Teach Us To Pray*.² Ideally, the curriculum lesson is taught to parents and children in a church or small group setting, and the Family Devotional Guide is used at home to reinforce and apply the lesson. However, the Family Devotional Guide, though enhanced by the curriculum study, is not dependent on the study of the curriculum. The curriculum lesson is summarized at the beginning of each lesson in the Family Devotional Guide.

Remembering and applying the following principles may help to make your time around the Word more life-giving for you and your family: be sincere, keep it simple, keep it short, set the tone, and solicit participation.

Prepare to lead these devotions by reading the lesson summary, main ideas, and Scripture passages. This will give you the opportunity to reflect upon the content, and it may better enable you to answer questions and lead with understanding and conviction. The Poem, Points to Ponder, and Prayer Story are further sections that may engage your heart. At some time during the week, you may want to share some of these sections with your family.

Note: A number of resources on how to pray for your family are recommended in this book. You may want to check each chapter's resources before deciding which ones you want to purchase.

² Sally Michael, *Lord, Teach Us To Pray: A Study for Children and Adults on Prayer* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Truth78, 2006), Truth78.org.

Be Sincere

Deuteronomy 6 makes it clear that in order to teach our children diligently, we must have God's Word in our own hearts (Deuteronomy 6:6). We must first love God's Word before we can genuinely lead another to love God's Word. We must treasure God before another can be drawn into a relationship with God through our efforts. There is no substitute for reading, praying, obeying, and asking God to work in our own hearts first.

Read the lesson summary first on your own. Look at the main ideas and look up the Scripture passages. Meditate on the Scripture and the Points to Ponder. Pray for God to open your mind and heart. Ask Him how to apply His Word in everyday life. Ask God to help you see how you need to change, to mold your heart to His desires, to forgive your sins, and to guide you in all His ways. Pray for each member of your family.

Keep it Simple

Each day's devotion consists of a Scripture passage and a few questions. You need not do more than this unless your family is clamoring for more! It is better to establish a daily habit of simply turning to the Word together than to set forth on a complex plan that cannot be consistently executed. Set a specific, consistent time each day for your family devotions. Six days of devotional ideas are provided (including the Family Night Devotional), recognizing that it is rare that a family would be able to be 100-percent consistent. But if you are able to do so, you may want to choose a psalm on which to meditate for the seventh day.

Keep it Short

It is better to leave your family wanting more than to leave them wishing they could have escaped sooner. Resist the temptation to say, "just one more thing," or to feel like you must teach all you have gleaned from your own personal study. This is a beginning. You will have many more opportunities to instruct daily as you sit in your house, walk by the way, lie down, and rise. Keep the Word of God fresh in your heart and seize these moments for informal instruction.

There are additional follow-up ideas for the week at the end of each lesson. If your family consists of older children (i.e., fourth grade and older, depending on your children's comprehension of written material), you may be able to use one or more of these follow-up ideas during your devotional time, but do not push your children to the limit of their ability to participate with interest. It is better to use the whole day to informally implement some of these ideas.

Plan how this will happen. If you decide to memorize a verse, this can be done during the devotional time—but it can also be done in the car, while setting the table, or before bedtime.

There is also an optional family night activity each week. If you decide to have a family night, be sure to include something to make this a special time—a favorite meal or snack, a game the whole family can enjoy, etc. Be sure to check in advance to see if you will need to make any special preparation for the family night activity. In some cases, you may need to pick up some materials.

Set the Tone

Reading God's Word is serious business, so your tone should reflect this. However, it is not profitable to tonelessly bore children. God's Word is full of interesting stories, puzzling instruction, deep thoughts, and wise advice. Be winsome in your manner, not austere and judgmental. Read with enthusiasm and thoughtfulness. Make your comments interesting and thought-provoking.

Solicit Participation

Family devotions are a time for sharing. Encourage everyone to be involved. This is not a time for you to show how much you know but to encourage others to discover and share delight in God's Word.

If your child has heard the lesson or is familiar with the Bible story, you may want to turn some of the statements in the lesson summary into questions and use the summary as a review. This will encourage your child to think, participate, and remember.

When looking at a text, resist the temptation to explain it to your child. Instead, ask questions to train your child to discover what the text is teaching. It is important that your child be able to answer the following questions about the text:

- What does the passage say? (observation)
- What does the passage mean? (interpretation)
- How does the meaning of the passage apply to me? (application)³

In asking the question, “What does the passage mean?” help your child try to discover the author’s point. Steer him to words or phrases in the text that will help him to see the author’s intent. The child should not understand the question as, “What does this mean to me?”, but rather, “What is the author saying?”

When you ask a question, give your child time to respond. If your child has difficulty, point him to the text for the answer (e.g., “look at verse 2”). You may need to give a hint but, as much as possible, encourage your child to think about the text and its meaning. Note: Where important, answers to discussion questions are suggested in [brackets]. Don’t hesitate to gently correct erroneous answers that your child gives by pointing to specific words or phrases to help him understand. Little by little, your child will acquire the skill of careful reading and thoughtful consideration. This process takes time and is difficult to learn, so work with your child patiently while he learns this critical Bible-reading skill.

Tips to Help Your Child Understand the Meaning of Bible Passages

- Look for answers to the five Ws and one H: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?
- Look for key words or repeated phrases.
- Look for “connections” within the text (e.g., conclusions, summaries, comparisons, contrasts, results, etc.). Words that may signal these include therefore, for, so that, for this reason, because, but, however, nevertheless, as, like, and if...then.
- Look at the verse in context.
- Look for lists in the text.

3 Kay Arthur, *How to Study Your Bible* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publications, 1994), 10-11.

The questions in the Family Devotional Guide are based on the English Standard Version of the Bible. It is highly recommended that you use the ESV, although it is not essential. Try to avoid simplified or abridged children’s Bibles, which often omit key connecting words.

Once your child has discovered the author’s meaning of the text, you can ask how the text applies to your child personally. It is important for your child to understand that the Bible speaks to individuals today. Help him to very practically apply the teaching of the passage to his life. He needs to know how he can be a “doer” of the Word and not just a “hearer.”

End each devotional session with prayer and encourage participation in the prayer time. Vary your prayer pattern—one day you may pray short sentence prayers, another day one member of the family may lead in prayer. It might be helpful to encourage your child to think about the text and to pray according to the content of the passage. Often children don’t know what to pray, so it may be helpful to suggest some things that could be mentioned in prayer.

Suggestions for Varying Your Prayer Times

Varying your mode of prayer will help keep your children engaged.

- Pray “sentence prayers”—each person prays a sentence or two and prays at various times.
- Pray topically—pray about a certain topic, then mention another concern for prayer; pray through several requests.
- Place prayer requests on slips of paper and draw to determine who will pray for each request.
- Gather around a person, lay hands on him, and pray for him.
- Pray in pairs.
- Take a prayer walk—stop at critical spots to pray.
- Pray over requests in missionary letters.
- Pray with a map.
- Pass out pictures of friends and family—each person can pray for the person pictured.

- Write out your prayers.
- Suggest a “prayer starter” and let others finish. (For example, “Lord you are so good because...you send rain on the good and bad alike...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us..”)
- Go outside and pray with your eyes open.

L E S S O N 1

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Main Ideas

- God always answers the prayer of the righteous.
- The prayers of ordinary Christians are answered.
- Prayer isn't learned naturally; we need to be taught how to pray.
- We need a heart that wants to learn to pray.
- Only God can give us the heart to pray.

Key Verse

Psalms 34:15—The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.

Scripture

- 1 Kings 16:33
- 1 Kings 18:20-21, 26-29, 36-39
- Psalms 34:15
- James 5:17-18
- 1 Kings 19:1-4
- Luke 11:1

Lesson Summary

The Bible tells us about an important contest organized by the prophet Elijah against 450 prophets of Baal. Each side cut up a bull and laid the pieces on a pile of wood. And each side prayed for fire to be sent down from heaven to light their wood. The 450 prophets prayed to Baal, and Elijah prayed to God.

The prophets of Baal prayed all morning; they “cried aloud” and cut themselves. They prayed in the afternoon as well...but there was no answer (1 Kings 18:26-29).

So Elijah built an altar for the wood and the bull, and he dug a large trench around the altar. Then he told the people to pour 12 jars of water over the wood and the offering!

The people of Israel had been trying to follow both the one true God of Israel and the false god Baal. So Elijah prayed, “let it be known this day that you are God in Israel” (1 Kings 18:36b). After Elijah prayed, the “fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust” (1 Kings 18:38). Even the water was “licked up” by the flames! God showed that He is the one true God, and the people fell on their faces when they realized this.

God answered the prayers of Elijah because God answers the prayers of His people. (See Psalm 34:15.)

God answers prayers for the salvation of unbelieving husbands and wives. He answers the prayers of prayer warriors who pray for revival. And He answers the prayers of little girls, like Sylvia Tarniceriu, who prayed for a pair of shoes, a sweater, and a coat.⁴

We might be tempted to think that Elijah's prayers were answered because he was a special man—a prophet of God. But people who pray are ordinary people, and God answers the prayers of ordinary Christians who are faithful in their praying.

Even though Elijah was a prophet, James 5:17 tells us that Elijah was “a man with a nature like ours.” After this important contest, Elijah became afraid and ran away. He sat down in the wilderness and told God that he wanted to die. So Elijah was very ordinary in many ways. He became afraid, discouraged, and worried.

God answers the prayers of His very ordinary children, but sometimes His children don't know *how* to pray. Even Jesus' disciples, who walked and talked with Jesus, had to learn how to pray.

This book (and the *Lord, Teach Us To Pray* curriculum) will help you to learn how to pray, but prayer can't be learned just by listening to a teacher or reading about it in a book. To learn to pray, we need two things. We need a heart that wants to learn to pray, and we need

⁴ Sylvia Tarniceriu's story is told in *God Knows My Size!* by Harvey Yoder. See the reference for this book in the Additional Ideas at the end of this lesson.

the Lord. Only God can give us a heart that wants to pray, and only God can really teach us how to pray.

Prayer Poem

*Faith asks no signal from the skies,
To show that prayers accepted rise,
Our Priest is in His holy place,
And answers from the throne of grace.*

*Faith, mighty faith the promise sees,
And looks to God alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, It shall be done!*

—Charles Wesley

Prayer Story

David Brainerd, missionary to the Susquehanna, Delaware, and Stockbridge Indians, died in 1747 at the age of 29. His ministry was marked by much prayer. He often spent whole days alone in the woods praying for the souls of the Indians. Sometimes, he would pray so earnestly that he was covered in sweat.

He could not speak the Indian languages, so he was completely dependent on God to reach the lost Indians. Brainerd knew that, if the Indians would be saved, it would be through a remarkable work of the Holy Spirit. He prayed that the Holy Spirit would so work through him that the Indians would not be able to turn away from the gospel.

Once Brainerd's sermon to the Indians was interpreted by an Indian who was so drunk that he could hardly stand up. But through the power of the Holy Spirit, dozens of Indians were saved through that sermon.

Points to Ponder

*Good praying is more easily caught than taught.*⁵

—D.A. Carson

*When we confess that we never get answers to our prayers, we are condemning not God, or His promises, or the power of prayer, but ourselves.*⁶

—Author Unknown

DAY 1

Read: Lesson Summary

Read: John 11:38-44

Questions

- What does verse 38 tell you about Jesus' heart for His people?
- What was Martha's response to Jesus' instruction to take away the stone?
- Verse 40 has a condition ("if"). What is the condition? What is the result of fulfilling the condition?
- What act of faith did Mary and Martha and the crowd show?
- In His prayer, Jesus thanked God—"I thank you that you have heard me." What does this show you about Jesus? [He depended on the Father; He responded to life situations with prayer]
- What expression of faith does Jesus' prayer contain?
- How was God's glory shown in this passage?
- If Jesus, the Son of God, prayed to God the Father, what does this tell us of our need for God and for prayer?

Pray

- See suggestions in the Introduction.

Note: Remember to check the Additional Ideas at the end of this week's devotions.

⁵ D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1982).

⁶ *The Kneeling Christian* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1986), 70.