

BibleWise

Learning How to Pray

If you want to learn something, teach it. I find that maxim particularly true when helping young children learn how to pray by having them teach a doll or stuffed animal. I use this exercise with 3-5 year-olds and it always produces great results.

I start out by asking each child how he or she prays. Some give specific examples of prayers they have learned, which they say before meals or before bed at night. Then we start to look at what we put into a prayer.

- Who are we praying to?
- What do we want to tell God?
- Do we have to ask for something in order to pray?
- We talk about prayers of gratitude, support, comfort, and for others.

Then we say a prayer together.

Next, I give each child an 18"-24" cloth doll. Boys get boy dolls and girls get girl dolls. I introduce each child to a doll. I tell the child the doll's name and a little background information. Example: "Scott, this is Wesley. I've known Wesley since he was a little boy. He likes to play most sports besides enjoying biking and reading." Then I have Wesley say something. The words may come out of my mouth, but I move Wesley as though he were talking to Scott. Wesley might say, "Hi Scott, do you like to play soccer?" (I talk about something I know about the child, so the child opens up and starts talking with the doll). "Jacquelyn, this is Channing. Channing spends time playing with her Barbie dolls and likes to wear hats and pretty dresses." Channing might say, "Hi Jacquelyn, I like your shoes. Do you like to shop?"

I then ask them to talk with their dolls and teach them how to pray.

The key is to listen closely to what they are teaching, so you can make a group comment -- not just single out one child and say, "No, we don't pray like that." The collective comment will usually help the child get on the right track. The important thing is to help them see prayer as a conversation with God -- that prayer isn't just asking for something; it is sharing moments with God.

I've heard the sweetest prayers, as the youngsters become the voices for their dolls. After they've practiced with their dolls, they show us how their dolls pray. One little boy had the doll kneeling as he held the doll's hands together with one hand and put his hand over the doll's eyes with the other - since his eyes didn't close - and said, "Hi God, this is Kurt. I'm in Sunday School. They sure talk a lot about you here. You are Love. I like that. Bye! Oh, Amen."