



7 Creative Ways to Encourage Your Kids to Pray

Excerpts from U.S. Catholic Magazine article by Susan Salaz (5/22/19)

Breath prayers

They are easy, effective, and can be done anywhere. The breath prayer is an ancient Christian prayer form also known as the Jesus Prayer. Practitioners repeat a single word or phrase to the rhythm of their breath. The original prayer includes saying “Lord Jesus Christ” on an inhale then “have mercy on my soul” on the exhale.

These prayers can be individualized, are repetitive and easy to remember, and the centered breathing has a calming effect. One of my favorite breath prayers is to inhale “Lord” and exhale on “be my help.”

Movement prayers

Movement prayers encourage children to pray with mind, body, and soul and are effective with kinesthetic learners. They can involve any physical activity.

Our 3-year-old son is obsessed with basketball. So we shout out something or someone we are thankful for with each shot of the ball. Some days we begin with a stretching session, reaching up to God in praise, and then reaching down to thank God for what we have on earth. We sometimes end our session with a prayer for our health and talent.

Visual prayer reminders

Physical and visual reminders are extremely useful with children. This can be a symbol they have chosen, something they can hold and see, that helps them grasp their connection to God. They can keep this symbol on their sports bag, serving as a reminder to stay connected with God throughout the activity.

Intention is important here. If we can intentionally meld prayer into our routines, it will become familiar and tangible for our children.

Playful prayers

In 2015 Pope Francis tweeted, “Parents, can you ‘waste time’ with your children? It is one of the most important things that you can do each day.” He specified this idea again in a 2017 homily in Milan, reminding parents “playing with your children, ‘wasting time’ with your children, is also a way to transmit the faith. It is graciousness, the graciousness of God.”

Play can be powerful, and I am often surprised at how prayerful children’s pretend play can be as they offer kindness and solve struggles between their toys.

Colorful prayers

Coloring can be meditative, providing time and space to focus mentally while your hands are busy. A fun prayer game is to choose colors that correspond with prayer intentions. Each color serves as a prayer for that intention when used.

Another way is to apply a prayer device for each color. Children can remember this like a traffic light. *Go* and give thanks when using green. *Slow down* and ask for God’s help when using yellow. *Stop* and listen to God when using red.

Meditative prayers

Coloring and crafting are great ways to get in touch with kids and help them get in touch with God. Our second daughter has been a meticulous crafter since a very young age. Today, crafting has become her meditation. It is cathartic, and we now realize it is an important part of her daily routine. She seems to use this time listening to her heart while working through troubles and delights. I hope that she continues to share this beautiful, quiet time with God.

Prayerful listening can be arduous, especially when our lives are rarely quiet. We are bombarded with media consumption and its influences, and communication in all its forms can be deafening. Prayer is a form of communication. Prayer is not a way to talk *at* God, but rather a way to talk *with* God.

Christian prayer is especially exciting because it can be a conversation with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God wants to be a part of our lives, even the youngest of those lives, and part of our conversation.

Prayer songs

Conversations come in many forms. Prayers and rituals become entertainment when turned into songs—repetition and melody make them fun and memorable.

Recently at Mass our parish has been holding hands across the aisles and singing the Lord's Prayer. This added musicality has changed a rote prayer into a more meaningful experience for the congregation.

Music is powerful and mentioned many times in the Bible. Encouraging children to use the gifts God entrusted them, like that of singing, is especially important.