

Summary: Would you like to make prayer a habit for the children in your Sunday School class? Try these seven ideas.

Making Prayer a Habit

When I asked for prayer requests one Sunday morning, two very earnest little boys responded. "I want to be a Texas Ranger hero," said Teddy. "I want a dog just like Old Yeller," replied Robbie. As I led the Sunday School class in prayer, I somewhat reluctantly asked God to grant Teddy's and Robbie's requests. But by the following week I had changed my attitude about unusual prayer requests because God had answered Robbie's prayer! Our Sunday School class is learning that God hears our prayers. Following are the guidelines we use:

Pray Gratefully. The day after we prayed that Robbie would get a dog just like Old Yeller, Robbie met his new neighbor from down the street. The neighbor had a frisky yellow Lab puppy that needed a new home. The rest is history!

Gratefully
Originally
Deliberately
Habitually
Earnestly
Applicably
Repentantly
Steadfastly

To make answers to prayer visible, our class uses a prayer box. To make a prayer box, choose a box with a lid. Divide the box in half by gluing a piece of cardboard in the middle inside the box. Cut two slots in the lid, and label one slot "requests" and the other slot "answers." Encourage the

children to record requests and answers and place them in the box.

Designate part of a bulletin board or prepare a poster to display answers to prayer. Use a heading such as "Delight yourself in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4, NKJV). Display answers to prayer on the bulletin board or poster. Periodically plan a thanksgiving party. Serve a small treat, and encourage the children to share how God has answered their prayers.

Pray Originally. Teach your class to pray scripture. Using a verse such as "Hear my prayer, O LORD" (Psalm 86:6), create impromptu rhythms. Have the children recite the verse using rhythm instruments. Sing prayer choruses such as "Seek Ye First" and "Whisper a Prayer." Pray with lifted hands or on your knees. "Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground" (Nehemiah 8:6). Pray for the person to your left or to your right. Hold hands and pray.

Pray Deliberately. Ask for prayer requests. Some students will have many requests, while others will be reluctant to share. Record the requests so you can remember to pray during the week. Include every request, even the ones that seem inconsequential. Guard against being a gatekeeper (i.e., deciding what is or isn't important enough to merit prayer). Instead, teach your class the truth found in Philippians 4:6, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Pray Habitually. Prayer time does not have to be at the same time each week. In fact, by varying prayer time,

you are teaching your class a valuable lesson: Anytime is the right time to pray. Stop and pray as children enter the classroom and share urgent needs or concerns. Pray after a physical activity to help the class wind down. Pray before snack time. Pray before the Bible story, asking God to prepare hearts for the lesson. Pray after the story time to thank God for such a wonderful reminder of His love and care.

Pray for every request, even the ones that seem inconsequential.

As prayer time becomes a habit your class will begin to spontaneously request prayer. What a blessing when Chuckie walked into Sunday School and greeted me with "Let's pray for my grandma today."

Pray Earnestly. "My daddy won't come to church anymore." "I wish my sister and I could be in the same foster family." Such serious requests merit especially earnest and heartfelt prayers. "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray" (James 5:13, NKJV). Don't be afraid to show emotion at such times. If the child is small, invite him or her to sit on your lap or kneel together while you pray. Take the hand of an older child or simply sit or stand beside him or her. It takes courage to verbalize serious needs, so pray accordingly. You may be the only one interceding on behalf of the child. Reach out to the child the following week. Pray with him or her over the telephone or write a simple prayer and drop it in the mail.

Pray Applicably. The boys in class are preoccupied with the larger than life heroes on videos and TV. So on a recent Sunday three of my students de-

cidated they wanted to grow up to be a Texas Ranger, Luke Skywalker, and a Power Ranger. I remembered Jeremiah 29:11, "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,'" and prayed that the Lord would make each of these boys a godly hero.

Encourage your students to pray for the qualities of godly heroes from the Bible, such as the courage of David, the obedience of Joshua, and the faithfulness of Samuel. Remind your class that God specializes in making heroes out of ordinary people: David, Joshua, Moses, Daniel, and Samuel, to name a few.

Pray Repentantly. After I finished telling the story, I looked directly at each of my students and asked, "Did you know that Jesus died for you, Teddy? Aurelia, did you know that Jesus died just for you? And did you know that Jesus died for you, Truman?" That Easter morning, Truman, Aurelia, and Teddy asked for Jesus' forgiveness. They repented of their sins and thanked Jesus for salvation. The truth from God's Word laid the foundation and prepared their hearts for repentance. God's Word convicts the hearts of children.

Pray Steadfastly. Let your students know you are praying for them. Send postcards that say, "Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice" (Psalm 55:17, NKJV). Also let them know you rejoice with them and thank God for the prayers He has answered.

Anytime is the
right time to pray.

Look for reminders to prompt you to pray for the children in your class. Three of my students live in my neighborhood, so I pray for them as I walk or drive by their houses. Two of my students attend my daughter's school, so I pray for them when I pick up my daughter. One of my students has a new scooter, so I pray for his safety when I see any other child on a scooter.

Teach your class that GOD HEARS their prayers. Begin right away to pray Gratefully, Originally, Deliberately, Habitually, Earnestly, Applicably, Repentantly, and Steadfastly.

—Lori Williams