



Helping Your Child *Have a Relationship with God*

by Mary Oldfield

We have high hopes and dreams for our children's faith. We want them to have a healthy understanding of their own sin and the need for God's forgiveness. We want them to recognize the voice of God and obey Him. We want them to have an enduring faith that keeps them strong through life's troubles and protects them from harmful behaviors. In short, we want our children to have a healthy, growing relationship with God.

We have such high hopes for our children's faith; we just don't always know what to do to help them get there. Because of this, it can be easy to fall into discouragement. I can relate. As a mother, grandmother, and former children's ministry director, I know firsthand the many struggles involved in parenting, especially when it comes to spiritually nurturing your child.

The demands of parenting can be overwhelming and exhausting. I've talked with many parents who feel worn down, frazzled, and frenzied, trying to keep up with the fast pace of life. I've prayed with many parents who know they are supposed to spiritually nurture their children, but don't have time to read all the Christian parenting books scattered around their house.

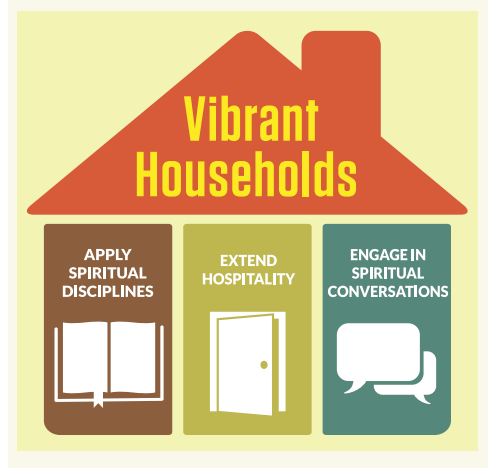
Some of us wind up feeling guilty for not nurturing our children in the Christian faith, but we just don't feel adequate or equipped enough to do anything about it.

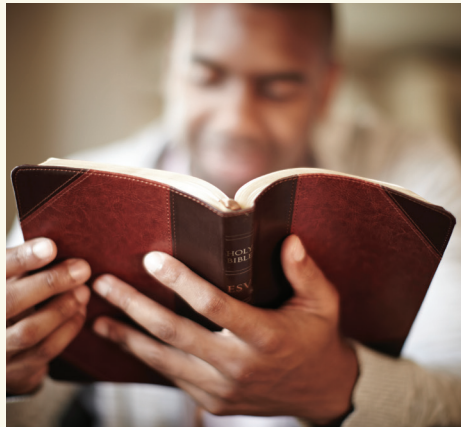
If you are feeling this discouragement, let me share with you some refreshingly good news. New research from the Barna Group and Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM) has revealed that there are three everyday household habits that can help nurture a spiritually vibrant home. What are these practical habits? The research tells us faith formation is more robust in households that do the following:

1. **APPLY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES**
2. **EXTEND HOSPITALITY**
3. **ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS**

The task of spiritually nurturing your child becomes less difficult and overwhelming when you break it down into these three everyday habits. And the good news is the research also shows that these habits can be nurtured in *any* household.

So, whether you are parenting your own children or step-children, parenting your grandchildren, or living in a multi-generational household, keep reading. There is hope for anyone who wants to nurture their children's spiritual health by helping them have a relationship with God, have spiritual conversations, or extend hospitality.





Parenting with God, by contrast, means pausing in our busy lives to lean on God.

To help you nurture these habits with your own child, I have gathered together insightful passages from the Bible and practical ideas from my years of working with parents and children. The result is a practical guide for each of these habits. These three quick reads are designed to guide, encourage, and equip you to nurture the faith of the children in your household.

In *this* booklet, we will be looking at how you can nurture the first of these household habits: *applying spiritual disciplines*. It really is possible to help your child relate with God and begin to develop a life of prayer and reading the Bible. You can do this with God's help.

RELATING WITH GOD AS A PARENT

If you want your child to have a relationship with God, a great place to start is by relating with God yourself. What exactly does this look like? I am referring to a general posture of dependence on God. As Christian parents and grandparents, we often are tempted to be more self-reliant than God-reliant. We get caught up in the rush of life and start to think we are in control. We assume that we are alone in our parenting, including developing the spiritual health of our children.

Parenting with God, by contrast, means pausing in our busy lives to lean on God. In other words, pausing to remember we don't have to go it alone. We can pause at any time during the day or night to receive from God or gain perspective or ask him what He is doing. Lots of good things come from pausing in the midst of our sometimes frenetic parenting.

We pause to call out to God.

There are times in our parenting when all our efforts are physically and spiritually draining. We serve our kids; we pick up around the house; we deal with fights and arguments; we make split-second decisions. It's exhausting!

This is why it is essential that we pause in the midst of our parenting to call out to God. Talking with God, listening for His Spirit, remembering His words from the Bible—these small acts of communication are refreshing in the midst of parenting.

God's people are supposed to call out to him in the trials and efforts of life:

"My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Psalm 121:2

God is there to help us, to listen to us, to comfort and guide us. We have unlimited, 24/7 access to God's guidance through the power of the Holy Spirit, our Helper and Counselor. This verse from Psalm 121 has been such a comfort to me that I have memorized it. It reminds me that I can always pause to call out to God, to ask for help. Psalm 32:8 says God counsels with His eye upon us. I love that. He sees your struggles; He sees your insecurity. He wants to be in a living relationship with you all through your week. In the midst of parenting, it's refreshing to pause from time to time to call out to God.

We pause to remember God is at work.

Certainly, there are things we as parents must do for the spiritual growth of our children. There are responsibilities we must carry, but the transformative work to be accomplished inside our children belongs to God. This makes the task of spiritually nurturing our children feel less heavy and overwhelming. Some burdens are not ours to carry.

Sometimes we need to pause to remember it is God who does the work inside our child. God begins the work, grows the work, and completes the work. As Paul wrote,

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Philippians 1:6

It is profound to not just consider the implications of that truth for our own lives (*What work is God doing in me?*) but to also consider the implications of that truth in the life of our child (*What work is God doing in my child?*). Of course, parents and grandparents have important roles and responsibilities, but without God’s help all our efforts are in vain.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.”

Psalm 127:1a

As we tend to the wonderful, inspiring, sometimes exhausting labors involved in parenting, it is important that we pause from time to time to remember God is at work.

We pause to ponder God’s character.

It is also important sometimes to pause and reflect on a characteristic or attribute of God. These are moments taken to consider the power of God and praise God for who He is.

The Bible reveals that God is wise, in control, accessible, present everywhere, all-powerful, omniscient, good, gracious, faithful, and loving. The list goes on and on. What is important is that we take time to pause during our day to simply ponder one of God’s wonderful attributes.

Perhaps we’ve had a couple parenting mishaps, and we’re feeling like bad parents. In the midst of that struggle, we can pause and ponder God’s graciousness. He is gracious to us, forgiving, loving, and kind. Stopping to ponder God’s graciousness helps us lift up our heads from our own struggles and see God and worship Him for who He is.

It is refreshing and hopeful to pause during the day and consider God’s amazing character and attributes. Taking small moments during the day or night to pause is a practical way to relate with God as a parent. We pause to call out to God, to consider His work in our children, and to ponder His character. The net result of these small pauses during the day is a growing reliance on God.

This makes it easier for us to partner with God in what He is doing in our child. One of the works that God does in our children is helping them relate personally with Him. This is one of the three household habits that the Barna research confirms leads to true spiritual vibrancy in the home.

So, how do we partner with God in helping our child develop a real, living relationship with God? There are two practical rhythms we can grow in over time to help our child learn how to pray to God and understand His word. We can do the following:

- 1. PLAN SPECIAL MOMENTS**
- 2. RESPOND TO EVERYDAY MOMENTS**



It is refreshing and hopeful to pause during the day and consider God’s amazing character or attributes.



PLANNING SPECIAL MOMENTS

Being a parent involves planning. *Lots of planning.*

We plan for birth by taking classes and reading books. We plan for bringing baby home by buying new furniture and getting lots of tiny, cute clothing. We plan for crawling and curiosity by baby-proofing the house with plug covers and cabinet locks. And as our child grows, our planning continues.

In the midst of all this planning, it is also important to consider the spiritual nurture of our children. No matter what age your child is, you can plan special moments that will help your child learn how to relate with God. Planning special moments is the first practical rhythm we can grow in over time to help our child develop a real, living relationship with God.

Barna's research revealed that in spiritually vibrant homes, people relate with God in at least two foundational ways: praying and handling the Bible. We help our children have a relationship with God by helping them talk to Him in prayer and hear from Him in the Bible. It is possible to plan special moments where our children are learning how to do both of these things.

If planning special moments seems like something only a pastor or church leader can do, remember it was *to parents* that God gave the role of spiritual nurture in Deuteronomy 6:6-7a.

“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children.”

As a parent, you have a God-given influence over your child. If you love a certain hobby, sport, or sports team, chances are your child will also grow to love many of those same things. If you show a genuine desire to relate with God through time in prayer and in the Bible, regardless of your own level of understanding, chances are your child will also. I've known many parents who learned along with their child, as they prayed and read children's storybook Bibles together. You can do this!

When planning special moments, make them fun and exciting. After all, you're helping your child have a relationship with the God of the universe! Whether you plan five minutes or half an hour, every day or once a week, morning or bedtime, weekday or weekend—make it a special time.

Prepare a favorite meal, serve a snack or special treat. Consider designating a certain place in your home. It could be in comfy chairs in a less lived-in room of the house or on pillows plopped on the family room floor. It could be in your child's bedroom or around the kitchen table. Ask the Lord to guide you in specifics of when, how long, and how often. Ask for His help in creating special moments that your child will look forward to.

With this general introduction of planning special moments, let's consider how we can plan special moments specifically for prayer.



We help our children have a relationship with God by helping them talk to Him in prayer and hear from Him in the Bible.

SPECIAL MOMENTS IN PRAYER

Prayer is talking to God. It's how we stay close to God throughout the day. It's telling God what's on our hearts and waiting for Him to respond. It's how God aligns our desires with His ways. We can be assured God hears and answers our prayers. And although He doesn't always answer our prayers in the way we expect, He always answers them in ways consistent with His character.

My mother modeled prayer for me. Growing up, she encouraged me to say my prayers before bed. But the way she encouraged me most was by her example of the way Jesus taught us to pray in Matthew 6:6a:

"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret."

For years I watched my mother go into her bedroom every night and close the door. And for years I noticed when she came out there was a red mark pressed in the middle of her forehead. One time she left the door slightly ajar, and I saw my mother humbly kneeling beside her bed, head bowed against the bed, hands folded and pressed against her forehead, praying to her Father.

While solitary prayers were modeled for me, praying with others was not. I was first introduced to praying with others when my daughters were in elementary school. A friend invited me to pray with other moms for our children and the school they attended. Reluctantly, I agreed to go. As the weeks went by, I gained confidence to pray out loud and experienced firsthand the blessings of praying with others.

About that same time, I read a book entitled *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence. I was captivated by the writings of this 17th century monk, whose life work was cooking and washing dishes in a French monastery. Brother Lawrence lived a life of continually seeking the Lord's presence and established a habit of talking to God throughout the day about everything, no matter what he was doing.

We can help our children establish this habit of talking to God about everything, all through the day. You may have questions as you start to nurture your child's prayer life. Questions like:

Is it important to use particular religious words when praying?

God doesn't expect or even want you to use fancy religious-sounding words to impress others when you pray. He wants you to talk to Him, using everyday language with words from your heart.

Do we need to kneel and fold our hands when we pray?

God hears our prayers, whether we are kneeling, sitting, or standing. He hears them if our hands are folded or our palms are up with arms lifted high. He hears them if our eyes are closed or if they're open. (How else could we pray with our children as we're driving in our car?)

Why do prayers often end in "Amen"?

Amen is commonly used as a way of ending a prayer. It means "so be it" or "let it be said." It can be used as a way to express agreement after a prayer. God hears our prayers with or without a concluding amen.



Prayer is talking to God.





These prayers help children learn how others communicate with God and become the basis for praying spontaneously at other times.

FIVE TYPES OF SPECIAL MOMENTS FOR PRAYER YOU CAN TRY

While it is important to allow children to pray using their own words, it is often helpful to begin by teaching them simple prayers that can be memorized and simple patterns of prayer that can be followed. These prayers help children learn how others communicate with God and become the basis for praying spontaneously at other times. You can think of these as helpful “training wheels” for prayer. Here are five examples of how you could plan a special moment of prayer with your child.

#1 Meal-Time Prayers

Meal time is a natural time to invite your child to pray. Not only is it a culturally accepted time of prayer, but it is also a good time to thank God for His gifts, including the very practical gift of food and drink on the table in front of us. Here are some simple prayers I’ve used around the table with my own children and grandchildren:

God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food. Amen

Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest, and let this food to us be blessed. Amen

Thank you, God, for the world so sweet.

Thank you, God, for the food we eat.

Thank you, God, for the birds that sing.

Thank you, God, for everything.

#2 Nighttime Prayers

Nighttime is a natural time to reflect back on the day and tell God any concerns you or your child may have for the coming day. These nighttime prayers can be sparked with a simple memorized prayer, followed by talking with God in your own words. Here is the nighttime prayer we’ve used at our children’s bedsides for years:

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
Guide me safely through the night,
And wake me with the morning light.
Amen.*

#3 Praying Scripture

Praying words from Scripture is a powerful way to pray because you know you’re praying God’s will when you pray in this way. To pray Scripture personally for your child or teach them how to pray words of Scripture for themselves, choose a small Bible text and simply replace the pronouns with the name of the person you are praying for. Or insert “I” and “me” if you are praying for yourself. Here are some examples of praying scripturally:

Show Dorothy Your ways, O Lord, teach Dorothy Your paths; guide Dorothy in Your truth and teach Dorothy, for You are God, her Savior, and her hope is in You all day long. (Adapted from Psalm 25:4-5 NIV)

May I trust in the Lord with all my heart, and not lean on my own understanding. In all my ways I acknowledge Him and He will make straight my paths. (Adapted from Proverbs 3:5-6)



In adoration, we praise God for who He is—His character and attributes.

#4 ACTS Acrostic Prayer

One of the first models of prayer that I learned was the simple acrostic: ACTS. Each letter stands for a topic in an order that helps me pray.

- **A is for Adoration.** In adoration, we praise God for who He is: His character and attributes. This sets the tone for the rest of the prayer. It helps us focus on God's power instead of our weakness or problems. *"Praise the Lord! Praise the Name of the Lord, give praise, O servants of the Lord."* Psalm 135:1
- **C is for Confession.** During this time, we silently confess our sins to God. *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* 1 John 1:9
- **T is for Thanksgiving.** Here we thank God for all He has provided and all He has done. *"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."* 1 Thessalonians 5:18
- **S is for Supplication.** These prayers are where we intercede for others through specific prayer requests. *"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."* Ephesians 6:18 NIV

#5 Finish-the-Sentence Prayers

Another way to help children begin to find words to pray to God is to start a sentence and invite them to finish it using their own thoughts, feelings, and words. At first, your child may need help completing the sentence. I have found this to be a great way to help children find their voice in prayer. The possibilities are endless, but you could start with these ideas:

- *I love you, God, because...*
- *I need you, God, because...*
- *I am thankful, God, for...*
- *I feel closest to you, God, when...*
- *God, help me understand why...*

Having considered a few ways of planning special moments of prayer for your child, let's now consider planning special moments in the Bible.

SPECIAL MOMENTS IN THE BIBLE

In my years as children's ministry director, I always referred to the Bible as "God's true book, the Bible," and I still do. It's important for children to know the Bible is God's true Word and that the stories really happened. The Bible is how God speaks to us. It guides our way and teaches us His truth.

"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light on my path." Psalm 119:105 NIV

My great-grandmother on my father's side and my grandmother on my mother's side modeled for me the importance of being in the Bible. My grandmother had read the entire Bible many times. All 27 of her grandchildren knew this about her. By the time I came around (I was 24th!), she still hadn't tired of reading the Bible to us. And although I only saw my grandmother and great-grandmother once or twice a year, God has preserved these memories in my heart and mind for decades. Memories of their love for the Bible impressed upon me, even though both had



**The Bible is how
God speaks to us.**





Choosing a family verse can help your family focus on God and His purposes in the world.

gone to heaven before my 12th birthday. These weren't memories of specific passages or lessons, but memories of special moments in the Bible together.

You, too, can prepare a place for God to work inside your child by planning special moments in the Bible. As you think of planning these moments, you may have a few questions such as the following:

What Bible should I use?

The Bible you use depends on the age of your child. Here are some different types of Bibles you can choose from:

- **Children's Storybook Bibles.** These are illustrated Bible stories told in an age-appropriate manner for preschoolers and early readers. The illustrations help young children engage in the story. One fine example is Sally Lloyd-Jones' *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (ZonderKidz: 2007).
- **Children's Study Bibles.** These Bibles are for elementary-aged kids and older and include the full text of Scripture. Look for helpful features like high-quality illustrations, a concordance, maps, Bible dictionary, application questions, reading plans, character profiles, and book introductions. One good example is *My Very First Holy Bible* (Concordia Publishing House: 2010).
- **Full Text Bibles.** These are Bibles that contain the full text of Scripture such as the New International Version (NIV), English Standard Version (ESV), New Living Translations (NLT), or New International Readers Version (NIrV). The NIrV is written at the third-grade level. Red-letter versions with the words of Jesus in red, a concordance, and cross references are helpful features, too.

How long should we read the Bible together?

This depends on the age of your child and your child's attention level. You might want to start with 5 minutes and work up to a longer time. It's important to establish a routine of reading, even when you don't feel up to it or your family is resistant. So, whether you decide to read in the morning, after a meal, or at bedtime, strive for consistency.

How do I read full-text Bibles with my child for optimal understanding?

First, pray for insight and understanding before you start reading. Read with enthusiasm and inflection in your voice, and allow your child to read as well. It's best to read one chapter, paragraph, or even just a few verses than to hurriedly read just to get finished. Difficult passages are opportunities to admit that you don't have all the answers. For further understanding, you could read the cross-referenced passages noted in the margins or at the bottom of each page.

FIVE TYPES OF SPECIAL MOMENTS FOR THE BIBLE YOU CAN TRY

#1 Read the Bible

The Bible is one continuous story of God and His people. While it is intended to be read from beginning to end, this is not always practical or age-appropriate for children. Storybook Bibles can be read one story at a time until completed. When reading a full-text Bible, you may want to select specific readings.

You could start by reading about Jesus in one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). These Gospels are where your child can encounter Jesus. Jesus is the center of God's Word to us, and so the Gospels can, and should be, returned to again and again. You can also turn to the Old Testament where your child can encounter the wonders of creation and the history of God's pursuit of humanity: from Adam and Eve to stories about Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, and other heroes of the faith. After the Gospels, the rest of the New Testament is where your child can learn about the earliest Christians and what they show us about the life of Jesus. You may want to search online for a suitable children's reading plan or select a children's Bible that includes a reading plan.

#2 Scripture Memory

Scripture memory is how we hide God's Word in our hearts. It is one of the ways the Holy Spirit reminds your child of God's words for guidance or comfort. To make learning Scripture fun and memorable, try adapting the words of Scripture to tunes of familiar songs such as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," "Mary Had a Little Lamb," or "Happy Birthday." Musical repetition of Scripture is a sure way to help your child memorize God's Word. After many years of leading VBS at our church, I know firsthand how words can get stuck in your head through music.

Here are some memory passages to start with:

- *Jesus said, "I am with you always."* Matthew 28:20b
- *"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid."* Hebrews 13:6a, NIV
- *The Lord says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love."* Jeremiah 31:3b

#3 Study the Bible

One good method for studying the Bible follows a simple, three-part pattern: Observation. Interpretation. Application.

- **Observation:** What are the facts, content, who, what, when, and where of the passage?
- **Interpretation:** What are the lessons, warnings, commands, and promises? What do you learn about God? What is God doing?
- **Application:** How can I apply this to my life? How does this change me?

When studying the Bible, it's best to select a small section of Scripture rather than an entire chapter. It can be helpful to refer to other Bible translations of the same passage. (See www.biblegateway.org for a quick view of multiple translations.) If you have older children or you want to learn more yourself, you might want to consider using an online devotion such as Daily Devotions from Lutheran Hour Ministries (lhm.org/dailydevotions).





#4 Family Verses

Choosing a family verse can help your family focus on God and His purposes in the world. When selecting a family verse, consider how your family could live so that God's kingdom grows in your family's area of influence. Display your family verse in a prominent place in your home. Involve your child in decorating the verse or in selecting a special frame. I've known families who purchase wooden decor or vinyl wall stickers for display. Here are some examples of family verses:

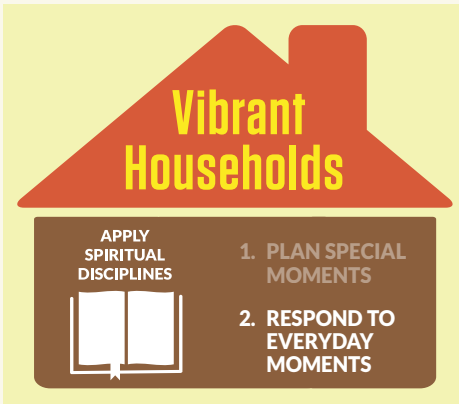
- *"But as for me and my house: we will serve the Lord."* Joshua 24:15b
- *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."* Matthew 5:16

#5 Verse of the Week

Having a "verse of the week" is a good way to regularly keep important Bible truths in front of your child. Verses can be selected based on current situations, ages or stages in your home, or from a favorite devotional or Bible app. You can post God's words throughout the house with sticky notes or index cards on the refrigerator or on mirrors in bedrooms and bathrooms. You may want to purchase a pretty frame or a chalkboard for your weekly verse. Verses can be sent in lunchboxes, backpacks, purses, or coat pockets. They can be texted, emailed, or whispered in your child's ear as they start or end the day. Here are some examples:

- *"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up."*
1 Thessalonians 5:11a
- *"Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* Joshua 1:9b

We've just looked at ways you can plan special moments for prayer or to read the Bible in your own home. But remember there are two ways we can help our children learn to relate with God: by planning special moments and also by responding to everyday moments. Let's consider now how we can respond to everyday moments in ways that help our children relate with God.



RESPONDING TO EVERYDAY MOMENTS

Being a parent involves responding. *Lots* of responding. We respond to the cry of our newborn in the middle of the night, to baby's first smile, first words, first steps, and first fever. We respond to affections and playfulness, tears, tantrums, fears, fights, injuries, and illnesses. We respond to requests and bad attitudes. And we respond to questions, *lots* of questions.

It is possible to respond to everyday moments in a way that helps our children learn how to pray and how to handle the Bible. Responding to everyday moments is the second practical rhythm we can grow in over time to help our children develop a real, living relationship with God.

One afternoon my five-year-old granddaughter mentioned that she sometimes gets frightened in bed at night. This was a passing comment. I might have simply moved on in the conversation, but I sensed that this was an important everyday moment to respond to.

So, I reminded her that whenever she's afraid she can pray to God. I used this everyday moment as an opportunity to nurture her prayer life. If I hadn't intentionally been looking for opportunities to respond, I might have missed that moment to help her relate with God, to help her know God is real and present in her life. As you start thinking about everyday moments you can respond to, a few questions may come to mind:

What if my child is not receptive?

Many children will feel it is natural to be nudged toward prayer or the Word in the midst of everyday life. But others may resist turning to the spiritual in the midst of everyday situations. If this is the case with your child, don't worry. Turning to God in everyday moments is a habit that, like all habits, takes time to establish. A helpful rule of thumb is to start small and build from there.

What if I'm not prepared for the moment?

When we plan special moments, we have the advantage of preparing ahead of time for what we want to say or ask or do. Responding to everyday life, by definition, does not allow us to prepare. If this feels stressful, just remember that our goal is not to say the perfect prayer or have the perfect answer. We're just wanting to nudge our children to have a relationship with God Himself.

The research on spiritually vibrant homes suggests that one of the most important aspects of spiritual coaching in the moment is just initiating. It's okay if you don't have a perfect prayer to pray, the power is in taking the initiative and saying: "Hey, should we pray about this?" It's okay if you don't know the perfect biblical answer to a question, the power is in taking the initiative and asking, "Do you think God's Word has anything to say that could help us in this situation?"

If responding to everyday moments seems like something only a pastor or church leader can do, remember God will help you and equip you when you ask for His help.

FIVE TYPES OF RESPONSES TO EVERYDAY MOMENTS YOU CAN TRY

#1 Arrow Prayers

Arrow prayers are on-the-go, targeted prayers sent up to God when a situation or need arises in the moment. With arrow prayers we can respond to fear, worries, anxious thoughts, or situations that occur in everyday (or not-so-everyday) moments. Arrow prayers can be prayed at home, in the car, at the bus stop, on a walk, in the grocery store, or at the mall. Whenever there is a situation where God's help is needed, arrow prayers can be prayed out loud with your child.

Perhaps your child is starting a new school and is nervous about meeting new friends. While walking to the bus stop you could pray: "Father, help James not be worried about today. Help James meet new friends at school." I recently sent an arrow prayer in a frightening situation with my grandson when we were trapped in our car during a flash flood. In the end, we were safe. But in the moment it helped tremendously to pray out loud: "Jesus protect us and keep us safe. Send help quickly." Not only was the prayer calming, it modeled calling out to Jesus in a scary situation for my grandson.



Responding to everyday moments is the second practical rhythm we can grow in over time to help our children develop a real, living relationship with God.



In a situation where God's help is needed, arrow prayers can be prayed out loud with your child.



A blessing prayer can express that love and desire as you speak God's truth over your child.

#2 Blessing Prayers

Sometimes as you send your child off to school or as you tuck them in at night, an indescribable love and desire for God's best for your child washes over you. A blessing prayer can express that love and desire as you speak God's truth over your child. You could pray:

- *"Sally, may you feel the love of God today."*
- *"Tony, may you live into the calling God has for your life."*
- *"Christian, may you know you are a child of God, fearfully and wonderfully made."*

A blessing is just praying words that express your love and desire for someone. Blessings are powerful whether they are expressed in your own words or come from memorized Scripture. I've had parents tell me that once they start praying blessings over their child, if they ever forget, their child reminds them! Blessings can be prayed over your child before they go to school, at bedtime, or on special occasions like birthdays.

#3 Listening Prayers

God communicates with us in our everyday moments. Most often we hear God's voice by something He impresses on our hearts as an answer to prayer, or to guide, comfort, encourage, or convict us. It is always consistent with His words in the Bible and with His character. In John 10:3-5, Jesus says His sheep hear His voice and know His voice. As followers of Jesus, we know that Jesus speaks to us. This doesn't mean an audible voice from the clouds; rather, God speaks to us in everyday life:

- When gossiping with friends and you're convicted to stop, you've listened to God.
- When your thoughts are self-centered and God reminds you to look to the interest of others, He is shaping you to be more like Christ.
- If your child lies about breaking your favorite coffee mug and later confesses, it's likely God is impressing honesty and the need for confession.

With time spent in prayer and in the Bible, God will develop and grow within your child over time an ability to listen for and hear His voice.

#4 Bible Verse and Bible Story Reminders

When we respond in everyday moments with Scripture, we are responding with the very words of God. This brings the power of God's Word and God's truth into everyday life. Jesus said in John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit ... will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." Here are some ways to respond to everyday moments with Scripture:

- The Golden Rule can be applied to many situations when your child needs to be more caring and kind (see Matthew 7:12).
- Perhaps you want your child to be more thankful. You could tell the story when Jesus healed ten lepers and only one returned to give thanks (see Luke 17:11-19).
- When complaining or arguing occurs, you could respond with Philippians 2:14.
- If your child is having difficulty forgiving someone (see Ephesians 4:32).
- If your child is a worrier, Philippians 4:6-7 reminds your child to turn things over to God.

If you are unsure where to look in the Bible, start by searching your Bible's concordance. A search of the word, such as "fear," "worry," "temptation," "joy," "peace," "kindness," "contentment," etc. will direct you to appropriate verses.



#5 Responding to Creation

God reveals Himself to us through His creation. One of the most tangible ways to help your child relate with God is to respond to His power, handiwork, magnificence, and glory, in creation. We are reminded of His handiwork with the screech of a hawk as it soars in the sky, the taste of an apple plucked from a tree, a gentle breeze on a hot summer day, the sweet smell of a lilac bush, or an array of colors on a crisp fall day. As it says in the Psalms,

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.” Psalm 19:1

You can use moments outdoors with your child to respond and give glory to God for all His beautiful creation. As you encounter beautiful flowers, colorful birds, interesting cloud formations, breathtaking sunrises, sunsets and rainbows, seize those opportunities to respond in worship to God’s breathtaking creativity. When at the zoo, praise God for His creativity in making so many different and unique animals. Responding with praise to creation gives glory to God.

GROWING MORE SPIRITUALLY VIBRANT

If the preceding pages have given you ideas for next steps to try out with your own child, I encourage you to persevere. Begin with prayer and a plan to get started. Start small. Start somewhere. Start by initiating something you have learned. God will do the rest! I love the picture painted in Isaiah’s prophecy:

“All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.” Isaiah 54:13

If nurturing your child’s faith makes you feel inadequate to the task, just remember this verse. Our children will be “taught by the Lord.” He is working inside them. You aren’t parenting alone; you can parent with God, partnering with Him as He invites your child to have a living relationship with Him.

It’s parenting with God that allows us to nurture the high hopes we have for our children. It’s good that we have high hopes and dreams for our children’s faith. It is right that we would want them to have a healthy understanding of their own sin and the need for God’s forgiveness. It’s good that we want them to recognize the voice of God and obey Him. It’s natural that we want them to have an enduring faith that keeps them strong through life’s troubles and protects them from harmful behaviors.

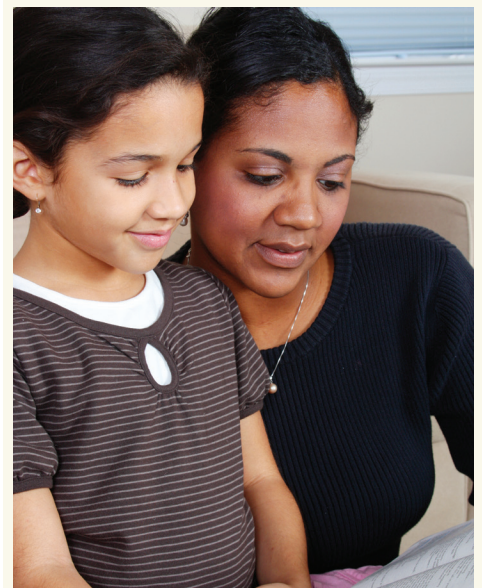
Yes, let us have high hopes for our children’s faith. And let us parent with God as we help our children grow into a lifelong relationship with Him through prayer and time in the Bible. As you yourself take your next steps to help your child relate with God, my prayer for you is from Hebrews 13:20a, 21:

Now may the God of peace ... equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in You, that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

MORE RESOURCES

For the full research report from Barna/LHM, you can read:
Households of Faith: The Rituals and Relationships That Turn a Home into a Sacred Space

You may also be interested in:
The Spiritually Vibrant Home: The Power of Messy Prayers, Loud Tables, and Open Doors



“All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.”

Isaiah 54:13

A graphic titled "Vibrant Households" featuring a red house silhouette. Below the title are three vertical resource cards. The first card is titled "APPLY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES" and features an icon of an open book. The second card is titled "EXTEND HOSPITALITY" and features an icon of a door. The third card is titled "ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL CONVERSATIONS" and features an icon of two speech bubbles. Each card also includes a small image and the text "Helping Your Child" followed by a specific theme, and the "PROJECT CONNECT" logo at the bottom.

Mary Oldfield lives in St. Louis with her husband, Robin, of 38 years. They have two married daughters and five grandchildren. She delights in trusting God to help her prepare a place for God to work in the lives of her grandchildren. Mary is a retired children's ministry director who spent 20 years equipping and supporting parents as they responded to the call to be the primary spiritual nurturers of their children.



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