

A young girl received her first communion and when she returned to her pew, her parents noticed that she was deep in prayer. After the service they asked her what she was praying for. She said, “well, I prayed for you, mommy and daddy, and I prayed for my dumb brother and then I sang Jesus a song and told him my favorite ghost story.”

Cute as this story may be, there are some great truths that we can learn from children and their prayer lives. The author Jane Vennard, who I’ve been referencing all summer, believes that praying is our natural way of being and that infants are born knowing how to do this. She says that we need to remember how to pray. Kids know wonder and awe and silence and mystery. They can teach us so much about prayer and so that’s what I would like to explore a bit tonight.

Children naturally seem to be able to pray with honesty. They can so openly talk to God that it seems like the natural thing to do to sing a song to Jesus or to tell God a favorite story. The other thing that moves me about children and prayer is that they so much believe that God is there and hears their prayers. That questioning about whether or not God is there hasn’t yet happened, even though it eventually will happen at one point or another.

What would our prayer lives be like if we were always able to honestly and openly talk to God about whatever was going on in our lives...even the most mundane and seemingly boring details of our lives? What would it mean if we were able to share with God our favorite memories and our deepest desires? And maybe you already to that and if you do, wonderful. You are able to experience God and God's love in a way that many adults have forgotten.

We can also learn about transparency in prayer from children. They really seem to hold nothing back in their prayers. I found a website that has collected real prayers written to God from children and here are some of what they have written,

“Instead of letting people die and having to make new ones, why don't you just keep the ones you got now?”

“I went to this wedding and they kissed right in church. Is that okay?”

“I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions.”

“In Bible times did they really talk that fancy?”

“I am American. What are you?”

“Thank you for the baby brother but what I wanted was a puppy.”

“I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it.”

“Please put another holiday between Christmas and Easter. There is nothing good in there now.”

“We read that Edison made light. But in Sunday school they said you did it. So I get he stoled your idea.”

Some of us have been taught at some point or another that prayer has to be screened or thought out before we can pray to God. Maybe this was inadvertently taught, but somewhere along the way, we learned that only some things can be brought to God and not others.

But God wants all of it. God wants all of us. Our hopes, our fears, our joys, our disappointments, our worries and our anger. God wants it all and God will work IN it all. There isn't anything that God can't handle. Our psalms are full of those kinds of prayers. Prayers of every emotion and experience. I invite you to read some of the psalms. Sometimes when I don't have the words to pray I read the psalms and let those be my prayer.

That is why it is so refreshing to learn from our children and grandchildren and our kids in Sunday school. They have a wisdom that we have lost...it's a wisdom of trust and transparency and we are so blessed to welcome the children in our midst.

One of the most wonderful moments of my life was when Logan said his bedtime prayers by himself. It wasn't because he had memorized the prayer, but it was because he said the prayer with such joy and innocence. We were sitting in our rocking chair and he folded his hands and closed his eyes and said in his little, difficult to understand toddler chatter, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Angels watch me through the night and keep me safe till morning light." And then with the most enthusiasm his tired little voice could muster, he said, AAAAAAMEN."

And I think God heard that loud and clear.

Jesus reminds us to be like children when it comes to faith. To step away from the complicated questions and to instead simply love the fact that we have a savior who is near and who listens at all times and in all places.

May you find that you, too, can pray with openness and honestly and transparency and that you can rediscover awe and amazement in your relationship with God. Amen.