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## How do I pray with my family?

**The question I'm going to explore here isn't, of course, relevant to everyone – though it will be a very important one for some. And many of the principles below can – and, perhaps, should – apply to how we pray as adults, too.**

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In my experience, children love to pray. Their ease with God spans Christian traditions. They thrive on routine and will be in enthralled by the comfort and the colour of ritual. They love the Word of God and will listen over and over again to stories from the Bible. Their prayer will be spontaneous, joyful and creative.

When I first started to explore ways of praying together at home with small children, I looked around for the books on the subject. I couldn't find any. There are plenty of books of prayer for children, but nothing much about how to pray with children.

Here are a few ideas for praying with children and with teenagers and as a whole family.

### **With children**

With younger children it is important to understand how they develop and particularly the importance of routine. When our own children were small, we tried to make prayer a natural part of the day the rhythm of life. Tea time, bath time, story time and prayer time all followed each other in a comfortingly familiar daily routine.

That prayer included daily rituals of sitting down together, lighting a candle and saying a set prayer. But it also included spontaneity and creativity. Using pictures the children had made themselves as a focus of the prayer, allowing them to give expression to their prayer. And making sure that the whole thing was punctuated by stories from the Bible.

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Small children learn through play. It is the way they come to understand the world around them. They reproduce the world through their play, solving problems and re-enacting its dramas and delights. So, we must make praying like playing.

Whenever we pray in the home with children, teenagers or as a couple, or even on our own, we need to try and weave together these three elements.

**Ritual** – using familiar prayers and secure patterns of prayer and developing our own little family rituals of prayer.

**Spontaneity** – nurturing within ourselves and in our households ways of expressing prayer in response to what has happened to us in the day. Both thanksgiving and petition.

**Play** – praying should be fun!

Some years ago, a Sunday school teacher asked me if I had noticed that adults' prayers usually began with the word "please", but children's prayers always began with the words "thank you".

It is a most challenging observation. When we adults come to God, it tends to be with all

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the stuff we want to ask God to do for us. But children come with thanksgiving on their lips.

So when we pray with children, it is not us praying for them, but us praying with them, and asking them to lead us in prayer. Often where we may dither and hesitate, their praying gets right to the heart of a situation in ways we find embarrassing or difficult.

### **With teenagers**

Praying with teenagers will always be more challenging. Probably the most important lesson to learn is not to force them or expect them to join in if they don't want to. Teenagers are very interested in God, very interested in spirituality and very committed to wanting to change the world. Given the right space and the right conditions they will want to give voice to their longing for God and their longing for a better world. In the home, sometimes this will be best expressed by silence, by images, by listening to music, by meditative reading. And sometimes by discussion which then may lead into prayer. With teenagers this might be something that happens once a week rather than every day.

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***“You gave your Son to share in the life of a family in Nazareth. Help us to value our families, to be thankful for them, and to live sensitively with them.”***

*New Patterns for Worship*

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**Faith at home offers resources to help us discover God in the place we spend most of our time.** It includes support for families in how to discuss faith and develop their practices and habits together. [Find out more on our website.](#)

**Teenagers can teach the rest of us a lot about prayer.** They will want to live their prayer, and see prayer in action, or they will soon lose interest. They challenge the rest of us to see the connection between prayer and life.

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## **Prayer**

Thank you for the world so sweet;  
Thank you for the food we eat;  
Thank you for the birds that sing;  
Thank you God for everything  
Amen.

*(Edith Rutter-Leatham)*

**[Invite your friends and family to join in](#)**

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