

Ideas for a Teaching a Praying in Color Session to a Group CHILDREN

Supplies

Plain white or light pastel paper—8 ½ x 11 or larger
Thick or thin colored markers. Give each child a black pen for outlining. Let each child choose 5 or 6 markers. I like markers because I think crayons are difficult to handle. If you want you can provide rulers, cookie cutters, and stencils.

Getting Started

I often start the session with some a simple physical exercises—stretching, wiggling, swinging....and then we sing a simple song .

I do two things before we actually start praying. I give children:

1. A **Doodling Vocabulary**
2. A List of **Names for God**.

1. Doodling Vocabulary

Start with a three-minute refresher “doodling” class. I ask participants to tell me the names of some shapes they could draw. They’ll probably say “circle, square, star, heart, rectangle, octagon....” I will say some of the shapes they might have missed like amoebas, blobs, clouds,. As they say them I quickly draw them on the easel I’m using up front. They don’t need to draw them. Then I ask them how they could decorate or add designs to the shapes. They might say “lines, teeth, crosshatching, dots, polka dots, scallops, arcs, rays....” I draw the ideas as they say them. The idea is to let them know that anything goes in the drawing. They don’t have to be an artist, just a person who can draw lines or dots! But I also tell people to feel free to draw things that actually look like real objects--trees, flowers, people, cars—if they want to.

2. Names for God

On another piece of easel paper I ask them to tell me the “God” names they use when they pray; “God, Holy One, Loving Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Creator, You can write the names on the paper as they say them. I also remind them that we often add adjectives to those words: Amazing God, Brother Jesus, Heavenly Father.... The idea is to acknowledge that we use different names for God at different times or in our different prayers. God is also so much bigger than our names. Children can use whichever name like in their prayer. I also suggest they can just draw a window or a big opening through which we try to imagine God.

You might consider hanging those easel sheets on the wall so they can see some of the ideas they had and can refer to them.

Praying in Color

Then we get down to *praying in color*. I tell the group that we will be entering a time of quiet (no talking while drawing/praying). For children I often call it QT for “quiet time.” I ask them to take a big breath and let it out. We do this a couple of times. I tell everyone we will start praying by drawing a shape on our own piece of paper (I usually put my shape in the middle of the paper, but that isn’t necessary). In the shape, ask them to write their God name-- whichever name they choose from the list you made earlier or from their own personal list. Then I say that for three minutes we will “ask God” to be part of this time together by drawing around the name for God. The asking can include words, but words are not necessary. The drawing is a way to get still on the inside and prepare for a time of intercessory prayer and listening to God. They can add to their shape using the doodle ideas above and also add color. People can pray with words in their heads or just be silent as they concentrate on the drawing and on the name of God. I often say—“If you want to talk to God in your head, go ahead. Ask God to be with us now; but when your words run out, keep praying—do this by drawing and focusing on the name for God. Your marks, color on the page and your attention are the prayer.” I also say, “If words come, pray them. If not, enjoy your quiet time with God.”

I use an egg timer to time the three minutes. Any kind of timer, even a phone will do. When the three minutes are up, I ring a chime or a bell. Have anyone take a deep breath. At this point you can also say a one-line prayer or one line of a psalm or a short Scripture passage together. “Thank you for loving us.” “You are our shepherd.” “You are awesome, God.” If your one-liner is long, write it on an easel or project it onto a screen so everyone can see it and say it together out loud.

Next I say that we are going to pray for about three or four people, one at time. We will all pray for the same person at the same time. I ask one person in the group (maybe by a raised hand) to tell us the name of someone they would like us to pray for and ONE sentence about why. Use just one sentence, because too much information leads to both worry and over-curiosity. You could model this: “I’d like us to pray for Keisha. She has the flu.” That’s enough information. When someone in the group offers a name and a one-sentence reason for the prayer, I ask the whole group to pray for the named person by drawing a shape on their paper and putting the name of the person in it (ask for spelling from the person who suggested the name.) For three minutes everyone will pray for the person by drawing, doodling, and coloring a shape with the name in it.

As they draw/pray, they can use words in their heads if they want (or write them down), but the words aren’t necessary. Or they can start using words,

but when the words run out we continue to sit with God by drawing. We are offering the person into God's care without necessarily knowing what to say or what the person needs. We are spending time with them and God by drawing. The movement of our hands allows our bodies to participate in the prayer and to be less distracted.

Ring the chime or bell at three minutes. Have everyone take a deep breath and say the line of Scripture you chose. Then ask for another name. Pray for the new person for three minutes in the same way. Repeat the process as many times as you want. I encourage people to do the entire prayer drawing on one sheet. But if they draw big they can use more than one sheet. There are not a lot of rules!

Praying for three or four people takes about fifteen minutes. It is enough time to establish the idea of the prayer practice and to help people to settle into the stillness and quiet. For the last name you might suggest that everyone draw a doodle for someone they personally want to pray for without saying the name out loud. It's a nice way to end the session. When the time is up and we have taken a breath and said the line of scripture, I might say, "And at the end of the prayer, the people said," and everyone responds, "Amen."

At the end of the prayer time, I'll often ask people "What did you notice during this prayer exercise?" This is a safer question than "What did you think or feel?" "Noticing opens the door for many kinds of responses. I also suggest they take their prayer drawing home and put it someplace where they'll see it. Every time they walk past it, it is a reminder to pray for the people again.

This process takes about a half hour or forty-five minutes.

Notes about leading a *Praying in Color* session with children:

- ❖ Children will often name their pets or dead pets or deceased relatives. When one child mentions a pet, the others will continue on that path. I usually say ahead of time: "Let's pray for people who are alive." At the end when I give them the chance to pray for whomever they want, I tell them they can pray for pets or anyone or anything—living or dead.
- ❖ Children can really be still and quiet for 15 or 20 minutes given the parameters. Three minutes sound like a lot of time, but children can do it. I have to admit I was amazed when I first tried it. A large egg timer might be a nice added visual so children can look up and see the time passing.
- ❖ Children under five might have trouble sitting still during this exercise. If I'm doing a workshop for children I usually say that it is

not suitable for children under five. Parents or teachers can certainly work one-on-one for younger children. If I'm leading a workshop for children, I ask that children ages 5-7 be accompanied by an adult. There should be at least one adult for every three children of this age to assist the children during the prayer time if they need it.

- ❖ Try some unusual paper sizes and products. I like 4" round stickers, paper napkins, large plain paper, a white board....Any piece of paper or board can become a prayer space.

- ❖ Teach the five traditional ways to pray using *praying in color*:
Prayers for others (Intercession)
Prayers for yourself (Petition),
"Thank you, God" prayers (Thanksgiving or gratitude)
"I love you, God; you are awesome" prayers (Adoration)
"I'm sorry, God." (Confession)

Children can also learn the prayers of Silence and Listening. I think it's important for kids to know that prayer is about spending time with god, not just about saying words and talking.

The above ideas are just suggestions. Please feel free to experiment with your own presentation style.

God's Peace,
Sybil