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Prayer

Each week during the Lenten and Easter seasons, we will be focusing on a different theme. The theme for this week of Lent is Prayer.

It is important that our children understand that there are many forms of prayer and that all forms of prayer can lead to a closer relationship with God.

A variety of prayer activities is provided, so you can choose those that best fit your children's needs. Some of the activities call for quiet reflection and some require advance planning because you will need to gather supplies and assemble a simple project that will be used by children during the week or perhaps the entire Lenten season.

For those following a lectionary-based catechesis, this theme corresponds to the readings for the first Sunday of Lent.

Week-at-a-Glance

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Supplies needed:

prayer table with Lenten candle

Gather everyone around the prayer table and light the Lenten candle.

Say to the children: Lent is a special time during the liturgical year when we examine how well we are living our faith. Are we following in Jesus' footsteps? Are we growing closer to him with each passing day?

Prayer can help us grow closer to Jesus. Prayer is simply a conversation with God. We can speak to God aloud or in our hearts. We can even write our thoughts to God or sing a song. When we finish talking, we need to listen for God's response. So let's practice listening now.

A reading from first Samuel 3:1–10

Samuel served the LORD by helping Eli the priest, who was by that time almost blind. In those days, the LORD hardly ever spoke directly to people, and he did not appear to them in dreams very often. But one night, Eli was asleep in his room, and Samuel was sleeping on a mat near the sacred chest in the LORD's house. They had not been asleep very long when the LORD called out Samuel's name. "Here I am."

"I didn't call you," Eli answered. "Go back to bed." Samuel went back.

Again the LORD called out Samuel's name. Samuel got up and went to Eli. "Here I am," he said. "What do you want?"

Eli told him, "Son, I didn't call you. Go back to sleep."

The LORD had not spoken to Samuel before, and Samuel did not recognize the voice. When the LORD called out his name for the third time, Samuel went to Eli again and said, "Here I am. What do you want?"

Eli finally realized that it was the LORD who was speaking to Samuel. So he said, "Go back and lie down! If someone speaks to you again, answer, 'I'm listening, LORD. What do you want me to do?'"

Once again Samuel went back and lay down.

The LORD then stood beside Samuel and called out as he had done before, "Samuel! Samuel!"

"I'm listening," Samuel answered. "What do you want me to do?"

After God got Samuel's attention, he told Samuel what he wanted him to do.

Now let's take a few moments to ask God what he wants us to do. Close your eyes. Sit quietly. Ask God to help you know what he wants you to do. Then be patient and listen. In the silence, God will speak to your heart so you will know what it is he wants you to do. (Allow a few minutes for quiet reflection and then close with this short prayer.)

Closing Prayer

Speak Lord. I'm listening,
I'm listening to you.
What is it that you want me to do?

To encourage your children to "listen" for God's direction in their lives, pray this prayer often throughout the week. (You may want to write it on the chalkboard at school or on an index card that you can place on your prayer table at home where it will serve as a visible reminder.)

Tough Call

By Sandra Humphrey and illustrated by Ray Morelli



Only Eric could strike out three times in a row and still smile. No wonder all the guys called him a dork. I sneaked a quick peek at the bleachers. Eddie was doing his finger-across-the-throat thing and Frankie was covering his eyes as if he couldn't stand to watch any more of the game.

Instead of going back to the dugout and sitting with the guys, after he struck out, Eric began picking up empty pop cans and tossing them in the recycling bin. He's always doing stuff like that. It's like he thinks he's on a personal mission to save the earth.

As usual, our team, the Wildcats, lost and I watched Eric amble off toward home, still picking up litter.

As I headed to the locker room, I had no idea that my world as I knew it was about to crash and burn.

My friends were already there waiting for me. Andy was laughing so hard, he was just about doubled over, holding his stomach.

"So is this a great idea or is this a great idea?" he finally managed to sputter, while he leaned against his locker to keep from falling over.

Kevin slapped him on the back and grinned. "You're a genius, man. Maybe not in math, but this is a seriously brilliant idea."

Leon gave him a thumbs-up. "Totally cool, bro."

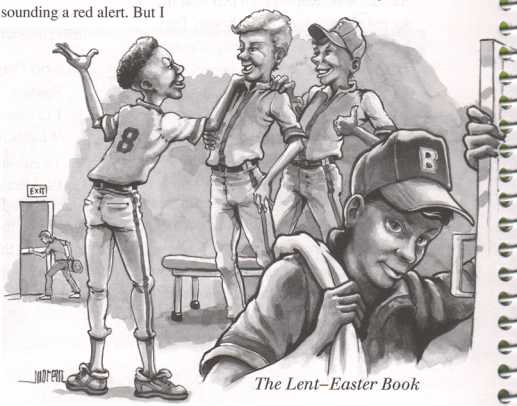
If it was Andy's idea, I knew someone was going to get hurt and all my sensors were sounding a red alert. But I asked anyway. "So what's going on?"

Andy was off on another laughing binge, so Kevin tried to explain.

"You know how Eric invited the four of us to his birthday party next Saturday?"

Then Leon screwed up his face and mimicked Eric's scratchy voice. "'Do you think that maybe if you're not doing anything else you might be able to come over to my house on Saturday to help me celebrate my birthday? That is, if you're not already doing something else?'"

Then Kevin took over again. "So Andy comes up with



this really brilliant idea. We're all going to tell Eric we're coming to his party and then none of us are going to show up. Let's roll the video: I can see Eric now. He's pacing back and forth wondering where everyone is. It's getting later and later and still no one shows up."

While Kevin was rolling his imaginary video, Andy grabbed his throat with both hands. Then he stuck out his tongue and looked cross-eyed. "And then maybe he'll finally get it. We don't want to be his friends. So when are we going to be his friends? Never. That's when. When are we going to be his friends?"

The other guys echoed, "Never, that's when."

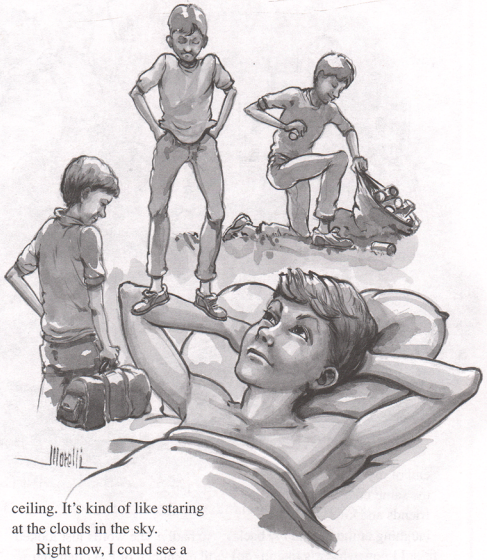
I could feel my face heating up. I knew this was wrong, but I felt helpless.

Kevin pounded me on the back and shot me a grin. "So are you with us?"

I didn't know what else to do, so I just shrugged, which I guess he took for a yes. Boy, did I feel sick to my stomach. Like I was going to throw up.

As we headed home, the guys were still making plans for Saturday. Roller blading and pizza and no Eric.

That night I plopped down on my bed and stared at the water spots on my ceiling. That's how I relax. Some kids listen to rock or rap, but I relax by staring at the water spots on my ceiling. It's kind of like staring at the clouds in the sky.



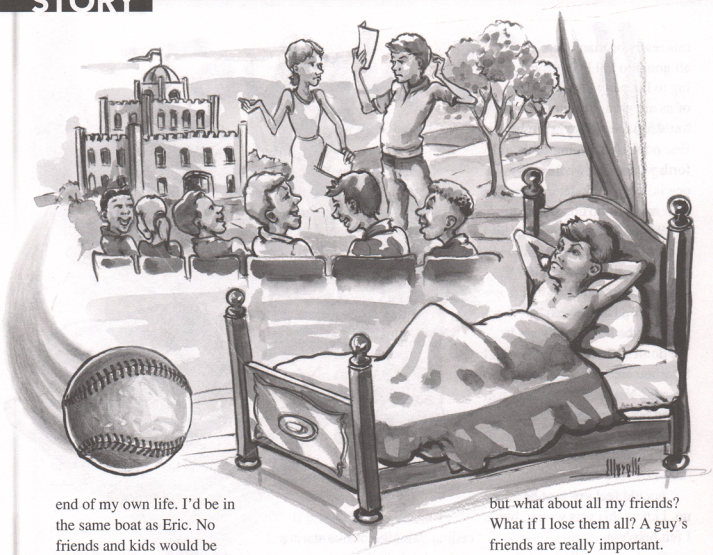
Right now, I could see a bear and a butterfly, or maybe it was a bat. And what looked like part of a guitar. Finally, I couldn't avoid the inevitable any longer. I had to do some serious thinking about Eric.

Eric and his jeans. The jeans were too short for him, the jeans with holes. *Real* holes, not holes like the rest of us made in our jeans to look cool.

Eric who's so quiet that sometimes I wonder if his lips are stuck together with Velcro. And when he does talk, he talks about how fossil fuels can cause global warming, while the rest of us are talking baseball and football scores. Besides, Eric's new this year and nobody likes new.

I could feel my stomach twisting into a knot. This was a dark day and getting darker by the second. It looked like this was going to be one of those no-win situations. If I joined the other guys and boycotted Eric's party, I knew I would feel rotten.

But if I did show up at Eric's party, that would be the



end of my own life. I'd be in the same boat as Eric. No friends and kids would be laughing at me behind *my* back.

I know what it's like to have kids laughing at you. That memory is burned into my memory bank forever. Last year my friend Eddie persuaded me to try out for the class play and, against my better judgment, I did. I can still see myself standing alone up there on that huge stage—my face neon red, my knees turning to Jell-O, and my mouth so dry it felt like I'd swallowed my pillow. And I couldn't even read my script because my hand was shaking so badly. The words just looked like a bunch of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

The other kids were practically rolling in the aisles—they were laughing so hard. Eddie ended up getting a part in the play and I ended up painting scenery.

So what was I going to do about Eric? God, I think I need some help here. I know what Jesus would do. If he promised to do something, he would do it. And I said I would go to the party, so I know I should go, but what about all my friends? What if I lose them all? A guy's friends are really important.

I think this is one of those tough choices where you know what is right, but it's still hard to do it. I'd still have my friends in my youth group at church, so I guess it's not like I'd be losing all my friends.

Boy, God, this has been a really tough call, but I know what I have to do. I think I'll give Eric a call and see if he wants anything special for his birthday.

And, God? Thanks for listening and always being there for me.

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Discussion Starters for Grades K–3

Think of a time when you had to make a tough decision like the one in this story.

- How did you know what you should do?
- Did you ask Jesus to help you? Why or why not?
- How can prayer help us make good decisions?

Discussion Starters for Grades 4–8

Think of a time when you knew that you should have done something nice for someone else, but you didn't really want to do it.

- What did you finally decide to do? Why?
- Did you specifically ask God to help you? How did prayer help?
- If you didn't actually say a prayer, was there some other quiet urging or voice, for example a verse from the Bible, that helped you come to your decision? If so, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God led you, and that's totally awesome!
- How did the decision you made affect the other person? How did it affect you?
- If you had it to do over again, would you do the same thing or would you respond differently? Why?

Everyone has embarrassing moments. Recall one of yours. What happened?

- Were others around? How did they react? And how did that make you feel?
- Did anyone come to your rescue? What did he/she say or do?
- How did that simple act of kindness make you feel?
- At any time during that whole incident, did you turn to God in prayer?
- If so, when did you pray? What did you say? How did prayer help?
- If that same situation happened today to someone else, how would you react and why?

Now suppose you have a really tough decision to make, and there are no easy answers.

- Who do you turn to for help? Your friends? Your parents? Another trusted adult?
- Do you turn to God? Why? Why not?
- What are the advantages of turning to each of these different sources for help?
- Have you ever asked a friend or your parents to pray for you when you've had a tough decision to make? Why, why not?

Have the children write a letter to God starting with these words: "God, there are so many areas in my life in which I want to grow. I want to trust you with my life. I want to believe that you care about what is going on in my life. I need help forgiving others and need help with my temper. I wish I could accept myself, but often I can't. I sometimes give in to the temptations in my life. Please help me, Jesus, to grow in…." Have the children seal their letters in an envelope and place them on the prayer table. As class starts each day, gather at the prayer table and pray together.

Prayer Rock

Easy

This craft is perfect for younger children. This decorative rock can help children remember to say their morning and night prayers because they can keep it right next to their beds!

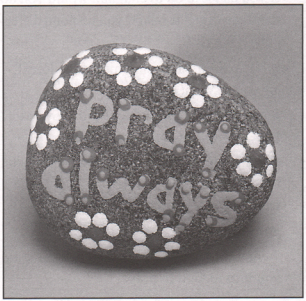
Supplies needed:

smooth, rounded rock or stone (1 per child; the rock should fit comfortably in a child's hand)
acrylic paints* (varied colors)
small paper plates or plastic containers
paintbrushes
paint shirts or smocks
newspaper

Directions:

1. Have children spread newspaper over work surfaces and put on their paint shirts.
2. Ask every child to choose a small rock or large stone for this project. It should be washed to remove loose dirt and debris (if this is a school project, have students wash the rocks at home).
3. Pour paints onto paper plates or into plastic containers.
4. When the rocks are dry, paint them with colorful crosses or with phrases such as "Prayer Rock!" framed with colorful borders. They should paint one side and then let it dry on newspaper. After it dries, have students personalize the other side, too.
5. Once prayer rocks are finished, have children hold their prayer rocks in their hands while you pray this simple prayer:

   Dear God,
   please bless these rocks we have painted.
   We will be placing them next to our beds
   so they will remind us to praise you
   when we wake in the morning
   and to thank you when we go to sleep at night.
   We know we can pray anytime and any place
   but we want to make sure we begin
   and end our days talking with you.
   Thank you for always listening.
   Thank you for the gift of prayer.
   Amen.



* *Whenever working with paints, have children spread newspaper on work surfaces and wear paint shirts, smocks, or other protective clothing.*

Prayer Journal

This personalized prayer journal is the perfect place for children* to write down some of their conversations with God. Whether used daily or weekly throughout the rest of the school year, this journal will record your children's words of praise, thanksgiving, petition, and sorrow.

In addition to this activity, you might even consider having your younger and older children pair up as prayer partners during the season of Lent. Each could pray for the other in the weeks ahead!

Supplies needed:

spiral-bound notebook (1 per child)
scissors
magazines/newspapers
glue stick
clear contact paper 8 1/2" by 11"
(2 sheets per child)



Directions:

1. Have children leaf through old magazines and newspapers to find pictures, words, or phrases that illustrate a variety of things for which they are thankful. Clip these items from the magazines and newspapers.
2. Form a collage with these items by placing them—but not yet gluing them—onto the front covers of their notebooks.
3. After determining the layout of collages, glue pieces into place. Repeat this process for the back cover.
4. Cover the front and back of collage-covered notebooks with contact paper. These pieces should measure 2 inches longer and 1 inch wider than their notebooks; the excess will be folded inside the covers.
5. Place the contact paper over the front cover of notebooks, lining the contact paper up to but not onto the spiral binding. The contact paper should extend 1 inch beyond the edges of the cover not bound by the spiral. Cut off the corners of the contact paper before folding the excess to the inside of the front cover.
6. Repeat the same process for the back cover.

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* *Younger children will need help with this project. You can buddy-up older children with younger ones. Not only can the older children help the younger ones make their journals, they can also help record their prayers. (You may decide to have younger children "draw" rather than write their prayers.)*

ACTIVITY

Prayer Starters for Prayer Journals

Explain to your children that prayer comes in all shapes and sizes. It can be in the form of traditional prayers like the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory, or it can be as simple as, "Thank you, God!" Prayer can be spoken, thought, or written. It can be silent or sung. Prayer can be private or communal. It can be short or ramble on. God simply wants us to come to him in prayer–always, anytime, anywhere. This activity will also help children learn the five (types/ends) of prayer.

Directions:

1. To help children think about their conversations with God, have them recall some recent conversations with their friends.*
2. On the chalkboard, list the topics they discussed, how they felt, how they think their friends felt, and why they like to be with their friends.
3. Introduce prayer as a conversation with God, who is also our Friend.
4. Discuss some of the things they may have talked with God about in the past. How did they feel? How do they think God felt?
5. Continue by having the students select five "prayer starters" from the list provided, or have them come up with some of their own if they prefer.
6. Then have them write personal prayers of praise, thanks, adoration, petition, and intercession in their prayer journals.
7. Finally, have them choose one of the prayers to share with the group.

** This makes a perfect "buddy project" for pairing up older children with younger ones. The younger children can draw their prayers while the older children can write the "prayer starters" across the top of the pages.*

Prayer Starters

Good morning, Jesus! Thank you for…

Heavenly Father, I think it's awesome that…

Dear God, I'm so sorry that I…

Oh, Jesus, I did it again! I…

Dear Jesus, please bless my friend who needs your help with…

Dearest Jesus, I know that you love me because…

Abba, Father, I'm worried about…

Sweet Jesus, please help me to…

Thank you, dear Jesus, for…

Our Father, I know you understand how I feel about…

Dear God, I'm so happy I could…

Holy Spirit, I have a tough decision to make about…

Don't forget. You can also ask the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, and all the angels and saints to pray to God for you and your needs.



Prayer Jar

Easy

This activity reminds children to pray more often during Lent so that prayer becomes a part of daily routine as we move into the Easter season.

Teacher/Parent preparation:

You will need to make the prayer jar in advance. See directions below.

Supplies needed:

1 large plastic jar per class or family (gallon-size or smaller)
construction paper: purple, pink, green, yellow, blue, white
measuring tape
pencil
scissors
glue
marker
6 plastic baggies
double-sided tape or clear-drying craft glue

Make a large sign saying: We can pray in all sorts of ways! Purple = prayer of intercession; pink = prayer of praise; green = prayer of thanks; yellow = prayer of petition; blue = prayer of adoration; white = a combination of prayers.

Directions for making prayer jar:

1. Wash, rinse, and dry empty jar.
2. Measure the circumference of the jar. Then cut a 2-inch-wide strip of construction paper the length of the circumference.
3. On the "label," print the words, GROWING IN PRAYER, with a marker. The letters should "grow" from tiny letters to large letters as shown here: GROWING IN PRAYER.
4. Tape or glue the "label" onto the jar.
5. Cut the 6 different colors of construction paper into small strips measuring 1/2 inch wide by 3 inches long. Place strips into plastic baggies for later use. Each baggie holds a different color. Label each bag with the type of prayer and the color.

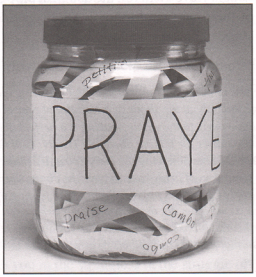
Directions for activity:

For Older Children

Whenever a child prays privately, he/she places a color-coded slip of paper into the jar. This activity helps children to realize how often they turn to God in need, in thanksgiving, in praise, in adoration, and in intercession.

For Younger Children

Every time a child prays privately, he/she places a strip of paper—any color—into the jar. By Easter, the jar should be overflowing.



Making Pretzels

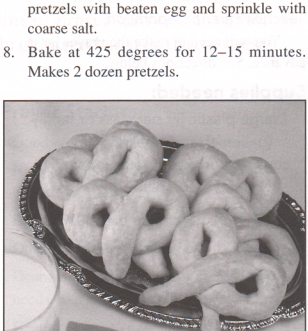
Kitchen fun can provide teachable moments.* So roll up your sleeves and help your children learn how traditional pretzels can remind us of God.

Ingredients:

1 1/2 cups warm water
1 pkg. active dry yeast
1/2 tsp. sugar
1/2 tsp. salt
4 1/2–5 cups unsifted flour
1 egg, beaten (for glazing pretzels)
coarse salt (to sprinkle on glaze)

Directions:

1. In a large bowl, dissolve yeast according to the directions on the package.
2. Add sugar and salt; stir until dissolved.
3. Add 3 cups of flour, stirring until all flour is mixed.
4. Add remaining flour and knead dough until smooth.
5. Place dough back in bowl, cover with a towel, and let dough rest for an hour or more.
6. Give each child a golf-ball size piece of dough. Have them roll the dough in the palms of their hands until they have 12-inch long strips.
7. Form pretzels on greased cookie sheet. Brush pretzels with beaten egg and sprinkle with coarse salt.
8. Bake at 425 degrees for 12–15 minutes. Makes 2 dozen pretzels.



Reflection

Redeemer of the world, give us a greater share of your passion through a deeper spirit of repentance, so that we may share the glory of your resurrection.

The Liturgy

** As you're mixing the ingredients and kneading the dough, talk about the shape of a traditional pretzel. It has three parts to the whole, making it a perfect discussion-starter for talking about the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Its shape can also remind us of arms crossed over the chest, which is how early Christians prayed. Rather than folding their hands as we often do, they crossed their arms over their hearts. Monks are credited with forming these traditional pretzels as symbols of arms crossed in prayer.*

Prayer

Dear Parent(s),

During the Lenten season, we will be focusing on different aspects of Lent: its meaning, its symbols, its customs, and its traditions. Each week, your child will bring home Family Take-Home Pages, which are filled with activities that reinforce what we are discussing and learning in class. These Take-Home Pages are theme based and divided into three sections: Warm-Up Exercises, Getting Started, and Putting It into Practice. The theme for this week of Lent is Prayer. May the activities suggested in these pages provide you with additional tools for nurturing your child's faith.

Warm-Up Exercises...

Gather the family around the Lenten candle. Have one member of the family light the candle and another read from Scripture.

A reading from Luke 4:1–13

When Jesus returned from the Jordan River, the power of the Holy Spirit was with him, and the Spirit led him into the desert. For forty days Jesus was tested by the devil, and during that time he went without eating. When it was all over, he was hungry. The devil said to Jesus, "If you are God's Son, tell this stone to turn into bread."

Jesus answered, "The Scriptures say, 'No one can live only on food.'"

Then the devil led Jesus up to a high place and quickly showed him all the nations on earth. The devil said, "I will give all this power and glory to you. It has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. Just worship me, and you can have it all."

Jesus answered, "The Scriptures say: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him!'"

Finally, the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem and had him stand on top of the temple. The devil said, "If you are God's Son, jump off. The Scriptures say: 'God will tell his angels to take care of you. They will catch you in their arms, and you will not hurt your feet on the stones.'"

Jesus answered, "The Scriptures also say, 'Don't try to test the Lord your God!'"

After the devil had finished testing Jesus in every way possible, he left him for a while.

After sharing this passage with your family, lead them in a discussion. You may want to use the following questions:

We heard how the devil tried to tempt Jesus. How do you think the devil tempts us today?

What are some of the things that keep us from spending time with Jesus? Could these be temptations, too?

How can temptations be harmful?

What can we do to avoid temptation?

How can prayer help us avoid temptation?

How often do we turn to Jesus in prayer?

Follow your discussion with prayer. Have everyone close their eyes. Then tell them: Everyone struggles with temptations. Sometimes it's not easy to do what is right. Think about something you're struggling with now. Is it like a boxing match? A wrestling match? A dark cloud? Drowning? Now picture Jesus right there with you in the struggle. Put the struggle or the

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temptation right at Jesus' feet. You go to a river and sit on the riverbank. Jesus tells you he understands your struggles. He also had to struggle. Tell Jesus everything in your heart. Feel Jesus put his arm on your shoulder. No matter how many times you may have fallen, Jesus still puts his arm on your shoulder and says, "I died that you might live for me and be truly happy. I will never leave you. You mean so much to me that I gave up my life in order to save you. Count on me to be there with you all the time. I am always there to help you."

After the prayer, talk briefly about what it is like to know that Jesus understands. Come up with a prayer you can pray as a family in tough situations, such as, "God bless you, God love you, God keep you," or, "Jesus, I'm so weak, help me." Suggest these words to each other when things are tough.

Then pray the Our Father together as a family.

Getting Started...

The Bible gives us lots of clues about praying. In the Gospel of Matthew (6:6), we discover that Jesus told his followers, "When you pray, go into a room alone and close the door. Pray to your Father in private. He knows what is done in private, and he will reward you."

Jesus wasn't talking about going to your bedroom to pray. He was talking about the "inner room" of your heart. When you block everything from your mind except for Jesus, then you will find that "inner room." Even in a room full of people, you can pray privately in your heart.

Help your children learn to find that "inner room" with the following exercise.

Have your children find a comfortable place to sit and have them close their eyes. Tell them: Imagine a breeze blowing you far, far away. Toss your worries from your mind.



Let the wind carry them away. Pause, then add: Now, relax and think of Jesus. Repeat silently, Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you. Say it over and over again. Once you've focused on Jesus, sit quietly with him.

After a few minutes, have the children open their eyes. Explain that this is called meditation.

Putting It into Practice...

The Bible tells us to "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Why not make this your family's goal for this week?

Here are some suggestions to get you started:

Whenever you hear an ambulance siren, pray for the person in need of medical attention, medical personnel, and family members.

Whenever someone tells you wonderful news, thank God for that blessing.

Whenever you hear bad news, say a prayer for the person(s) involved.

When a friend or neighbor is going through a difficult time, pray for him or her.

When you receive a card, letter, or e-mail, pray for the person who sent it.

When someone celebrates a birthday, sing: May the dear Lord bless you... (to the same tune as Happy Birthday). Song is prayer, too!

See how many suggestions your family can come up with. Happy praying!

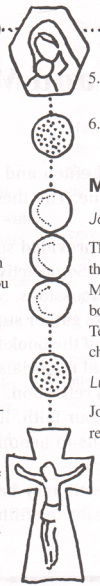
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Praying the Rosary

The Rosary is a Gospel prayer in which we contemplate the lives of Jesus and Mary. In the Rosary, we pray with Mary to grow closer to her Son, Jesus.

Often a parent will "lead" the first half of the Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory, while the children join in with the second half. But you may want to let your children "lead" different decades of the Rosary. (You can obtain posters of the mysteries of the Rosary at www.pauline.org.)

Though the joyful, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries have been around for centuries, Pope John Paul II added another set of mysteries in 2002—the luminous mysteries. Some families prefer to meditate on the sorrowful mysteries during Lent. Other families prefer to use the luminous mysteries during the first five weeks of Lent and the sorrowful mysteries during Holy Week. During the Easter season, the glorious mysteries are preferred.



How to Pray the Rosary

1. Start by making the Sign of the Cross.
2. Pray the Apostles' Creed, then one Our Father, three Hail Marys, and one Glory.
3. Announce the first mystery (see mysteries following.) Explain it to your children or read it from the Bible, and then pray a decade of the Rosary, which includes one Our Father, ten Hail Marys, and one Glory.
4. Announce the second mystery and then pray one Our Father, ten Hail Marys, and one Glory.
5. Repeat this process, announcing a different mystery with each decade.
6. When all five mysteries are completed, pray the Hail, Holy Queen.

Mysteries of the Rosary

Joyful Mysteries

The Angel announces to Mary she is to be the Mother of God's Son (Lk 1:26–29, 38); Mary visits Elizabeth (Lk 1:40–42); Jesus is born (Lk 2:6–7); Jesus is presented in the Temple (Lk 2:22, 34, 35); the finding of the child Jesus in the Temple (Lk 2:42–43, 46).

Luminous Mysteries

John baptizes Jesus (Mt 3:16–17); Jesus reveals his glory at the wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1–5, 9–11); Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God (Mt 1:14–15); Jesus is transfigured (Mt 9:2–3, 7); Jesus gives us the Eucharist (Mt 14:22–25).

Sorrowful Mysteries

Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mk 14:32, 35–36); Jesus is scourged (Mt 27:26); Jesus is crowned with thorns (Mt 27:28–30); Jesus carries the cross (Jn 19:17); Jesus is crucified (Jn 19:25–27).

Glorious Mysteries

Jesus rises from the dead (Lk 24:1, 4–7); Jesus ascends into heaven (Acts 1:9–11); the Holy Spirit descends upon the Apostles (Acts 2:1–4); Mary is assumed into heaven (Jn 14:3); Mary is crowned Queen of heaven and earth (Rev 12:1).