



faith PATH

PRAYING *with*
YOUR CHILD

PRAYING WITH YOUR CHILD

Now that your child is three years old, it is an excellent time to begin to teach them how to pray. Prayer is the secret center of our relationship with Jesus, the place where we can find grace, strength, joy, and peace. The disciples themselves asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). This is a fantastic prayer for parents and children alike! Sometimes parents are tempted to just “leave prayer to the professionals” by relying on clergy and staff at church to teach these habits to their children. That won’t work. As parents, our job is to cultivate and encourage our children to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. Now is a great time to start. Here’s how:

STEP 1: DEVELOP HABITS

For Yourself: If you are not in the habit of doing so, begin to set aside a small amount of time every day for prayer. Begin with just 5 to 10 minutes or so, but be consistent. Self-care is often lost in the midst of having young children, but it is critically important—especially for parents.

With Your Child: Find time in your schedule for consistently praying with your child. Again, start with a very short amount of time, even just a handful of minutes. If you cannot find time for prayer in your schedule, take this opportunity to rearrange your priorities to make space for it. To help you succeed, we have included our *Quick-Reference Guide to the Prayer Book for Family Use* with this Guide. It will help you find many meaningful prayers from our Book of Common Prayer to enhance and deepen your prayer time.

STEP 2: CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

When it comes to prayer, remember that words are for us, not for God. Sometimes words can get in the way. Children are naturally more contemplative than adults. And they have the ability, even at three years old, to begin to learn habits of meditative prayer. Here is how to teach your child a form of Christian meditation called Centering Prayer:

Sit with your child, and allow yourselves a few moments to be still and get comfortable. Sit in a position that keeps your back as straight as possible. If you find it helpful, you can begin your meditation time by singing a hymn with your child, or playing one on your phone. You can also light a candle or kneel before a cross or icon. To begin the meditation, gently close your eyes. Choose a “prayer word” for you and your child to repeat together. This word should be short, memorable, and meaningful. Something such as “Jesus” or “love” or “Maranatha” (which means “Come O Lord”). Begin to repeat your prayer word out loud together. Then transition to repeating it silently.

Use the same prayer word every day, so that it becomes instinctive and not distracting. Children can typically meditate for about one minute per year of age. So a three year old may be able to meditate for three minutes. Begin with just one or two minutes, and work up as your child is able.

DIFFICULTIES WITH PRAYER

I don't know how to pray myself, so how can I teach it? If prayer is hard for you, fear not! It is an art, not a science. It takes practice, perseverance, and patience. Don't give up! If God seems silent, trust that he knows what he is doing. Keep it simple, and go slow. If you don't know what to pray, turn to the Psalms and let the words of Scripture become your words.

MORE HELP FOR PARENTS: SUNDAY SCHOOL

If your three year old child is potty-trained, then he or she is ready for Sunday School! Our Sunday School curriculum for 3 year olds is called Godly Play. Be sure to sign your child up by going to the kiosk in the Education Building beforehand and printing a name tag. The classes take place upstairs above the nursery hallway. Sunday School is a fantastic supplement to your teaching, and it will reinforce (but cannot replace!) what you are doing at home.

INTENTIONAL FAITHPATH PLAN

CHILD'S NAME _____

How will you be intentional this next year?

- Pray daily for *and with* my child.
- Attend church regularly.
- Schedule regular family times.
- _____

The next step on the FaithPath is *Worship*, recommended at age four. You will receive an email during the month of your child's birthday, and the resource will be available for you with your child's name on it at the Bringing Faith Home Center, right outside the Incarnation Bookstore.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- *The Monk Who Grew Prayer*, by Claire Brandenburg, is a book for children about praying at all times.
- *Beginning to Pray* by Anthony Bloom is a great little book to deepen your prayer life.
- *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence is a very small but classic book on praying at all times.
- *Loyola Kids Book of Everyday Prayers*, by Margaret Savitskas and Catherine Odell.
- *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Jean-Pierre de Caussade is a book about growing spiritually even amidst all the various duties of our lives.
- See incarnation.org/faithpath for more resources.

INCARNATION'S CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTRY

Bringing Faith Home: incarnation.org/bringing-faith-home

Children & Family Ministry: incarnation.org/grow/children