

# The Spiritual Practice of Praying Together

*“The foremost thing to strive for in prayer with children, as with adults, is to help them know that they can have a personal, ongoing relationship with God.”*

— Betty Shannon Cloyd, *Children and Prayer: A Shared Pilgrimage*, p. 56.

Prayer is part of the backbone of the Christian spiritual life. It is a vital part of a living relationship with God. However, there are many kinds of prayer – ranging from individual prayers, such as the “breathe prayer” (when you repeat a phrase over and over silently, while breathing in and out), to written or memorized prayers said together with others in public worship of God.

Prayer should not just be a matter of individual practice, or of Sunday worship: it should also be part of the life of the “domestic church”, the gathering together of Christians as families on a daily basis. The prayer talked about here is prayer in the sacred community of the Christian family.

**Mealtime Prayers**      Make mealtime graces a part of your daily life as soon as your child joins you at the family table. Teach several graces to your child, including some that invite each person to offer a sentence prayer. Many books of good children’s prayers can be found in Christian bookstores.

**Bedtime Prayers**      Closing each day in prayer with your children is a powerful practice that gives priority to God as the Lord of our days. Develop a standard prayer time routine with your child. You may wish to include prayers of thanks for events of the day, prayers for special people in your lives, and prayers for God’s help and protection.

**Prayers for One Another**      Few moments are more powerful than when one family member prays for another family member aloud in that person’s presence. You can pray such prayers on special occasions, such as birthdays, anniversaries or “milestone moments” in the growth and development of family members. You might institute a time to pray for one another



once a week at a specified mealtime. Also try to include a time each day when your family prays for other family members, persons outside your family, and the world.

**Prayers of Thanksgiving** Make it a habit of offering thanks to God often. You can say thanks for a child's first step, the loss of a baby tooth, the sighting of a ladybug, the kindness of a friend, the first flowers of spring ....

**Prayers of Confession** Children learn about sin and the need to confess our sins by seeing their parents say "sorry" to God and asking for his forgiveness, and by doing so with them. Children also learn about confession and forgiveness by seeing this modelled between family members. When parent admit their wrongs to their children and ask for forgiveness, they offer a powerful example to their children; and when parents forgive their children, they reflect and point them to the grace of God. Confession of sins is an essential part of a family's prayer life.

**Prayers of Common Memory** Try to teach your children prayers that will help them to participate more fully with others in worship. Pre-literate children find great joy in being able to say the Lord's Prayer with others on Sunday. Other good prayers of "common memory" include Martin Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers.

### *"Vespers"*

*Little Boy kneels at the foot of the bed,  
Droops on the little hands little gold head.  
Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares!  
Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.*

*God bless Mummy. I know that's right.  
Wasn't it fun in the bath to-night?  
The cold's so cold, and the hot's so hot.  
Oh! God bless Daddy - I quite forgot.*

*If I open my fingers a little bit more,  
I can see Nanny's dressing-gown on the door.  
It's a beautiful blue, but it hasn't a hood.  
Oh! God bless Nanny and make her good.*

*Mine has a hood, and I lie in bed,  
And pull the hood right over my head,  
And I shut my eyes, and I curl up small,  
And nobody knows that I'm there at all.*



*Oh! Thank you, God, for a lovely day.  
And what was the other I had to say?  
I said "Bless Daddy," so what can it be?  
Oh! Now I remember it. God bless Me.*

*Little Boy kneels at the foot of the bed,  
Droops on the little hands little gold head.  
Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares!  
Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.*

(Alan Alexander Milne 1882-1956)