

9 tips for a successful family prayer time

Set aside a regular time to pray together as a family—or, if your schedules don't allow for the whole family to pray together, aim to pray together one-on-one or in small groups.

Tips for Getting Started

- ▶ **Find a regular time to pray, and make it a habit.** Your family prayer time might be daily, or once a week (Sunday afternoons or Wednesday evenings, for example). Psychologists say that it can take months of persistence to develop a habit. You can help the process along by hooking family prayer to another family habit. Do your younger kids already have a bedtime routine? Kick it off by sitting down together for prayer. Does your family eat meals together? Work in a short time of prayer at the beginning and end of the meal. The time before Sunday Mass, driving to school, watching TV, brushing teeth—any of these activities might be a trigger for shared prayer.
- ▶ **Start small.** Until family prayer time is a habit, you may need to start small. If you can't do a ten-minute prayer service, start with five; if you can't do five minutes, start with sixty seconds, or even a ten-second blessing on the way out the door in the morning.
- ▶ **Find a style of prayer that fits your family now.** Try out different prayer practices until you find one that works for your family at this time in your kids' faith development. You will find many ideas [elsewhere on this website](#).
- ▶ **Let kids lead.** Giving kids choices, input, and leadership opportunities is a great way to get them engaged, and also

prepares them to pray on their own initiative.

Coping with the Prayer-Time Crazyies

Praying with kids can be more messy than holy, especially when you are just beginning to pray together, and especially when young children are involved. Know that you are not alone: hundreds of generations of Christian parents have had the same experience. Is your toddler using the rosary as a slingshot? Been there and done that. Does your teen pray through gritted teeth? Check. Is your second grader kicking your ten-year-old as you pray the Our Father? At least they're not actually killing one another, which is more than could be said about Cain and Abel during *their* family prayer time (Genesis 4:1-9).

Here are some tips for dealing with the prayer-time crazyies:

- ▶ **Pray now, discipline later.** Unless kids are in danger of getting hurt or destroying property, ignore their behavior and focus on your own prayer (you'll need the extra grace anyway). If you constantly stop praying to deal with their behavior, then they are running the show—and you're no longer praying. You can discuss expectations and hand out consequences after prayer is done.
- ▶ **Start out small.** Begin by making family prayer time just as long as you can tolerate your kids' behavior. You may even need to begin by simply sprinkling some five-second Invocations throughout your day.
- ▶ **Stick with it to establish new expectations.** Kids are often resistant to new routines or changes in expectations. Stick with it through the initial resistance. As prayer becomes a habit and regular expectation, and as you find the prayer practices that best fit your family, you will begin seeing the fruits of your efforts.

- ▶ **Explain why you're praying.** If your kids ask questions about why you're praying (or praying in a new way), offer them a brief explanation.
- ▶ **Be patient.** Sometimes you will think, "We didn't actually pray; we just went through the motions." Although it may not *feel* rewarding, sometimes going through the motions is prayer nonetheless, because it is its own kind of striving toward God. And one day, you and your kids will be "just going through the motions" and discover yourselves surrounded by the presence of God.

Learn more

- ▶ [Acts 2:46](#)
- ▶ [On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World \(Familiaris Consortio\), 59-62](#)