



Help Children and their Families Talk to God (& Listen!):

A KidZ at Home® Workshop for Parents, Grandparents, and Teachers



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A Note to the Workshop Facilitator

Is there anything more exciting than watching a child learn to speak to and listen to Jesus? Not for us. Unless maybe it is seeing a whole family learn to connect with God! Especially if you're a member of that family!

This workshop is one of several offered by KidZ at Heart to help adults create space and place, at home and at church, for the children we love to be with the Holy Spirit. We pray that these notes will help you and those you lead, parents, grandparents, and teachers, to be encouraged as you and they cooperate with the Holy Spirit in connecting children with God for a lifetime.

On the following pages, we have provided suggested verbiage for you, and you will find presentation tips in italics. Scripture passages will be found in bold print, as well as some wording we recommend be stated exactly as is. This workshop will take approximately 45 minutes to one hour to complete.

May God bless you as you collaborate with the Holy Spirit and other adults, as together, you help children fall deeply in love with Jesus!

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Resources you'll need

Before you begin, be sure you have the following props and visuals ready to go...

- A personal Bible for reading Scripture to the group
- An additional large Bible with a “traditional” look
- A laptop, projector, and screen (or large TV) with a connection to the internet for viewing two video segments
- One handout for each participant (note [major points on handout] are set off in facilitator’s notes with brackets)
- Strips of paper in two different colors (Resource Guide activity)
- Red sticker dots (Resource Guide activity)

(The first step in effective teaching is to draw participants into an experience. In this case, we want them to experience prayer - the spiritual practice which is our focus. We also want this experience to help engage them in discussion and discovery with one another. This workshop includes these elements woven together.)



[How do YOU help children and their families talk to God (& Listen!)?]

Welcome to **Help Children and their Families Talk to God (and Listen!)**. What could be more exciting for us to focus on for the next hour?

So, let's jump right in.

Turn to a person next to you and tell that person how you normally invite children to pray. How do you help them enter into prayer? Do you ask them to fold their hands and bow their heads? Do you model prayer for them and ask them to follow along? **What do you do to help children talk and listen to God? Why do you think some practices might be more helpful than others?** Share with your partner. You can also jot down ideas on your handout. *(Allow for 1-2 minutes of discussion.)*

Let's hear back from some of you. **What did you discover that seems to really help kids pray?** *(Take several answers for each.)*

Now, I have one more question for you. **Thinking back to how you typically invite children to pray, which of those ways are most meaningful to you? Which of them aren't so effective for you?** Let's share our thoughts with everyone at one time for this question. *(Be sure to paraphrase and repeat back what each person says here and elsewhere. Say "thank you" after each share.)*

I don't know about you, but I find that **sometimes** we try to help children **pray** using techniques that we ourselves would never use. And **other times, we invite children** to prayer using techniques that only adults would use. But how often do we **really** think about **how to best help** a child, **at his or her age level, talk and listen to God?**

[Welcome]

Welcome again to **Help Children and their Families talk to God (& Listen!)**.

(If you are not known to all of the participants, briefly introduce yourself here. Share your name, position at your church if applicable, ages of your own children and/or grandchildren, and your involvement with children at home or church.)

This workshop is one of several family ministry workshops prepared for you by KidZ at Heart International. We will explore how to invite the children in your life and ministry into spiritual practices that will nurture their souls, even as we learn some practices for ourselves. Based on KidZ at Home resources created by KidZ at Heart, this workshop will enable you to use good questions and simple objects to invite your children to spend time in the presence of God! In just a few minutes, I'll tell you a bit more about KidZ at Home resources and how you can use them for free.

Since we'll be listening to God in a variety of ways, it will help us if you wouldn't mind silencing your phones to avoid any disruptions.

(Model this yourself and give participants time to do likewise.)



[Help Children and their Families Pray Without Ceasing: Welcoming the Holy Spirit]

Let's pray together, the way we would start a Sunday school class or a special family time together. It might be a little different than you've experienced before.

In Scripture, God helps us understand his nature and his character by comparing himself to concrete objects that we can understand better – at any age. One of those objects is the Bible. We know that the Bible is God's Word. In fact, some people call this book, "The Word." In John 1, verses 1 and 2, Jesus is also called the Word:

(Read the following from the large, traditional Bible you will place on the stand:)

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. (John 1:1-2, NLT)

I'm going to place this copy of God's Word right here. Let's use this as a visual reminder to focus on Jesus, the eternal Word of God, for the whole time that we get to be together with each other and with the Holy Spirit.

(Place the Bible on the table open to John 1 in such a way that the participants can easily see the open book and with the words at the appropriate orientation for the participants to read.)

Now, let's sit in silence together for just one minute with our eyes focused on this Bible as we welcome the Holy Spirit to speak to us. I'll close by saying "Amen."

(Hold hands straight out with palms up in a welcoming position as you look at the open Bible. Then say the following:)

Holy Spirit, we welcome you into this room, into our lives, and into our hearts.

(Time 1 minute in silence. Then say:)

Holy Spirit, you are welcome here. Be our teacher. Amen.

There are so many concrete objects in Scripture that you can use in this same way. We've listed just a few of them for you on your handout. You can use a pitcher of water and talk about the Living Water, or a loaf of bread to remind children that Jesus is the bread of life. And these reminders are meaningful for us, as parents and grandparents, too!

Okay, sitting still and silently may have been a bit difficult for some of you. But I guarantee you that was for only one minute! *(Smile in recognition of their surprise.)*

Some of you may be wondering, "Can my children do this?" Your children will actually do this type of prayer. And they often do it better than we adults do it. As you invite children into this silent prayer, with a visual reminder that God is here with us, children respond. They want to engage with God.

And this invitation, at the very start of your children's class, or as you begin a family devotion time, or just at a family meal, helps children (and you) focus on prayer and enter into a time of "praying without ceasing." So, to help your children and their families talk to God and listen, we need to model this type of prayer focus and talk to families about how to do it. And remember, adults will need more practice than children!



But this really works. Children and adults both have an automatic expectation when they walk into a room. **What a person (of any age) experiences at the start of a time together determines their expectations for the rest of the session.** If we invite children into a meaningful, serious time with God, they're better prepared to be with God throughout. If we initiate this time with God with loud, chaotic activities and then ask them to sit still and listen for God, everyone's expectations will naturally be frustrated!

I said I'd tell you more about KidZ at Heart and the resources they have. KidZ at Heart trains, partners with, and mobilizes networks of leaders to help children fall deeply in love with Jesus. One way KidZ at Heart does this is through a series of free, online resources called KidZ at Home.

Each session of KidZ at Home includes a video discussion about a spiritual practice you can do at home or at church with the children in your life. Each discussion includes an expert in children's ministry and spiritual formation explaining that spiritual practice. And there's also a downloadable resource guide that provides several hands-on activities for you to use to help children experience the practice. Again, these are all free and reproducible. **And they're available at www.kidzatheart.org/resources.**

[Help Children Pray Like Children]

Remember how we started today by sharing ways we try to help children talk to and listen to God? And we shared that some of those techniques were helpful for us but not for them, and some were not really helpful for anyone.

Well, let's watch a portion of one KidZ at Home episode. I want to invite you to listen to a few minutes of a conversation between KidZ at Heart's President and Founder, Gordon West, and Children's Ministry Leader, Melissa McDonald. In this clip, Gordon and Melissa share how our culture and upbringing may limit our prayer life, and how we can successfully help kids hear from God and speak to him more easily and more frequently when we invite children to pray ... like children pray.

On your handout, you'll see some reflection questions to answer. We'll discuss these after we watch the video.

(Play 6:55-9:55 of the Scripture Prayer conversation using [THIS LINK](#))

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiJYpS8myl0&t=11s> [Inviting children into Scripture Prayer]

(Listen for Gordon's story about dad to help know where to stop video)

(After watching the video:)

Regroup with your previous partner and then join with another pair to make a small group of four.

(Watch to make sure everyone finds a place in a group of at least three and no more than five before continuing.)

Now, in your small groups, please take about three minutes to respond to this video clip. Share your observations and your answers to the reflection questions on your handout.

Tell your small group how you answered these questions:



- **What makes prayer hard for you? For your kids?**
- **What does God really care about?**
- **What difference does it make to adults and children when they understand what God really wants?**

[Help Children and their Families Pray Through Scripture]

All too often, the things we suggest for parents or teachers to do to help children are so complicated or they require training, or some additional resource is needed. We can better help children and families talk to God and listen to him when we keep it simple. In fact, maybe we could let God do almost all of the work.

Let's experience a **Scripture Prayer**. Scripture Prayer is simply speaking to or hearing from God using God's own words from the Bible.

I'm going to read a short passage of Scripture out loud three times. After each reading, we'll have a minute of silence, and I'll give you something to look for or think about.

As I read this for the first time, **NOTICE** if a word or phrase stands out to you. It may "impress itself" upon you. Don't try to analyze it, just notice it.

(Slowly and with frequent pauses, read Psalm 139:13-16, suggested from The Passion Translation.)

As we sit silently, continue NOTICING that word or phrase that impressed itself upon you. Again, just notice it.

(Allow 30 seconds to one minute of silence.)

As I read a second time, **LISTEN** for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be offering you. Is there something God wants you to do or say or believe?

(Slowly and with frequent pauses, read Psalm 139:13-16 from The Passion Translation.)

In another minute of silence, continue LISTENING to God's invitation and consider how you might respond.

(Allow 30 seconds to one minute of silence.)

Now, as I read a third time, **REST** in your response to God, the one who invited you and the one who will walk with you in your response.

(Slowly and with frequent pauses, read Psalm 139:13-16, suggested from The Passion Translation.)

One more time, sit in silence and REST, knowing God is with you and will continue to be with you as you respond.

(Allow 30 seconds to one minute of silence.) Amen.



Now, we want to invite you to talk about your prayer experience in your small group of four. *(Or if the group is very small, ask the large group the question for general discussion.)*

What did you hear from God? What was this experience like for you? You can share as little or as much with your group as you desire. *(Allow 3 minutes of discussion.)*

Think how easy this was. You, your teachers, your parents, your grandparents can pick a short passage and read it slowly. And you can help children and their families learn to talk to God and to listen to God using God's own words.

[Help Children and their Families Learn to Listen to God]

Now many people, of all ages, don't really know what it means to listen to God. How do we "hear" God's voice?

The answer to that is very similar to how a new baby knows her mother's voice at birth. She's heard it over and over for 40 weeks. She's practiced listening to mom.

In the same way, we can help children and families learn to listen to God by modeling and practicing. When we practice in community, we learn how God speaks in different ways to different people.

Let's watch another part of the KidZ at Home conversation where Gordon and Melissa talk about practical ways to help children and their families listen for God's voice. Again, there are some questions on your handout that we'll answer together after the video.

- **Which type of prayer do children see you model the most...talking prayer or listening prayer?**
- **How does your modeling affect children as they learn to listen to God?**

(Play 11:25-17:54 of the Scripture Prayer conversation using [THIS LINK](#))

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZiJYpS8myl0&t=11s> [Inviting children into Scripture Prayer]

(Listen for Melissa to say "God always speaks " to help know where to stop video)

Let's pull back into our small groups and discuss your answers to just the first two questions on your handout:

- **Which type of prayer do children see you model the most...talking prayer or listening prayer?**
- **How does your modeling affect children as they learn to listen to God?**

Take just about two minutes to share your answers to those first two questions.

(After calling the group back together:)

Let me do a quick poll. If you model talking prayer the most, raise your hand. *(Model raising your hand.)* No surprise, huh? Most of us inadvertently teach children that prayer is all about us telling God what is wrong in the world, what we want him to do about it, and by when. Pretty presumptuous, isn't it? But I think God probably has some pretty important things to say to me, too, right?



Let's answer the next two questions together.

What gets in the way of children and their families (and you!) hearing from God? *(Allow several people to answer. Expect answers like they're too busy, they don't know how, distractions, afraid of what they might hear... Say "thank you" after each answer and share any from this list that don't get shared.)*

And that last question: **How can you and the teachers, parents, and grandparents you lead learn to create space for yourself and for the children in your lives to be able to hear from God?**
(Take a few answers from the audience)

Here are a few simple steps, simple, but maybe not easy.

- 1. Believe that God wants to and will speak to us and to children.** Think about Samuel as a young boy in the Temple. In 1st Samuel 3, we see it took repetition and practice before (in verse 8) the adult "Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy." And it took guidance from the adult Eli to prepare the child Samuel (verse 9) to reply "Speak, your servant is listening."
- 2. Slow down.** Of course, this may be the hardest one, but is it worth it to hear from our loving, heavenly Father? What can we do to help children and families create space to slow down? Is it okay to only be in one activity?
- 3. Purposefully create a space and place.** I've heard of some families buying a cushion and a flashlight. Then they create a space on the floor in one end of a child's closet. This becomes the child's place to listen to God.
- 4. Create a "holy habit" of listening.** Once we've created space and place, we need to make it into a routine. What about five minutes before bedtime? Or how can a family stop to listen together at the table?

[Help Children and their Families Engage in Conversations with God – Age Level Preparation]

For more hands-on ideas for helping children and their families learn to engage in conversation with God, look at the last page of your handout for the KidZ at Home Resource Guide. This one is from a session called "Conversation with God."

(Show Resource Guide.)

On the front page of the guide, there is a definition of the spiritual practice, the scriptural basis for it, and the benefits for the child.

On the back page of the Resource Guide, you'll find those ideas for families of various ages under "Invitations to Engage." We're going to use that second page of that guide to experience some practical ways to help children and families learn to talk to and listen to God.

(NOTE: if the group is small OR consists of parents with children all in a certain age range, use only one age-level activity. For larger or varied groups, designate a corner of the meeting room for each of the three age groups: Early Childhood (4-6 years), Elementary Age (7-9 years), or Preteen/Early Adolescent (10-12 years). This upper age group's activity may also be used successfully with teenagers or with families with multiple children. Once groups are formed, continue with:)



Now that we're in the right groups, I want to ask you to choose one or two adults in your "family." You can choose a mom, a dad, a grandparent, an aunt or uncle – anyone you want. Do that quickly. *(Give about 30 seconds.)*
Did every group choose their adults? Hurry!

Now, adults, you're going to silently read the engagement activity on the KidZ at Home resource guide. Pick the one that is appropriate for the age of children in your group. After you read the activity, do it with your family group. I'll give you about three minutes. *(Hand out props according to the Resource Guide.)*

(Allow 3 minutes. Give 2-minute and 1-minute until done warnings.)

Okay, let's come back together and share with each other. **How would that activity work for your children at home or church? What other ideas might you add to make the activity even more helpful as children and their families learn to talk to and listen to God?**

(Allow several to share.)

Great answers!

[Closing and Prayer]

We hope this workshop has helped you see that Scripture Prayer is an easy way for all ages to engage with God. And remember that one of the best ways to engage the children and their families in your life and ministry in Scripture Prayer is to do it with them. You can lead them, and they can lead you!

It will be exciting to see how God uses these spiritual practices to transform our ministry leaders, our parents and grandparents, and the children we love!

If you want to learn more about ministry to children from a spiritual formation perspective, you may want to visit the KidZ website at www.KidZatHeart.org- remember - that's KidZ with a Z.

If you are looking for resources to help you introduce children to other spiritual practices, go to the KidZ at Heart website and select the KidZ at Home tab.

In closing, let me remind you of 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18.

Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Nothing is as important as inviting our children to love and pray to God personally and completely! Let's help our children fall deeply in love with Jesus.



Pray with me ...

Dear God,

Help us not be guilty of perfecting our skills as ministry leaders and parents to only teach children *about* you. Teach us to connect our children *with* you, in vital, real, life-giving ways. Help us to use prayer to connect our children with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

God bless you.



Help Children and their Families Talk to God (and Listen!)



A KidZ at Home® Workshop for Parents, Grandparents, and Teachers

1. HOW do YOU help children and families talk to God (and listen)?

2. HELP children and their families pray without ceasing: Welcoming the Holy Spirit

- ✓ **A Bible:** *Jesus, the Living Word of God - John 1:1*
- ✓ **A Rock:** *The strong, unchanging Father God - Deuteronomy 32:4*
- ✓ **A Water pitcher:** *Holy Spirit, the Living Water - John 7:37-39*
- ✓ **A Loaf of bread:** *Jesus, the Bread of Life - John 6:48, 51*
- ✓ **A Shepherd's crook:** *Jesus, the Good Shepherd - John 10:14-15*
- ✓ **A Ceramic pot:** *God, the Master Potter - Jeremiah 18:6*
- ✓ **A Candle:** *Jesus, the light of the world - John 8:12*

3. HELP children pray like children



KidZ at Home® – a free resource from KidZ at Heart (www.kidzatheart.org/resources)

- ✓ What makes prayer hard for you? For your kids?

- ✓ What does God really care about and how can we help children and their families understand his heart?

- ✓ What difference does it make to adults and children when they understand what God really wants?



4. HELP children and their families pray through Scripture

- ✓ 1st reading: **NOTICE** if a word or phrase stands out to you. Don't analyze it, just notice it.
- ✓ 2nd reading: **LISTEN** for an invitation from the Holy Spirit.
- ✓ 3rd reading: **REST** in your response to God, the one who invited you and the one who will walk with you in your response.
- ✓ What did you hear from God? What was this experience like for you?

5. HELP children and their families learn to listen to God

- ✓ Which type of prayer do children see you model the most...talking prayer or listening prayer?
- ✓ How does your modeling affect children as they learn to listen to God?
- ✓ What gets in the way of children and their families (and you!) hearing from God?
- ✓ How can you and the teachers, parents, and grandparents you lead learn to create space for yourself and for the children in your lives to be able to hear from God?
 - Believe that God wants to and will speak to us and to children.
 - Slow down.
 - Purposefully create a space and place.
 - Create a "holy habit" of listening.

6. HELP children and their families have conversations with God.



Resources



KidZ at Home® videos and resource guides available free at www.kidzatheart.org/resources. Portions of this workshop were taken from these resources:

- *Hearing from God*
- *Conversation with God*
- *Scripture Prayer*
- *Time-In with God*

KidZ at Heart International – You belong in this community!

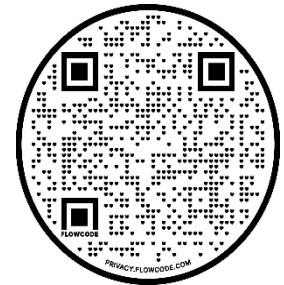


**KidZ
at Heart**

KidZ at Heart is a global Christian community that trains, partners with, and mobilizes networks of leaders to help children fall deeply in love with Jesus!

To help children worldwide, we partner with people and organizations within each **culture** who already have **relationships** with children and a God-given **responsibility** to nurture them. We train these leaders in effective Christian **education** and age-appropriate spiritual **formation**, while **modeling** relational ministry, through intentional community. We then mobilize these leaders by establishing self-sustaining training networks.

Through a variety of conferences and programs hosted by KidZ at Heart, we offer training for you, the North American children's ministry leader. And we can help you take your training across town or around the world!



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CONVERSATION WITH GOD

“Prayer is listening as well as speaking, receiving as well as asking;
and its deepest mood is friendship held in reverence.”

—George A. Buttrick

What makes you walk away from a conversation saying, “Good talk!” ... or what makes a conversation satisfying? Many times, it comes down to being heard by the other person and hearing loving truth from them, a place of mutual listening and acceptance.

Those same things that make for genuinely good conversation are valuable to us when we pray. Prayer is a place of both awe and intimacy. Prayer is “a climbing up of the heart unto God” (Martin Luther). Prayer is a place where deepening relationship flows in both directions.



We might need to broaden our understanding of prayer. We might need to take the time to marinate our hearts in the Lord’s Prayer, since those are the words that Jesus used to teach his first disciples how to pray. Acknowledging who God is, trusting in his will, forgiveness and forgiving, and rejoicing in provision, guidance and deliverance.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us, “Don’t stop praying.” From that we know that prayer is more than a mealtime, “Thanks,” or a bedtime, “Bless me.” Prayer is not an event; it is a lifestyle. Prayer is, according to Richard Foster, “a life of constant conversation with the Holy One.” Imagine a child who converses with God as she plays, does her chores, tries hard to learn a new concept in school, faces failure as she practices, or endures disappointment when plans change. **What a wonderful existence if children can go through life with the habit of talking to God and hearing from him — in conversation.**

As we enjoy the soul-satisfying habit of a continuing conversation with our God, we can influence the children in our lives to abide there also. And as we invite children to engage in ongoing conversations with God, we are showing them a place where they can have heart-to-heart authenticity, acceptance, understanding, encouragement, and his lingering presence. And it is a place where they can hear from God — where they become familiar with the loving whisper of the Spirit of God.

Start the conversation with your child!

“Come and sit with me a minute. Let’s have a conversation about conversation.”

CONVERSATION WITH GOD

INVITATIONS TO ENGAGE

EARLY CHILDHOOD (2-6 years old)

(Sit on one side of an open door and have the child sit on the other side of the door.)
Can you hear me? Even though we can't see each other, you know I'm here and you know that I can hear you. Tell me something that makes you happy. Now tell me something that makes you sad. I care about those things so much! And God cares even more than I do. Even though you can't see him, God loves to hear from you and he loves to talk to you.

Let's sit together, and you can tell God what you told me. Now let's sit quietly for a minute to see if God has something to say to you.

Isn't it wonderful that we don't have to come to this door to talk to each other? Praying to God is like that. You can talk to him anytime about anything.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us, "Don't stop praying." That means that all day long you can say, "Help me!" or "Thank you!" and God will hear you and answer.

ELEMENTARY AGE (5-10 years old)

When we have a conversation with someone, part of the time we talk and part of the time we listen. Sometimes we forget to listen, don't we? Prayer is a conversation with God, and sometimes we talk so much that we forget to listen to him, too.

Let's use two colors of paper strips and create a prayer chain to hang in your room. As you pray, write on one color of paper strip the things you are saying to God. Then on the other color, write the things God has said to you when you listen to him while you pray. Then add them to the chain.

Each night as you remember what you've prayed about through the day, add to the chain and you will learn something about your conversations with God.

PRETEEN/EARLY ADOLESCENT (10-14 years old)

(Have the child cut three or four small circles out of red paper or use red stickers.)

Good conversation means that there is both talking and listening. That's true even when we are in conversation with God. Maybe if we had some red lights, like we see when we are driving, we would remember to stop and pay attention to what God might be saying.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us, "Don't stop praying." That means that we can talk and listen to God all day long.

You can think of places to put these red circles. Then when you see them all through today, you can stop and talk to God and then wait there a little while to listen to what he might want to say.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE

Children, Can You Hear Me?

by Brad Jersak