



Helping children to listen to God

Children can be helped to pray in many ways. Some of the ways children may learn to pray in school are through singing, making up their own prayers, leading prayers in worship, saying liturgical Anglican responses, learning different kinds of prayers, signing prayers or making prayer responses in dry sand. They can also be helped to listen to God.

The process below is based upon the Fellowship of Contemplative prayer which was started in 1949 by Robert Coullson for adults to encourage silent and contemplative prayer. Members of the Fellowship commit themselves to daily contemplation and weekly prayer for members. In the adult exercise, it takes a maximum of 1 hour with 20 minutes for each of the three parts but children can be guided to reflect in a few minutes.

What words do we use?

The Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer use short sentences or sayings in the Bible which are in direct speech. These are called Dominical sayings. Sayings about God or not in direct speech are also suitable for meditation but are not used in the Fellowship method. For example, 'The Lord is my Shepherd' (Psalm 23) would not be used in the Fellowship method but the words 'I am the good shepherd' would. For adults, the words are introduced with context and biblical background.



For children, a story might be the introduction to the words, or there might be a Biblical phrase for the week that runs through all the worship, or it might be a phrase that stands alone for the one act of worship. The collective worship planning will make clear how the biblical phrase is introduced and reinforced.

What do I do first?

Firstly, plan your collective worship using a Bible story eg the good Samaritan which could then use 'Love your neighbour as yourself' or a biblical phrase eg I am the light of the world. As always with collective worship, the music played, the songs sung, the story told and the prayers said are best planned around a theme. There are some more phrases offered from the Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer below. The words can be written for all the children to see. Art work/music/dance can be used to show an understanding of the words and then used in the collective worship.



Preparing for prayer:

As always in preparation for prayer, the leader might ask the children to sit very still, maybe look at the candle, maybe close their eyes, or think about their breathing in and out. Leaders will have different ways of helping children to be still. Words need to be quietly spoken by the leader so that the children begin to get themselves ready for 'listening to God'

The leader explains that there will be three places of quiet for the children to pray.

Three parts

Part 1: The mind:

The children are invited to listen with their minds to allow God's word to live and grow in their minds.

The Biblical phrase is said slowly

Leader: What do you think the words mean? What do you think about the words?

Quiet for a suitable length of time: this can be very short for children

Part 2: The Heart:

The children receive and hear the words.

The Biblical phrase is said slowly (this could be said by a child as confidence grows)

Leader: What do the words mean to you? How do you feel about the words? Do the words mean anything in your own life? Quietly, in your head, say the words over again – don't think of anything else – feel that God is very close to you.

Quiet for a suitable length of time: this can be very short for children

Part 3: The Will:

Intercession. God speaks through the children to the people for whom they are praying. The phrase is used to pray for the world/the community/nations/each other/particular needs current affairs. The leader chooses one aspect to pray for and invites the children to pray that phrase for the people they are praying for. This can be organised in different ways eg if the children are comfortable, they may say the name of someone they wish to have prayer for aloud

Leader: Repeats the biblical phrase. We are going to pray those words for other people. Pray those words in your head for eg the people working in our shops, for the dinner ladies/people who work in the office or for one person in your family...

Leader concludes the prayers: This can take the form of a set prayer eg the Lord's Prayer, the school prayer, the grace or any familiar prayer for the children. The leader might close the prayers. A possible prayer for the leader is:

'Loving God, Thank you for giving us this time together to worship you. Be with us in everything we do today. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen'



Some sayings offered by the Fellowship of Contemplative Prayer:

Advent

Keep Watch...hold yourselves ready *Matthew 24.42, 44*

Do not be afraid *Luke 1.30*



Wait for me *Zephaniah 3.8*

Christmas

My joy in you *John 15.10*

Epiphany

I am the light of the world *John 8.12*

This is my son, my beloved, listen to him *Matthew 17.5*

Lent

I will pour out my spirit on you *Joel 2.12, 28*

Seek me and live *Amos 5.4*

Follow me *Luke 9.59*

Holy Week

Do not be afraid...see your king is coming *John 12.15*

Stay here and watch *Mark 14.34*

I thirst *John 19.28*

Weep not for me *Luke 23.27-31*

Easter

Come eat of my bread...and live *Proverbs 9.5-6*

I am come that you may have life...*John 10.10*

Peace be with you *John 20.21,26*

Ascension

I am with you until the end of time *Matthew 28.20*

I am the first and the last, the living one *Revelation 1.17-18*

Pentecost

Not by my might, nor by power, but by my spirit *Zechariah 4.6*

I will pour out my spirit on you *Joel 2.28 (Acts 2.17)*

Others

I have watched over you *Exodus 3.16*

Peace, be still *Mark 4.39*

Be strong and courageous, I will never leave you *Joshua 1.5,6*

Launch out into the deep *Luke 5.4*

Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest *Matthew 11.28*

You are mine, when you pass through the waters I will be with you *Isaiah 43.1,2*

Be still and know that I am God *Psalms 46.10*

I am the vine you are the branches *John 15.5*

I have seen your tears, I have heard your crying, I will come and heal you *2 Kings 20.5*

Be strong...be strong...and work, for I am with you *Haggai 2.3,4*

I am who I am. This is my name forever *Exodus 3.14,15*