

Involving children in prayer

This is an area that has often not been considered either by individuals or churches, but if you study a scripture like Joel 2:15-6 (... declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people ... gather the children, those nursing at the breast") in a time of national emergency the children were to be included in the solemn assembly. Similarly in Deuteronomy 31:12 Moses commanded "Assemble the people – men, women and children..." to listen to the law. If we really believe that children are part of the church, then if God is saying something to his body that needs to be communicated to the whole body.

Instead in most churches in Scotland today we have the ludicrous situation where the adults are being taught one thing, the teens something else. And the teaching in the children's department bears no relation to either!

Biblical expectation

The Biblical foundation for children being included in the church's prayer activity is found in the level of involvement that children exercised in partnership with adults in the history of God's people.

1. Children were involved in entering into the covenant with God. Deuteronomy 29:10-13
2. Children were involved in being taught to live according to God's ways. Deuteronomy 31:9-13
3. Children were involved in celebrations of God's blessings. Deuteronomy 16:10-14
4. Children were involved in hearing God's message. Joshua 8:35
5. Children were involved in weeping because of the sins of God's people. Ezra 10:1
6. Children were involved in understanding God's Word. Nehemiah 8:1-8
7. Children were involved in agreeing what God's people were going to do. Nehemiah 10:28-29
8. Children were involved in rejoicing and praising God. Nehemiah 12:27-43
9. Children were involved in crying out to the Lord for help. 2 Chronicles 20:5-13
10. Children were involved in praying for revival. Joel 2:12-32

Historical Expectation

You can read over 400 pages about the place that children have had in the revivals in Scotland over the past 300 years in Harry Sprange's book, *Children in Revival*, and much of that involvement is in the context of children praying. Children get excited hearing these stories, particularly ones that relate to where they live. (Over 200 locations are mentioned in the book.) Here are two accounts which highlight the place of children praying:

Rev George Stevenson in his account of what happened in Pulteney town in January 1860, says,

"The Holy Spirit came down with great power on the congregation..... In the school... upwards of a dozen boys held a prayer meeting together before going back to school in the afternoon. Since then several prayer meetings have been established both among boys and girls. At one time there was about a dozen separate children's meetings, some of them very large, numbering forty or fifty, who met to pray together; some of them small meetings, where five or six more timid little ones met to pray together. This impulse to pray together was quite a spontaneous movement on the part of the children and took their parents and teachers by surprise." (page 275)

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"A number of young men held a prayer meeting among the rocks, and such was the deep and overpowering emotion they were under that they determined to go through their village and

to speak from house to house, and to invite them out to prayer. Several joined them and they went through the village singing a psalm. The children determined that they should hold a prayer meeting themselves, as they were not allowed into the other prayer meeting on account of want of room. They went to the walls of a church as yet unfinished. After a time they all came under deep conviction of their sinful state, and several cried out in agony of mind. With such strong crying, tears and in "bitterness" were they seized, that the noise of their distress reached the houses. Those who knew the truth prayed for the unconverted among them and then went and urged them to receive Christ. These exhortations were so blessed of God that almost everyone became affected and a general spirit of prayer was poured out. From this place they went to a hall already filled with grown up people. There also the Lord wrought graciously in pouring out such a spirit of concern that the whole place became affected. On the following day some of the young men went to an adjacent village and there also the same work was manifest. Work stopped for 16 days in the area. A boy of 8 years of age, once, under strong convictions, spoke in the meeting, and his words made such a deep impression that more were convicted and converted than on any other occasion." (page 244)

Harry says in his introduction to his book: "It is the part played by the prayer meetings of children in Scottish Church history that has motivated me particularly to probe further and unearth this story, until I have concluded, along with D.A. Currie, that the spontaneous occurrence of prayer meetings among children 'may have been a distinctively Scottish phenomenon'."

Prophetic Expectation

Children can be motivated into prayer when they are told that God wants to involve them in the work of His Kingdom. Part of the vision that Jean Darnall had (see page....) relates to this and has been instrumental in the direction of the children's ministry of, among others, Harry Sprange and Graeme Young, who have both used the prophetic expectation contained in it to encourage children to expect to be used by God now and not wait until they are grown up.

Here is some of what Jean Darnall said in Scotland in 1987:

"The second thing I said to watch for is unusual manifestations of the Lord to boys and girls between the ages of 9-15. Jesus is going to appear to them. He's going to come to them in visions and dreams. He's going to make himself known to boys and girls who are in non-Christian homes, in homes of violence, in homes where there is no love, in homes where there is no family continuity and care and tenderness - but Jesus is going to come to these children - and they will start appearing. They'll start coming to their teachers and to other people or other Christians that they will meet, and tell about their unusual dreams and visions of the Lord. Don't play down what these children tell you when the Lord appears to them - when they come to you and tell you these unusual experiences. And some of these children won't have 'churchy language', you know, they don't come from Christian families, so they are not going to say it right, the way we are used to hearing it, but they will be telling about unusual experiences. When that time comes, give them the nurture and the wisdom and the love that they need, because they are future leaders in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and will become mightily used of the Lord. That's good news folks! Watch for it and wait for it.

"Start expecting unusual things to happen to the children you are teaching, because the Spirit of the Lord is preparing their hearts to receive the fullness of the Holy Ghost - to receive gifts of the Holy Spirit, to receive healing, to receive ministries of healing to others as the Lord uses these children.

And I felt that that is not only a word for Scotland, but I believe it's going to be a worldwide unusual awakening amongst boys and girls very soon. They will produce for the world mighty Christian leaders in the future, so watch for that, and if you are interested in children's ministry just ask the Lord to expand your faith and give you ears to hear and eyes to see, so

that you will recognise these children - that you won't laugh down their experiences or minimise what God is doing in their lives."

Present Expectation

Much has happened with children across the world and in the UK since Jean Darnall spoke of the place they have in God's present purposes. Now some of the young generation in Scotland are well prepared for what is to come and have seen fulfilled in their own experience some of what has been prophesied.

Harry Sprange has spent seventeen years of ministry in encouraging youngsters in Scotland to see their place in God's purposes and to get involved in praying towards the fulfillment of those purposes. Here are two stories from *Children in Revival* which show us what has already happened with this age group in Scotland:

"In the summer of 1989 I camped with eight boys aged 12 and 13 who wished to join in the Torch Run down Scotland which fed into the March for Jesus from Edinburgh. After spending two days running in the relays down the A9 on the Inverness - Dalwhinnie section, it was suggested at bedtime that they ought to pray that what they had been doing would not be merely symbolic (carrying a flaming torch across the country), but would achieve something in the spiritual realm. The boys then prayed non-stop for two hours interceding for the country with remarkable depth and concern: during that time a number had pictures or visions. One of them saw the group running down the A9, but leaving a trail of paraffin behind them. At a later date God lit the trail and the whole country went up in flames. At this, there was a gasp of astonishment, as the youngest in the group said he'd seen exactly the same thing at the same time. Another boy saw the St. Andrew's cross as two sticks smouldering at one end: suddenly the whole flag was engulfed in flame.

"In the summer of 1990 the first "Kingdom Kids" prayer camp was held: it was on the basis of bring your own sleeping bag and sleep on a church hall floor for a week to pray for Scotland. There were 35 applicants aged 11-15 despite all the other Christian summer camps available offering decent accommodation and exciting adventure activities! God met with them in a very deep way, and during a time of prayer in small groups one evening, all the youngsters were in tears. The following evening there was a time of exuberant praise during which many of the young people were clapping and some dancing and rattling tambourines, but in the middle of the group two were seen to be weeping bitterly. A boy of just 14 said that God was letting him feel His anger over the state of the church in Scotland and the girl slightly younger said she was feeling God's heart for the world. They were taken aside and encouraged to pray it through, while the rest of the meeting continued. We expected them to join in shortly after - in fact they each continued for over an hour. Personally I have never seen such a spirit of intercession in those so young as on that occasion." (Page 386)

Jean Darnall's words about children were instrumental in diverting Graeme Young to concentrate on children's ministry, with the thought, "If God wants to be using children in special ways, then we had better get them ready". Examples of children's experiences of the Holy Spirit and guidelines for this aspect of their ministry can be found in *Spying out the Land* by Graeme Young.

Learning about Prayer

These teaching points to help children to discover more about the place of prayer, are taken from worksheets of "Earlystart" (Young Resources) - a 20 subject discipleship course for youngsters.

Hearing from God

1. We can hear from God to know Jesus better.
Matthew 3:16,17 a voice said from heaven, "This is my Son"
2. We can hear from God to know what is true.
Matthew 16:17 This truth was given you directly by my Father in heaven.
3. We can hear from God to know what to do.
Matthew 2:13 - God told Joseph to escape to Egypt and stay there.
4. We can hear from God to know useful things about people and situations.
John 1:48 When Nathanael met Jesus, Jesus already knew about him.
5. We can hear from God to know some things that are going to happen.
Luke 1:76 While John was still a baby God said what he would do later.
6. We can hear from God through:
 - Holy Spirit leading - Luke 2:27, Matthew 4:1
 - Bible - Matthew 2:4-6, Matthew 4:4
 - Pictures and Visions - John 1:48-51, Matthew 17:1-9
 - Words - John 1:32-34, Mark 9:7
 - Dreams - Matthew 2:12, Matthew 2:19-21
 - Prophecies - Luke 1:39-45, Luke 2:25-35
 - Angels - Luke 1:8-13, Matthew 28:1-7

Praying

1. Praying puts us in touch with our loving Father. John 11:41, Luke 10:21
2. Praying puts us in line with what God wants. Matthew 26:39
3. Praying shifts the power of the Devil. Mark 9:29
4. Praying gets things changed to go God's way. Matthew 21:21,22
5. Praying brings us what we need. Matthew 7:7-11
6. Praying brings to God things that are wrong in us. Luke 18:13,14
7. Praying brings blessing to others. Mark 11:25, Matthew 19:13 with Mark 10:16
8. Praying brings strength and protection. Luke 21:36, John 17:11

Children's Prayer Times - some activities

1. Bring it to Jesus

Sit the children round a table with paper on the table big enough to cover the whole table.
Have coloured fibre tip pens available.

Ask the children about things they can think of that were brought to Jesus and write or put pictures of these things in the middle of the table

e.g. paralysed man, loaves and fishes, perfumed oil, gold/frankincense/myrrh, sick people, little children, family needs, Simon Peter, praise and worship.

Next ask the children what they want to bring to Jesus, and let them write or draw those things at their part of the table. You can have conversation together about the different things that are being written and drawn, and at some stage, children can stand up and walk round the table to see what others have done.

Explain to the children that Jesus too sees what we have written and drawn, and hears our conversation, so what has been done is already prayer. If children want to, they could then put some prayers into spoken words.

This activity can be targeted at a particular focus - e.g. in praying for the town, area, or country. So the children could be asked the question, "What things about Scotland do you want to bring to Jesus?"

2. Here for Jesus.

This activity is to help the children to think about the place that the church they are part of has

in the purposes of Jesus, and to pray about that.

Have six large sheets of paper placed around the room where they can be written on.

On each sheet write a title

(church name) in (church name)

(church name) in (village, town or part of city name)

(church name) in (area or city)

(church name) in (region)

(church name) in Scotland

(church name) in Europe

(church name) in the world

Let the children walk round and write down on the sheets what they think their church should be doing in that area. So the first one is "What do you think people in our church should be doing for one another?"

Then, "What do you think our church should be doing in our town?"

You can also think of what is already being done -

e.g. people in their work in the town, students in Christian Unions in another place in the country, missionaries sent from the church.

You can then, as a group, look at each sheet and give opportunity for children to pray in words about the things that have been written.

It would be good too to share with the adults in the church what has been prayed about.

3. Prayer Walk

Jesus said to watch and pray - and this activity involves looking and noticing things that we can then pray about.

Explain to the children that you are going to take them for a walk in the area near where you are meeting so that they can discover things in the community to pray about.

This is probably best done in groups of about four, so that there can be conversation along the way.

The idea is to go for a walk - allowing the children to decide where they want to go, and to see what catches their attention as they look around, and listen.

They may notice particular objects, places, people, conditions, feelings.

Before you go, have a short prayer time asking the Holy Spirit to show you things that will help you to pray for the community.

Make sure you have planned proper supervision for the safety of the group. Guard against children straying on to roads.

Talk along the way about what is being noticed. Encourage children that it does not have to be something "special" or extraordinary that catches their attention. Something very small or insignificant could be very important when it comes to praying.

On returning from the walk, give the children paper and pens to write or draw what caught their attention.

Make a note of where each group decided to go. This could be marked on a street map

Have a look at all the information and encourage the children to see what there is that they could pray about, and look for links between things that different children or different groups may have noticed, and things or people that the Holy Spirit may be highlighting.

4. Prayer Diary

Let the children share ideas of people and things that the members of the group could pray for during the week. When you have the list, divide them into one or more things to pray for each day of the week.

The children can then make a prayer diary listing the things to pray for, and then use this group prayer diary every day.

When the group meets again, you can talk over the things that have been prayed for, and take appropriate action - e.g. thanksgiving, more prayer.

The diary could be updated with fresh topics, as appropriate.

5. Prayer at Work

This activity can help children to understand that much of the church's ministry takes place by people doing the jobs that God has called them to in their daily work.

Find a time, or make a time, when the children can be together with the adults of the church to ask them where they work and what job they do.

Use a map, or pictures to illustrate all the different places and jobs.

Let the children pray for these people and their work in the community.

Ask some of the adults to come to your group and answer the children's questions about their work, and about what they would like prayer for. The children can pray with them while they are there.

6. Your choice

Decide on the range of items or area you want to focus on in a group prayer time.

Get together appropriate pictures of different aspects or items for prayer from magazines, newspapers, photographs, the internet, tourist offices (good for pictures of area and Scotland).

Put the pictures in the middle of the group, and let the children look at them and choose something to pray for.

This could be done by spoken prayer, written prayer (sticking the picture to a piece of paper and then writing a prayer), or action prayer e.g. holding them up together as a sign of bringing them to Jesus, putting them all together on a big sheet of paper with an appropriate verse on it.

7. Prayer notebook

Write down in a notebook what the group mentions in prayer. Look at it when the group meets and see where there have been known answers, see where situations have changed, and see where it would be good to keep on praying.

8. Pray for Scotland Prayer Diary

Use the prayer diary in the Pray for Scotland newsletter for your group to focus on a place each week for prayer. You can get further information from the Pray for Scotland email bulletin. Encourage your group to send things to the email bulletin which can be shared with people praying all over Scotland.