

# **FamilyLife Today**<sup>®</sup> Transcript

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## **Teaching Your Kids to Pray**

Guest: Nancy Guthrie  
From the series: Praying With and for Our Children (Day 1 of 2)  
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**Bob:** I'm assuming your children have heard you pray, right? Nancy Guthrie wonders, what kinds of prayers have they heard you pray?

**Nancy:** Have your kids ever heard you confess a specific sin? If we want our kids to have a relationship with God, that includes the joy that comes from experiencing forgiveness, followed by confessing a specific sin to God. Maybe they need to hear us confess a specific sin to God.

**Bob:** This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I'm Bob Lepine.

When we teach our children about prayer, in addition to instruction, they need to see us modeling what prayer looks like. We'll talk more about that with Nancy Guthrie today; stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us.

We're going to talk about prayer, and we're going to talk two things about prayer; we're going to talk about parents praying for their kids and about parents teaching their kids how to pray. So, which of those do you want to talk about first? Which is the bigger issue, do you think, for most parents: teaching their kids how to pray, or praying for their kids?

**Dave:** Wow!

**Ann:** I think they go hand-in-hand.

**Dave:** That's a big one, Bob.

**Ann:** I don't think you can teach your kids how to pray unless you—

**Bob:** Oh, you're side-stepping the issue. [Laughter]

**Dave:** She's good at that.

**Bob:** I think you're right. No, I will grant you, I think you're right that they do go hand-in-hand. What's the bigger felt need for parents?

**Ann:** How to teach your kids. That's what I think.

**Bob:** How to teach your kids how to pray.

**Dave:** I was going to say the opposite! I was going to say, we worry and we're so stressed about our kids, we forget we can pray. So, I'm telling you what, I'm right, Bob. I'm right on this one.

**Ann:** We're no help to you.

**Bob:** Okay, here's what we'll do. We'll throw it to our guest, let her decide where we should start with this. Nancy Guthrie joins us on *FamilyLife Today*; Nancy, welcome back!

**Nancy:** Oh my goodness, I'm so thrilled to get to be with you guys today and with your listeners.

**Bob:** It's been awhile since you've been on *FamilyLife Today*. How long awhile has it been?

**Nancy:** Well, it's 2019. Let's see...maybe I was here in 2002 or 2003? So that's awhile.

**Bob:** It's been awhile!

**Nancy:** You're making me age myself! I don't really appreciate that.

**Bob:** But in fact—I shared this with you—I saw recently a tweet from you, and it was a picture of you 20 years ago, with your daughter Hope 20 years ago, because you just went past the milestone of 20 years since Hope went to heaven.

**Nancy:** Yes.

**Bob:** When you were here before, we talked about Hope and Gabe and about the challenge you and your husband faced with two kids who did not live long.

**Nancy:** That's right.

**Bob:** I just didn't want to let this pass without you knowing that we still think about you guys and still think about Hope and still think about Gabe.

**Nancy:** You know, I guess I would just say, as we're going to talk about prayer today, I think those experiences, 20 years ago when I gave birth to a daughter and found out

that she was going to live less than six months, and I began to ask myself, “How do you pray for a child who’s going to die?” Maybe that was beginning, ground-floor, of trying to figure out, “What does it look like to be a parent who prays, in this world where God is sovereign and we would like to be?” So, maybe that was actually a good place to start.

**Ann:** Yes. That’s inspiring in and of itself, because many people would have a hard time even beginning to pray at that point of their journey.

**Nancy:** I did too.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Nancy:** Honestly, yes. I remember feeling really guilty at times that so many people would say, “We’re praying for you,” and I remember telling some of them, “Well, that’s really good, because we’re not praying that much.” I mean, I think initially we did, but then there were just so many questions, and honestly, hardly knowing where to begin praying. I was really grateful to know that people were praying for us, I was grateful to know that the Holy Spirit prays for us when we don’t have the words; when we don’t know what to pray, He prays for us with this groaning. So that was really good news to me.

**Bob:** In our online archive at [FamilyLifeToday.com](http://FamilyLifeToday.com), if listeners want to listen back to that conversation from 15-plus years ago—

**Nancy:** My copy is on cassettes, so that says something to you about how long it was!

**Bob:** Well, we have an updated copy for you. We can give you the MP3 files now. You can go and download these conversations, at [FamilyLifeToday.com](http://FamilyLifeToday.com), with Nancy Guthrie and hear about those days with Hope and with Gabe.

You have since written on prayer. You’ve written a one-year Bible devotional for parents to pray for their kids, and then wrote a book for kids on learning how to pray. Where do we start? Do we start with parents praying for their kids, or do we start with teaching our kids how to pray?

**Nancy:** Well, let’s start younger and go older, okay?

**Bob:** Okay.

**Nancy:** I think we should start with what every child should know about prayer.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Nancy:** I think all of us who have children, grandchildren, we want our kids to know how to pray, we want them to pray, but if you think about it, you know, what is the way

we typically teach our children to pray? I mean, most kids when they pray, I think one thing dominates their prayers: thank-yous...

**Bob:** Yes.

**Nancy:** ...and telling God what we want. Those are good things. I mean, those are a big part of prayer. Aren't we so glad that we have a God who's so worthy of thanks, to thank Him, and that He is our loving Father, that we can approach Him and tell Him what we need?

But I think that's a pretty limited vocabulary for prayer, so that's one reason I put together this book, *What Every Child Should Know about Prayer*, because I want to expand children's vocabulary, children's focus, children's expectations, and children's experience of prayer.

**Bob:** Don't you think most kids have that limited vocabulary because all they've ever heard is Mom and Dad?

**Nancy:** Well, I think you're stealing my points! [Laughter] Yes, exactly. I mean, if you think about it, when do they hear us pray? Usually before a meal. I mean, I would imagine in a lot of homes that's the only time—

**Bob:** Right. Maybe bedtime.

**Nancy:** Maybe bedtime—that they hear their parents pray.

**Dave:** And it might not even be an authentic prayer. It might be a read or a memorized—

**Nancy:** By rote prayer.

**Dave:** Right.

**Nancy:** I mean, I can think of a lot of my experiences in my family that—I mean, I know exactly what's coming, because it's what's always said.

**Dave:** Right.

**Bob:** When that's what you're modeling in prayer, what are you teaching kids about prayer?

**Nancy:** Well, I think it takes away from it a genuine conversation with a real person, who is God Himself.

**Bob:** Right.

**Nancy:** So yes, as parents, we want to model a genuine conversation about things that matter. You know, one thing I write in the book—what do we talk to God about? We talk to Him, God, about the things that matter to us and the things that matter to Him. That means that we have to be people who are in God’s Word; we have to be in Scripture, too, because that’s going to inform how we pray. But that’s a genuine conversation.

I mean, I come here and I meet you guys and we’re talking—what are we talking about? We talk about the things that matter to us and talk about the things that matter to you, because that’s relationship. That’s a genuine conversation. That’s what we want prayer to be.

**Ann:** I’m going to read one of them. “God hears us when we pray,” and then it says, “God can hear us when we say our prayers out loud or when we talk to Him from our hearts. If we say them out loud or whisper them, it might help us keep our minds on what we want to say to Him. God has promised to hear the prayers of all people who belong to Him,” and then you have Psalm 116:1: “I love the Lord because He hears my voice and my prayer for mercy.” Then there’s a prayer I can pray. “I love You, Lord, because You listen to my prayers.”

That alone for kids to understand, God hears us, He listens to us; and then Scripture to go along with that. I love pouring this truth of gold into kids’ hearts, and they’ll want to read it, it’s so good.

**Bob:** This is 141 pages, so this is—

**Nancy:** Yes, it’s not a short little book.

**Bob:** This is not bedtime story, although you can take two pages—basically, every two pages is a new thought, right?

**Nancy:** Yes. I know a lot of people who say they take either a section a night, depending on how old the child is, or just one page, and talk about it. I’ve tried to make the pages create the opportunity for interaction—

**Ann:** Conversation, yes.

**Nancy:** —between adult and child who’s reading it, so that it can lead to actual prayer, as you mentioned there. It says, “I can pray,” so trying to give them some words to pray. Or sometimes it’s a question you could ask and discuss with a child. So it becomes, yes, not just reading a story, but a conversation about this important thing called prayer.

**Dave:** Here’s what’s really amazing about this. As I look at each couple pages, it’s stuff adults need to learn. This isn’t just five-year-olds; this is—I would love people in my congregation to know that.

**Bob:** I think that was part of—

**Ann:** It's her secret plan. [Laughter]

**Nancy:** Well, it's certainly what I have heard over and over again, which, I have to say, does thrill me, you know, that I hear from adults who are reading—maybe they got it for their kids, but they're like, "I'm learning some things as I read this," and that makes me really happy.

**Bob:** Are you a natural prayer?

**Nancy:** I think one of my most common prayers is, "Lord, forgive me for my prayerlessness."

**Bob:** Oh, wow.

**Nancy:** Because yes, it's a lot easier to talk about prayer than to pray.

**Bob:** Yes.

**Nancy:** I think, actually, I'm becoming better at prayer, but I think it is a lifetime pursuit. I want prayer to be more a part of my waking up rather than scrolling through my phone. I want prayer to be more a part of through my day, not just at mealtime. I want prayer to be the way I end the day, not with Netflix, and not with so many other things it can be filled with, but with talking to that Person that I would say to you is my most important relationship.

**Ann:** It's interesting; you say that, and yet you wrote this book.

**Nancy:** Yes.

**Ann:** What prompted you to want to write this about prayer?

**Nancy:** Well, I think because I do see this need with kids to really be grounded in prayer that's real and not prayer that's rote. And I really wanted to use the opportunity to really mine through the Bible about what it says about prayer, and not focus solely on the experience. As you see in there, I have a section on the Psalms. I mean, the Psalms are an incredible resource when it comes to prayer! These are divinely-given words that—it's such a unique book in the Bible, because they're divinely-given words for us to sing or pray back to Him, back to God. That's amazing.

So, I have a section on how the Psalms help us to pray and shape how we pray, a section on various people on the Bible and what they prayed for. I think that's really significant for kids. You have Solomon who prayed for wisdom, you have David who

prayed that God would make his heart clean after he sinned. I think maybe the most poignant to me is Paul. When Paul prays, he begs God three times to take this pain away of this thorn, and there, I think, we learn a very important lesson for us to talk to kids about God, and that is that sometimes God's answer to our prayer to take our pain away is that He says, "My grace is sufficient. My strength is made perfect in weakness."

**Bob:** I had a man in our church come to us and say, "I would like to buy a copy of this book for every family in our church and give it as a gift."

**Nancy:** May his tribe increase! [Laughter]

**Bob:** Well, I think it was his burden to see not just kids learn the basics of prayer, but moms and dads find a way to incorporate this and to make it be a more vibrant part of what the family's structure.

You know, your confession—let's just be honest. We can ask around the table.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Dave:** No, let's not. Let's not.

**Bob:** We can go out to most Christian gatherings, and we could say, "How many of you would say, 'In my spiritual life, the area where I—I may be struggling in all kinds of areas, but the area where I have it most together is my prayer life. I'm doing really well in that.?'?" You ask that question, I guarantee you, you may have two hands go up from people who, for whatever reason, are gifted, burdened, it's just a part of the makeup of who they are in prayer, they're prayer warriors, as we like to say.

I think most of us would just say, "My prayer life is not what it ought to be, what I'd like for it to be. It's a discipline, it's—" Maryanne and I were having this conversation recently, and I just said, "This is something that I do by faith."

She said, "Well, what do you mean, you do it by faith?"

I said, "Prayer is always an exercise of faith, because you can't see who you're talking to, He doesn't talk back audibly to you. You are praying believing somebody's there, somebody's listening, somebody cares, this really matters, and this is not just an exercise in some kind of futility because God is sovereign and going to do whatever He's going to do anyway, so why bother to pray?"

I can come up with all of the reasons why prayer does not make rational sense, but the Bible tells us this is what God wants from us, so I have to by faith say, "I'm going to respond in faith and do what God's called me to do, and I'm going to teach my kids the same thing."

**Nancy:** Can I go back to this, what I was talking about earlier when I said that mostly our kids know how to thank God for things and ask God for things.

**Bob:** Right.

**Nancy:** I think that can be our tendency, too. I know that one thing I feel like helps me in regard to prayer and that I think the Bible teaches so clearly regarding prayer has to do with some of the other elements that should be in our prayer. I think one of the ones that's missing so often is beginning with praise. Thanksgiving for what He's done seems to come a lot more naturally to us than praising Him for who He is, just being willing to land and marinate on His character and who He is, and allow that to then just flow up in prayers of praise.

But we discover when we do that, that's such a great foundation to then begin to talk to Him, because we're so clear on who it is we're talking to!

**Dave:** I was wondering if you've found that the reason—because I agree. I've seen the same thing even in my own life, but I wonder if people don't know His character. If they're not in the Word, if they're not looking at revelation of who He is, I know what He's done and I can thank Him for that in my life, but I get stalled. Like, who is He, really?

**Nancy:** Yes.

**Dave:** So I have a couple words, and then I'm done. Which shows sort of the depth of our spiritual maturity.

**Nancy:** I think you're right, biblical literacy is a part of that. The more we know His Word, we have those words to pull on, that He is Shepherd, that He is Rescuer, that He is the Righteous One, that He is Jehovah-Rapha, the Healer. So we pull those words from Scripture, and that helps us with that.

We do offer prayers of praise, we offer prayers of thanksgiving, but maybe the sweetest time is when we move into prayers of confession. You know, just to begin our prayer, "Lord, I confess..."

Honestly, that's when it gets the most real, and I guess I would just ask the question to those parents who are listening: Have your kids ever heard you confess a specific sin? If they haven't—you know, you can read my book all you want, but I think all of us as parents know that our kids tend to follow our example more than what we tell them to do, and they're probably going to follow your example more than what you read to them, even out of a book.

So if we want our kids to have a relationship with God that includes the joy that comes from experiencing forgiveness, followed by confessing a specific sin to God, maybe they need to hear us confess a specific sin to God.

**Dave:** Now, have you done that? Have your kids heard you?

**Nancy:** One of my biggest regrets during my son's growing up years was not doing that more. I think I didn't figure out until he was a young adult how much that void in my prayer presence in his life, I think, was harmful to me and to him.

What I robbed him from was hearing me pray, confess it as sin, name it as that—the accountability that comes in a family, then, from that—but then also praying and asking God for the power to forsake that sin, and letting him see the gospel is not about perfect behavior, but instead, the gospel is about being able to confess my sin and experience not only his forgiveness but the power to forsake that sin, and then walk in that newness of life, walk out that repentance. That would have been such a better example than some of the ways he did hear me pray.

**Dave:** You know, as you say that, I go right to James five, thinking about what James told us to do with confession. Think about that, as you're talking about sharing it with one another, because often we think, "Confession's a private thing. It's just me and God; I don't want my son or daughter to know. I don't even want my spouse to know."

As he says—look at this—"Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed." I've taught this as a pastor; I've taught, "Okay, you can confess your sin and you think you're done, and yet, when you never speak that out to a friend, somebody that loves you, what's going on, you may not be healed of that addiction." It's like, "Oh, we're good now, God and I are—" and you know you're going to go back to it, because nobody knows.

But the second you bring somebody else into it, whether it's a son or a spouse or a best friend, now I'm on the hook. Bob, I just told you I struggle with this; Bob's going to be like, "I'm going to hold you to that."

**Bob:** There's some accountability.

**Dave:** "Let's see you get healed by God," and it doesn't happen till it's public. Way to go.

**Bob:** Nancy, you have six sections in the book *What Every Child Should Know about Prayer*, and I just want to walk through these, because I think it gives parents an outline for how we teach our kids about prayer.

First, God wants us to talk to him; second, prayer is more than asking God for things; third, God's people have always prayed; fourth, the Psalms give us words to pray; fifth,

Jesus teaches us to pray; and then the last section is, let's pray. Here's how we can do this.

I can see where a mom and a dad, or a grandparent with grandchild, reading through these sections—you're learning yourself, you're teaching your kids, you are getting very practical about what the discipline of prayer can and should look like. I would think kids going through this would come out the other end and it would be something maybe they're even more comfortable with than Mom and Dad are.

**Nancy:** Wouldn't that be great?

**Bob:** Yes.

**Nancy:** If you can learn to pray as a child and you know you have a heavenly Father who hears your prayers and that you can tell Him how you feel and what you need and you can tell Him what you've done, that becomes a habit in a lifetime. Think about how that changes the teen years and the young adult years, and all of the years.

**Ann:** I think for me—I didn't grow up in the church, so I had no modeling whatsoever, but I knew that I had a relationship with Jesus, and probably out of my youth and not knowing much I got into this habit of praying out loud with my kids all the time in the car, from the time they were babies. Because I knew it was a relationship, I was very honest with God, saying, "God, I'm so mad at You today!" or, "God, I need You today," and there was a desperateness in my prayer. I didn't make them listen, but I don't know why I even prayed out loud all the time with them.

Later, as they've gotten older, they've told me, "I learned how to have a relationship with Jesus watching your conversations and listening to your conversations."

**Bob:** I just want to let listeners know, if you're a parent or a grandparent, this is one of the privileges we have, to help guide our children and our grandchildren in this discipline of learning to talk to God. Nancy, your book, *What Every Child Should Know about Prayer*, is a great book for parents or grandparents to take their kids through and to help them think about, help them learn about how we communicate with God, the invitation He's given us to build a relationship with Him through prayer.

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We'd love to hear from you. You are part of the FamilyLife family and we want to know how God is using *FamilyLife Today* in your life.

Thanks for listening. Thanks to Marques Holt, Dennis Leake, Rhonda Street and our entire broadcast team. We hope you've enjoyed the broadcast and that you will be back for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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