

## CHILDREN AND PRAYER

One of my favourite scriptures is 1 Samuel 2:11 “But the child ministered to the Lord before Eli the priest”

You know why I LOVE this text? We all know the story of Samuel growing up in the temple with the high priest Eli in a time when the word of the Lord was rare and how the Lord spoke to Samuel and so on. But we easily read over this text. “The child ministered to the Lord.” Not, the child Samuel helped Eli in the temple. Can you see how little Samuel and his work and prayers are valued? Of the child Samuel we also read “He grew in stature, and in favour both with the Lord and men.” Not “little Samuel was a good boy.”

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If we think about children and prayer, we first of all have to value children. I want to tell you about a small everyday miracle that happened a month or so ago when children prayed. I can of course tell you BIG miracles, how children’s prayers changed history and transformed whole communities. But sometimes stories like that feel very far away and unreachable. So I decided to stay with something small and personal.

I have a problem with excema in my ears, it’s very irritating and very itchy. Drives me nuts. But I’ve learnt to handle it. But sometimes, the excema causes ear infection. That’s a total different ball game. My ears get very sore, everything pains – my throat, my head, my teeth my skin, I get feverish and can’t function. Then I have to go to the doctor. He takes a long piece of cloth, puts ointment all over the length and pushes it into my ear. It’s a little sore AND IT FEELS TERRIBLE. And then I’m of course totally deaf. It stays there until my ear is healed, usually more or less two weeks. I can’t handle it, I can’t function properly and I have to take time to go the dr (And I don’t have time) and I have to pay the dr a lot of money which I don’t have.

So, about a month ago, I woke up one morning and immediately felt that I was getting an ear infection. I just wanted to cry. PLEASE not this. My first thoughts were, I have to get someone to pray for me for this infection, and quickly as well, I just don’t think my own prayers are going to be enough. Now, I work in a

church office and I'm surrounded by believers every day. And pastors 😊. So I could literally ask anyone to pray for me. But also have a prayer club for kids on Friday nights; so I decided to go and find one or two children from the prayer club to come and pray. Got hold of two kids. Asked them to pray for my ear.

Now perhaps some of you have seen the videos of the Royal Kids praying. Or heard some of the kids at the opening of prayer conferences and so on. Those kids are praying up a storm hey. Loud and full of passion and conviction and emotion. The kids of my prayer club aren't like that. Perhaps Western people are more timid or scared, reserved, Afrikaans people especially. And I'm very "reformed", so I have all these "reformed" little kiddies; not into a big show.

In any case, so I asked these two children to pray for my ear. Okay cool. No big deal. Just put their hands on my ear, and prayed. Four minutes max. And both had a chance to pray. And my ear was healed. Instantaneously. Thank you guys. Gimme a hug. Now off you go.

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Children are powerful powerful intercessors.

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**WE ARE GOING TO HAVE A LOOK AT FOUR THINGS.** First of all some statistics on children, then some biblical perspectives on children, a few general things about children and prayer and if there's time, a few practical tips.

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If we look at the world today, we see that we have a population of 7.2 billion people. Roughly 27% of this are children 14 years and younger. That is almost 2 billion children!! You know how many children that is?? In the hour I'll be talking, about 15 000 babies will be born world wide. And add to that that 84% of Christians make a decision for Christ between the ages of 4 and 14. AND we just said that children are powerful intercessors – aren't you just getting all excited about the possibilities? Are you not already feeling this new window of opportunity opening...? And the responsibility of course.

Should we really be putting all our efforts and preaching and money and resources into adult ministry??

## **WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT CHILDREN? PERHAPS IT WOULD BE MORE ACCURATE TO SAY – WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT CHILDREN?**

I'm going to use six aspects pointed out by Prof Marcia Bunge.

Just listen to Psalm 127

“Behold children are a heritage from the Lord  
The fruit of the womb is a reward  
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior  
So are the children of one's youth.  
Happy is the man who has a quiver full of them...”

★ **Children are gifts of God and sources of joy.** God esteems children highly.

★ And of course, **God made man into His image.** Not just grown-ups. Each and every one is an image of the living God. Oh, I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. And therefore children must be treated as such; with dignity and with respect.

★ But, **children are also vulnerable.** And we must provide for children, protect them, seek justice for them.

★ **Children are developing beings.**

So important to remember. We have to instruct children, bring them up in faith, helping them to love God and their neighbours. According to George Barna: “By the age of nine, children more or less have their spiritual moorings in place. More often than not, what a person decides about truth, sin, forgiveness and eternal consequences during the PRE-TEEN years, is the same perspective that person carries to the grave..” What we don't teach our children, someone else will.

★ Of Course, children are not just little angels; **they are sinful creatures.** **Fortunately with growing moral capacities.** Children must be taught and modelled right and wrong and we must cultivate with them practices of mutual confession and forgiveness.

I'm sorry my dear. I'm sorry mommy. Let's also ask God for forgiveness.

★**And the best, children are models of faith and with gifts to contribute. Children can be harvesters in the Kingdom and agents of change and transformation.**

Oh, on this specific point I would just love to carry on and on and on. But there's not time for that. Children are the perfect workers in the Kingdom. They are open, full of faith, full of energy, without hang-ups, they are available, they are teachable.

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Let's read here in Matt 18. \*\*\*\* Just see what Jesus is doing here. Here's all the disciples. And they want to know who's the greatest in the Kingdom. And what does Jesus do? He takes a child and puts that child in their midst. And the attention shifts from the SO important adults, to this child. And Jesus uses the child as a metaphor for His Kingdom. This powerful lesson Jesus taught was meant to change His disciples perception about children for good. Jesus Himself restored the place and position of children.

We have to value children like this, realize the importance of children in the Kingdom, before we can start to think about **CHILDREN AND PRAYER.**

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★ First of all, just like adults, children pray when they **are in a relationship with Jesus.** And it's important to teach children right from the start that prayer is communication with Someone you love. It's not some rhyme you just do in church, before a meal or at bedtime, but a conversation with your dad in heaven. When I'm leading younger kids into prayer, I would often start by asking them to close their eyes, visualise the Lord and then just tell Him something that had happened today.

★When we pray, we usually think about the different aspects of prayer: **adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication (pray for self & others).** From more or less 6years and onwards, children are capable of all of these. A child of three may of course mimic you in prayer without really understanding. No

problem with that of course, it's the way children learn. But from 5 or 6 children are capable of praying all of these with understanding.

★A child's **Godview** will also have an influence on how they pray. Young children usually think of God as someone like a superhero with infinite powers.

★When we lead children into prayer, we must remember that children have **different personalities** and also that young children cannot yet understand abstract things. With young kids you have to be very concrete. Some children remember better when they see something, some remember better when they hear something, others want to move around, others want to touch.

Let's just take a quick example. You want children to pray for other children in India. You give them a few prayer points and can tell them to pray for children in India. They won't have a clue.

Or you can show them a picture of children in India. Then throw a sari around you for more visual effect. Play some Indian music, give them something with a strong curry flavour to taste. Perhaps burn some incense. Wave an Indian flag. Read a story about a real child from India. Show India on map. Now they experience India and now you give them prayer points and it is so much easier for them to pray.

★Just like children need to be taught maths and spelling, children also need to **be guided in prayer**. They won't instinctively know how to pray. The best way is of course to learn from example. They need to be there where you pray. Young children usually start with thank-you prayers. Jesus, thank you for a mommy and a daddy. Thank you for grandma and grandpa. Thank you for food and clothes. Then they peek and look around... and thank the Lord for everything they can lay their eyes upon: thank you for walls... and...windows.. So help them to pray. Shirley, mommy is going away this week, I'm going to learn more about praying. It is far from home. Let us thank Jesus that He made this possible. Or "Would you please pray that Jesus would help me to drive safely?" Or "Let us pray that Jesus would help you not to miss mommy too much." We will look at more examples just now.

★ **Never, never ever ever ever underestimate children.** Do not underestimate children's ability to hear God, never underestimate their ability to grasp the essence of what prayer is needed for, never under-estimate their faith. **Expand their vision!**

★ Let me give you a few **examples.**

In the beginning of last year a prayer conference for children was held at our church. At one point in the conference children had to pray for adults. A little girl, she was 6 years old at the time, prayed for a friend of mine. After praying, she told her, "you're going to have a baby." The woman told me this and she was in tears. "You know, the little girl prayed for me, I had this warm feeling in my womb and I know that God revealed that to her" Her son was born at the end of last year.

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Another example. During 7 days on the wall last year, at one of the stations in our prayer room you could take a paper and write down the name of someone that did not yet make a commitment to the Lord. When you prayed at this station you then took some of the names and prayed for them. When I cleaned up after 7 Days and looked at all the names that were written down, I saw something very interesting. It's easy to distinguish between the writing of the grown-ups and the writing of the children. The grown-ups wrote down names of friends and family. "Please pray for my brother Stephen and his wife who do not know the Lord." The children wrote down things like for instance "Pray for the Muslim-lady at Mommy's work.", "pray for the Muslim people in Egypt", "pray for the cricket players of Sri Lanka who do not know Jesus." If this is what we teach them when they are young, they will grow up with a heart for the lost.

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Last example. Some time ago in our kid's prayer club we prayed for our own community. We were in a room on a second story and I told the children to sit at the windows, look out on the community and write or draw what God told them about the community. (Everyone can't write yet.) Now if you ask kids to do something like this, 80% of them would draw something like for instance a

cross with a heart, something they feel is sort of the right thing to draw. That day when I took in all the papers, one of them looked like this: (picture). It was definitely something that the Lord revealed to the child.

## **LET'S GET PRACTICAL.**

It would've been fantastic if we could have a whole week just helping each other with practical examples of how to help kids to pray, to lead them into God's presence, to help them hear God's voice. But now we just have ten minutes.

Practical examples would depend greatly on you own context. Are you at the moment thinking about your own child or grandchild? Or are you thinking about children in a kid's bible club or about all the children in your church? What facilities do you have? What is the age of the children? Are you thinking of one lesson a single lesson on prayer or an influence over years? All of this would of course determine what we are going to do and how we are going to do it.

**We're going to look at two things – one is an one hour prayer event for kids and then also a few quick tips.**

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### **FIRST OF ALL THE ONE HOUR EVENT.**

My husband and I have a prayer club for kids on Friday nights. The kids are between 6 and 11 years old and there are usually about 20 kids or so. So what I'm going do now, is give you one example of one lesson we did earlier this year. Keep in mind, this is part of an ongoing thing and is just one Friday night of the year, so we focus on one or two things, we are not trying to cram in a lot of prayer-teachings into an hour.

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When we get there in the afternoons, the kids just play games until a few minutes before we start. Then we sing a few songs to calm the children down and to get everyone focused on the Lord. In between the songs anyone that wants to, then pray. At this time we also give time for children to witness. If you

want you can have something like a soft toy, a monkey for instance. Only the one with the monkey can talk. They pass it to each other or you can throw it randomly into the group. Young kids will sometimes just tell something that happened. For instance "I hurt my leg at school this afternoon." Help them to turn news into a testimony. Are your leg feeling better? Are you still sad? Wonderful! Michelle would you please thank God that he has made Tim's leg better already and that He comforted Him? Graham, would you please ask God to heal Tim's leg completely?

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★Okay next. Today we are going to talk about a man in the Bible called **Saul**. We read about Saul in Acts. Saul lived after Jesus has ascended to heaven and what he did, was to go around, catch the Christians and put them in prison. He did not want people to be Christians.

★We are going to read a story in Acts 9 and you are going to play the story when I read it.

Okay, then there's some chaos while you divide the kids in to groups with 3 kids in a group. One is Saul, one is his friend and one is Ananias. All the Sauls and his friends on THAT side of the room. You are in Jerusalem. Who stays in Jerusalem? Yes you do. Where do you stay? Jerusalem! That's right. **Jerusalem is a town in Israel. (map)** You can have a "Jerusalem" and a "Damascus" signpost.

All the Ananias' go to THAT side of the room. You stay in Damascus. Where do you stay? That's right. Damascus. **(map)**Okay, Richard, come here. You're the high priest. Okay, on your feet, you're ready for the game?

We are going to read about Saul that walked from Jerusalem to Damascus. **(map)**

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And then you read the whole story and the kids enact it while you read.

★After the little play, you talk about how God has changed Saul completely, about his new name and so on.

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Now you ask the kids to close their eyes. Think about Jesus. Tell Jesus He is wonderful and you love Him so much. Ask Him to help you love Him even more. Is there something in your life that you are doing or thinking that you think God doesn't like? Ask the Holy Spirit to tell you if there are things like that. Now ask God to change you just like He has changed Paul so that you become more and more like Jesus. We can pray that together **"Holy Spirit, fill me and change me to become more like Jesus."**

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Right, now think of someone that does not know Jesus. If you can't think of someone, ask the Holy Spirit to help you. Help children with examples. Perhaps a girl in your class or the neighbour or grandpa. Ask Jesus to reveal Himself to that person like He revealed Himself to Paul. Next time when you are here, we are going to see how we can go to that person and tell him about Jesus the way Paul told people about Jesus.

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Now we are going to pray for each other. Remember we read here in **Acts 9** ***Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings?*** Put your hand on your friend. Now pray for him/her: Monica, Jesus chose YOU to tell people about Him. **Holy Spirit, please fill Monica and give her boldness to proclaim your word.** (of course you will have to explain words like boldness and proclaim.)

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We are also going to pray for some other people today. We said Paul lived in Israel. Does Israel still exist today? Yes, of course it does. And there are lots of children in Israel just like you. Unfortunately most of the children in Israel do not believe in Jesus. That's very sad hey. See the blue area? Most of the people and children in the blue area are Jewish people. We talked about Jewish people

the other night, remember? They know that there is someone like Jesus, but they don't believe that He came to earth and died for our sins. Now in the red area, there are mainly Muslim people. We often talk about the Muslim people, they also don't believe that we will go to heaven because we believe in Jesus. This area is called Palestine.

Unfortunately for many many years the people in Israel and the people in Palestine have been fighting with each other. The children are very sad because of the fighting, some of them don't have houses anymore and sometimes their mommy or daddy is killed in the fighting. So they are very scared and they want the fighting to stop.

Explain slides with presidents, flags etc. They don't believe in Jesus either.

Carry on with PP explaining each slide. Practical tips etc.

When children pray, God seems to move more powerfully.

I am going to conclude with these words from John Robb, chairman of the International Prayer Council and at that stage director of World Vision:

“Staff of World Vision often observed the Lord's miracles when our project children prayed. We actually surveyed this phenomenon in five very poor countries where staff asked the kids to pray for specific infrastructural changes, such as the resolution of community splits, and many other needs. They did this for two years, and all were astonished by the miracles that occurred. When the children prayed, the parents got healed from terminal illness, governments chose those villages for the wells or the clinics, or the terrorists were kept out of those communities where the kids were praying.”

The results were so extraordinary that 'Children in Prayer' (CiP) began to spread more widely within World Vision, going from five countries to twenty countries. Finally, fifty of the national offices wanted to investigate CiP as a resource for community transformation as well as for the spiritual nurture of the kids themselves.

“They included the children in their strategy for national transformation.”

“Every week and every month we have prayer gatherings in different orphanages, homes and churches. On Saturdays we organize 24 hours of prayer. At the moment 50 churches, 60 orphanages and about 3 500 children are involved. Children have great faith and an innocent heart. When we started praying for the seven spheres of society, we saw great changes. Parents repented for not taking care of their children and children repented for disobeying their parents. People came free from addiction and adultery. We saw miracles of healing and unity among churches. Personally I believe these changes are related to the children’s prayer movement.”

***Resources:***

Marcia Bunge, KMS, Petra Kollege, George Barna, Roots 7, Paidion, Jane Mackie, Soekie Krog, CPNSA