

Back-to-School
**PRAYER
CHALLENGE**

PARENT GUIDE

THE CHALLENGE

For the 2018 September/October Family Discipleship Kit, we are inviting you to join us for a Back-to-School Prayer Challenge! We know that life gets busy as school, sports, and other extracurriculars start up, so this kit is not labor or time intensive. The challenge is simple: Develop a habit of daily prayer as a family.

The Back-to-School Prayer Challenge invites families to do this by adding a daily prayer to their weekday (Monday-Friday) schedule.

Ideally, parents would lead children in prayer in the morning before school: maybe before breakfast, or in the car on the way to school. But, it doesn't have to be in the morning. Maybe during an after-school snack, at dinner time, or even at bed time! The key is making regular and intentional prayer a family routine.

THE KIT

This kit includes:

Back-to-School Prayer Challenge Gameboard

Use the gameboard to track your progress and get inspired on what to pray about each day. Each space on the game board represents a weekday (Monday-Friday) from August 20 – November 7 (58 days).

Companion Bible Reading Packet

These are quick, one-sentence scripture readings and two discussion questions for a short family devotional at dinner or bedtime. All the readings focus on the topic of prayer. There are enough readings for you to do one each weekday night for the duration of the Challenge (58 days), but you can go through them as quickly or as slowly as needed!

Star Stickers

The enclosed star stickers are for marking each day off on your Gameboard and Companion Bible Reading

Prize Packages

To encourage your family in their challenge, enclosed in this kit are three prize bags you can earn along the way! They are:

- **Five Day Streak Prize:** Open this package when your family has strung together 5 days in a row on the Gameboard. *Contents: mechanical pencils, 1 per child*
- **Three Monday Streak Prize:** Open this package when your family has prayed together on at least 3 Mondays in a row. *Contents: erasers, 1 per child*
- **Three Friday Prize:** Open this package when your family has prayed together on at least 3 Fridays (does not have to be in a row). *Contents: pencils with pencil grips, 1 per child*
- **Half Way Prize:** Open this package when your family as prayed together on 25 different days (does not have to be in a row). *Contents: pens, 1 per child*
- **You Did It! Prize:** Open this package when your family makes it to the end of the Gameboard. *Contents: sheet of stickers, 1 per family*

WHY FAMILIES SHOULD PRAY TOGETHER

Experiencing Intimacy with God

As parents, you crave good conversation with your children. *What are they thinking? How are they feeling? Who are their friends? What are they learning at school?*

God desires the same thing with you. Part of the reason Jesus died on the cross is so that we could enjoy an intimate relationship with our Father in heaven. Prayer is the very means of that intimacy. God cares about you and wants you to talk with him and ask Him for the things that you need.

When you lead your family in prayer, you are deepening that intimate relationship with God because you are allowing him into all the facets of your life – not just church on Sunday mornings, or your personal quiet time – but into the very fabric of your everyday life.

Modeling that Intimacy to Your Children

Praying with your children teaches them how they can experience that close relationship with God as well. They will learn how to think about God through how you talk to Him. For that reason, when praying in front of your children, feel free to make your prayers simple and conversational. Children should understand that you are talking to God because you love Him, and they can do the same.

You can tell your kids that God is important to you – but how much more effective it is for them to see you praying to Him.

Ask, Seek, Knock

Families should pray together because life is tough and we need God to help us! Prayer is our way of asking God for help and receiving the grace we need.

Sometimes it can be tempting to think about prayer as a spiritual “exercise” that may affect our mindset but has no bearing on our actual life and circumstances. But that’s not how the scripture describes prayer. Consider the following:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” -Philippians 4:6

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” -John 15:7

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” – Mark 11:24

If you are new to the habit of daily prayer, take a moment at the end of this 12-week challenge and reflect. How did regular prayer influence your life? Did God show himself as the good Father who loves to give his children good gifts? (Matthew 7:7-11)

HOW TO PRAY

When teaching children how to pray, it is important to emphasize that there are lots of good ways to pray to God. God is everywhere, and his spirit is always listening, so you don’t have to be in one particular place for God to hear you. You don’t have to be at church or around the dinner table – God can hear you anywhere.

You also don’t need to speak out loud for God to hear you – the Bible says God knows our thoughts (Psalm 139:2). You can pray to him quietly in your mind when you’re on the school bus, or you could write out your prayers.

When we pray together as a family, however, we have one person speaking out loud, and the rest of the family listens. Explain to the children that as they are listening, they can be saying the same words to God in their hearts. At the end of the prayer, we say “Amen” which means “So be it!” or “Let it be done!” When the rest of the family repeats “Amen” after the prayer is finished, they are saying, “Yes, God! Make it so!”

Most of the time, we close our eyes and fold our hands when we pray because it can help us focus on the words being said and not distract others (or be distracted ourselves). But these are not mystical rules. For example, Mom can pray with her eyes open if she is driving!

Also, children should understand that they can talk to God about anything that crosses their mind – he cares what they are worried about, what they are proud of, and what they’re interested in. There really isn’t a topic that is off limits, because God already knows what’s on our hearts. In the Psalms, for example, we can read the prayers of people who feel angry and abandoned by God. Even that is okay! God can handle whatever we are feeling.

Even though we are free to pray about whatever we desire, it can be helpful to use prompts (like the enclosed gameboard) to make sure that our prayer life isn’t “in a rut”.

If we are always praising God, and never asking for things, that is out of balance. God wants us to ask for things! Likewise, if we are only asking God for things, and never praising or thanking him – that’s out of balance too. Using this structure can help us have a full and balanced prayer life that helps us grow strong, and calibrates us in a healthy way (like a well-balanced diet!).

WHAT TO PRAY

For the Back-to-School Prayer Challenge, the gameboard lists a prompt on each day to give you ideas of what to pray for. These prompts are just suggestions (of course you can pray for whatever is on your hearts) but they can be helpful starting points if daily prayer is a new rhythm to your family. The daily prompts are structured in the following way:

Monday – Give (or Dedicate) the Week to God

Every Monday has the same prompt – “Give this Week to God.” The repetition is intentional for two reasons. First of all, we are hoping this Kit is *not* a burden to you, so we made Mondays extra easy in this way. Second, this is an incredibly important way to start the week! This prayer of dedication is a declaration of our need for God to help us live this week. It’s a joyful admission that we aren’t strong enough to do God’s will on our own – we need his help. An example prayer might sound like this:

Dear Heavenly Father, We give this week to you. We are your children, and everything we have is Yours. We need you to help us do all the things we have planned this week. Whatever comes up, we are trusting you to take care of it. Help us to live this week in a way that pleases You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Tuesday – Praise God for who He Is

Tuesday’s prompts are reminders to praise God for who He is. The Tuesday prompts are themed around our Monthly Focus that we learn about on Sundays, so there is a lot of repetition. In August, we are praising God for his omnipresence; in September we are praising God for his Faithfulness; and in October we are praising God for his wisdom. Encourage the children to use what they’ve learned in the Garden to praise God in their prayers on these days. Here’s an example:

Dear God, you are omnipresent. We know that you are everywhere. You promised Joshua you would never leave him, and I know you will never leave me either. Thank you, Jesus, for being with me when I go to school. Help me to remember that you are always watching me. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Wednesday – Ask God to Help Us (the Child)

Wednesday’s prompts are all different, and they are all ways that God can help the child/children praying grow in their maturity or discipleship. So for example:

Dear Jesus, please help me be a good student at school. Help me have a good attitude and help me to work hard. Help me to please You in the way I act this school year. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Thursday – Thank God for what He has given Us

Thursday’s prompts challenge us to be thankful for different things God has given us:

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for the opportunity to go to school and learn about different things. Thank you for helping mom and dad know the best way for me to learn, and helping me get to school. Thank you for giving me a strong mind to learn these things. In Jesus' Name, Amen

Friday – Ask God to Help Someone Else

Friday's prompts ask us to look outside our own needs and think about the people around us – maybe someone we haven't prayed for before. When we do so, we will find ourselves thinking differently about these people – we will start to see them as God sees them.

Dear God, Thank you for my teacher, Mrs. Smith. I know that you put me in Mrs. Smith's class on purpose, and I thank you for the opportunity to learn from her. Please help Mrs. Smith have a good school year. Help her be healthy and not stressed. Take care of her family and keep them safe. In Jesus' name, Amen.

HOW LONG SHOULD WE PRAY?

These do not have to be long prayers! Notice how short each of the example prayers were above – just two or three sentences. Even a one sentence is a great starting point, if daily prayer is new project for your family: *Dear God, You are Faithful. Amen!*

WHO SHOULD PRAY?

This is up to you as a family. If praying together is not a common occurrence, start with Mom or Dad leading while the other children listen. Or, take turns – maybe Mom prays on Monday, and the child prays on Tuesday, Dad prays on Wednesday, and so on. Whatever feels like the next step of discipleship for the specifics of your family.