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Father to the Fatherless

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### **Nearly one third of all children now live in homes with no father present.**

These children make up 71% of all school dropouts, 71% of child pregnancies,  
85% of behavior disorders, 90 % of Runaways, 63 % of suicides,  
and 85 % of youth in prison.

Faced with these statistics I think back many years to an 82 year old man who prayed for and with me on my first job in an inner city preschool. At age three his father had abandoned him and his mother in an unheated shack in the middle of a north Dakota blizzard with the temperature 30 degrees below zero. Their life expectancy was less than one half hour. Fortunately his maternal Grandfather found them. *This abandoned child at age 82 told me he had been cold all of his life... not the cold of the blizzard... but the cold of knowing that his father would abandon him.* His next words I will remember all my life: **“The only thing that still warms me are the first two words of the Lord’s prayer “Our Father” which I changed to “MY father.”** These two words and sincere prayer are how I have started each day since I was three and one half years old.

Our very small group has remembered this man and his Heaven Father for nearly 50 years. They made such an impact that we have dedicated ourselves to collecting ways to help children REPLACE/augment their less than perfect earth fathers with a Heaven father. Following are our favorite five ways to help children get to know their “Father in Heaven”. Truly dedicated parents are invited to browse our entire forty year collection free at [www.teachustoprayer.com](http://www.teachustoprayer.com).

Our favorite first step (even for very young children) is taking turns at one sentence meal time prayers. Each parent prays a one sentence prayer and then each child does the same. Avoid correcting a child’s prayers (especially for the first day or so) as they are between the child and God. Surprisingly most children are quick to trust and learn from their parents lead. The last of our collection or prayer helps is helping children check their prayers to see if they line up with scripture but the key issues, the foundation of all prayers is that God HEARS and ANSWERS.

A great addition to one sentence prayers at meals is a prayer cloth or shawl. Putting such a cloth or shawl over a child’s head helps him or her understand that prayer is being alone with God...that he truly is “God with Us.” The first time using the shawl is simple.

1. Explain that the shawl helps us understand that any time we need Jesus we can call on him.
2. The shawl also helps us understand that being alone with God means ignoring the world around us...that focusing on God means being ALONE with him.... turning away from everything else.

A great third step is learning “The Lord’s Prayer”. (Download a free teaching puzzle, coloring book pages, bulletin insets. Parent take homes and much more at [www.teachustoprayer.com](http://www.teachustoprayer.com)). The puzzle is easily printable and enables most 5-6 year olds to memorize the prayer with little or even no adult help.

Step four for us has become a prayer cup...helping children understand the second half of prayer...the part after the Amen, the part where God talks to us, the part where God becomes personal and real. On one side of a Styrofoam cup each child writes “From Me to Jesus”. On the other side they write “From Jesus to Me”. If necessary help the child write a one sentence prayer and put it in the cup. Put the cup by the child’s bed or where they eat and have the child pray it each day. On Day one tell the child that prayer does not move God’s hands. They belong to him, but it always moves his heart because he has given that to us. If after two or three days the child does not think or feel God has answered pray with him or her. If after a week of praying together the child still says “No Answer”, involve the pastor or even the whole church. No child should reach the age of 18 or leave a church without at least ONE answered prayer. In the words of Dr. Charles Stanley: “**The ONE thing** that has molded my life is learning to **LISTEN** to God at an early age”. May your child say the same thing and treasure is first lessons in prayer as much as his first efforts to ride a bike.

God promises to answer all our prayers, even the clumsy ones, even the wrong ones, especially those of a child. I have heard God’s most frequent answers are yes, not and wait. Personally he always seems to ask me why? He even helps us know how to pray...a great question for a child. What do you think God would like you to pray? Perhaps the safest way to help a child pray rightly is to share just the right scripture. Some of our favorites follow.

1. Psalm 5:3 Are you praying DAILY ... first thing in the morning? Praying at least once a day is important. It helps us stay in tune with God, to WALK with him. The first prayer of the day is much more important than the last. Pray before you get into trouble...not after. Pray early...not late...but whatever time you pray, pray at least ONCE A DAY.
2. Matthew 7:9-11 Do you trust God? Do you believe He is real and that he is on your side? Can you picture God leaning over the edge of heaven looking for ways to bless you and reward you? Or do you tend to blame God for the bad behavior of Satan and other human beings? Nothing can hurt a prayer more than a wrong idea of God. He is a fixer not a hurter. He is a friend not an enemy. He is a healer. He can be trusted. Trusting in this FACT ...the goodness of God...is what faith and prayer all about.
3. Jer. 33:3 Do you tell God what to do or do you ask him. If you have been ordering God around you will never learn the very best thing about prayer... God’s gentle spirit leading you to a better prayer and to your heart lining up with his.

4. Matt 6:14-15, Proverbs 28:13 Are you praying with a pure heart? Are you angry with someone? Forgive them. Have you sinned? Repent. Are you ungrateful? Thank God for past prayers answered. Are you praying selfishly? Make a list of others to pray for.
5. Ephesians 6:18 Is prayer a habit. Are there reminders in your home... an altar...a framed verse on the wall, even a small table with an open Bible? There should be. An altar reminds us of the three great rules of prayer...**practice, practice, and more practice**. If there is no altar or at least an open Bible we will not develop the prayer muscle, a daily prayer HABIT. (One great addition to a family altar is a prayer cup featured at [www.teachustoprayer.com](http://www.teachustoprayer.com).)
6. Psalm 107: 19-20 Is your prayer in line with scripture? We cannot pray rightly without Bible verses but we cannot understand those verses without praying for the Holy Spirit to help us. Scripture and prayer...you can't do one without the other.
7. 1Peter 5:13 Have you prayed with someone else? Scripture gives only two ways that human beings are joined: in marriage and in prayer. If you want your children connected to the church for life find them at least 2 adult prayer partners and two peers...make a list of their phone numbers and post it in the child's room. Praying with others is habit forming. Get **connected**... join a prayer group or start your own.
8. John 14:2 Are you praying in Jesus name? This could be many things because Jesus has many names: healer, savior, deliverer etc. but for sure it means praying with LOVE because God is love. Praying in His name also means letting him come into your heart and guide the prayer as he would.

The shame of our nation is not that we fail to teach prayer in the schools but that we fail to teach it in the home and the church. We can view prayer as a car that needs maintained and repaired or like math as a skill that needs practiced. It really doesn't matter. When we look under the hood we ALWAYS find Jesus and his great love. Start with one sentence prayers, move on to a prayer shawl and memorizing the Lord's Prayer. Finally make and keep a prayer cup for each child in the family or Sunday School class. Keep a copy of our checklist on the wall for those times a child is having problems with a specific prayer. Like riding a bike and learning to read, learning to pray MY Father (*connecting with God*) should be a part of every childhood.

Charles White is a retired pre school teacher and web editor of [www.teachustoprayer.com](http://www.teachustoprayer.com) where he offers this article as a bulletin insert.