

# Introduction

## 2 Introduction

This book was written out of a desire and a passion for meaningful times of family worship. We have been praying for you who are reading these words now. Our prayer has been that this work will help you and your family, together, to encounter God more deeply and more fully.

Each day of prayer is designed to encourage participation. You'll find things to do, sing, say, listen to, and wonder about. You can also encourage participation by asking different family members to lead different sections of each day's entry.

### **WHEN TO USE THIS BOOK**

As parents of young children, we understand the challenges of different attention spans and the varying seasons of family life. We encourage you to adapt what you see here to suit your family. For example, while each day's reading is designed to be used in one sitting, you may find that it works best to do different sections at different times of the day. For example, you might do the "Preparing" through "Dwelling" questions after the evening meal and then engage the "Praying" and "Blessing" sections before bedtime. Don't rush—take as much time as you need to enter into God's presence and receive from God.

Find a regular time and place to make worship part of your family's natural rhythm of the day. If you make prayer as indispensable as brushing your teeth, there will come a time when the kids will say, "Wait, we didn't have our prayer time!" Even if you've skipped it for a while, start up again. Some days, family prayer will simply be a discipline, and might feel like a chore. But there will be other days when your family discovers the wonder of the loving presence of Jesus. Is anything better than that?

## HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

*Teach Us to Pray* follows the Christian calendar, which begins with Advent. (See the box at the end of this introduction.) The specific dates of the seasons vary from year to year, so you'll find calendar dates on each page to help you figure out where you are. At the beginning of each season, you'll find an introduction explaining the season and its meaning. We hope you'll read these introductions out loud when you get to a new season. They introduce a "Preparing" action to begin your prayer time, offer additional song suggestions, and give other ideas for family engagement with the season.

## HOW TO USE THE DAILY READINGS

Each day of prayer in this book moves through the same pattern:

- Preparing
- Inviting
- Stilling
- Singing
- Bible Reading
- Dwelling
- Praying
- Blessing

All of these elements are meant to be experienced as prayer to help you and your family enter an extended conversation with God. Here is how each element functions in the daily reading:

## Introduction



### Preparing

To begin your family prayer time, we've suggested simple preparing actions for the different seasons of the year to prepare your hearts and minds for prayer. The preparing action for a given season is explained in the introduction to that season.

Some of these embodied actions are rooted in biblical worship practices, and all are meant to create a multisensory experience. The authors have found that their kids—both preschool age and middle-school age—love these preparing actions and look forward to their turn to lead.



### Inviting

After the preparing action, prayer time continues with a Scripture verse reminding us of God's presence and activity in our midst. The inviting action is meant to be read responsively, with one person reading the regular print and the rest of the family responding with the bold print. Each passage is repeated for a few weeks at a time so that children can use it easily and so that the Scripture becomes ingrained in your minds and hearts. After praying through this whole prayer book, your family will have thirty sentences of Scripture memorized!



### Stilling

In order to hear God's voice, we need to learn to be still, so we've incorporated a brief stilling time into every day's reading. For your family this stilling time may last ten seconds, thirty seconds, one minute, or longer. It may feel awkward at first, but once you get used to it, being still together is a powerful experience.

Don't worry if this doesn't go well in the beginning, especially if your kids are very young. Keep trying, and keep experimenting with how long you can be still. It may help if you encourage people to close their eyes during the stilling time

to reduce distractions. By being still together, you give your kids and yourself a valuable gift in a world that increasingly is full of noise and stimulation.

## **Singing**

God's people have been praying together in song since the time of the Old Testament, and all sorts of studies show how important music is for our well-being and for our children's development. Each day includes a simple song. Additionally, in each season's introduction we've listed some songs for you to sing together. You can choose one, or several, or even just one stanza or phrase. Again, we encourage you to adapt these suggestions to your family. Each song is included in the back of this book, beginning on page 817, with music and words. In this appendix, most songs will appear in Spanish as well as English. For those who do not read music, search the Internet (YouTube) for a recording to play.



## **Bible Reading**

The Bible readings follow the seasons of the Christian calendar, telling the story of God's salvation. We've included readings from all sixty-six books of the Bible (grade-schoolers and Obadiah, now there's a challenge!). There are stories, prophecies, letters, law, and songs.



You'll find at least one psalm or other song from the Bible each week, usually on Sundays. The book of Psalms has always been the prayer book of God's people, expressing the full range of human emotion. We've tried to include that full range in the book so your whole family learns to bring all their feelings to God.

You'll also notice that on special days such as Christmas Day, Ash Wednesday, Resurrection Sunday, and others, a short Bible passage refrain precedes the regular Bible reading. We've done that so we not only hear the accounts of

## 6 Introduction

events on these important days but also hear calls to rejoice or repent within them.

With a few exceptions, we have used the New International Reader's Version of the Bible 2014—which is written at about a third-grade reading level—to help your kids understand God's Word as fully as possible.

As you read each day's selection, listen for God's voice speaking to you and your life. When you come across words like "holy" or "glory" in the readings, or other words that your children might not fully understand, take the opportunity to talk with them about what those words mean; their insights will often surprise you.



### **Dwelling**

Each day's Bible reading is followed by two brief questions or wondering statements. Many of these dwelling questions are influenced by the ancient Christian tradition of *lectio divina*, a way of reading Scripture contemplatively. This way of reading assumes that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through Scripture. The questions are designed to help your family consider how God might be speaking to you through a particular passage.

You may find it helpful to read through the Bible passage again after you read the dwelling questions, or to read the questions aloud before the Bible reading. Sometimes the questions engage the imagination as a way of entering into a story. Sometimes they ask if there is a particular word or phrase or picture that comes to your mind. Don't worry if nothing comes to you and don't worry about whether something is from the Holy Spirit or your own thought. Trust that God wants to communicate with you and your children and will give you what you need to receive.

Dwelling questions are not about looking for right information, so if your child says something that seems “out there,” resist the urge to correct him or her. Instead, look for how the Spirit is engaging your child and yourself in the process.

## Praying

We’ve included suggested topics for prayer each day if you would like to be intentional about praying beyond your immediate concerns. General themes rotate throughout the entries following this weekly pattern:

- Sunday: The Lord’s Prayer (different versions are found on page 850–852)
- Monday: Praise for who God is and thanksgiving for God’s work
- Tuesday: Prayers for God’s created world
- Wednesday: Prayers for family, friends, and people in our immediate circles
- Thursday: Prayers for our local and global communities
- Friday: Prayers for our personal relationship with God (during Lent these focus on confession)
- Saturday: Prayers for the church we attend and the church throughout the world

The suggested prayer topics conclude with a brief written prayer based on the day’s Bible reading. This prayer, like the suggested topics, is meant to encourage, not get in the way of, your family’s personal or spontaneous prayer.

## Blessing

Each day’s worship ends with a “Blessing” section—a reminder of God’s love. As with the inviting Scripture, the blessing is meant to be spoken responsively. We encourage you to touch each other on the head or arm or stretch your hands toward each other as you say the blessing, just as Jesus blessed the children



## 8 Introduction

who came to him. Or you may find it meaningful to sit with your hands open as a way of receiving God's good words. The words of blessing are repeated for a few weeks at a time, so that they, like the inviting Scripture, will go deep into our minds and hearts. For these texts we have chosen both traditional blessings and a range of affirmations of God's love that convey a sense of the blessings that surround us each day.

### **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHRISTIAN CALENDAR**

The church "tells time" by the life of Jesus Christ, especially by his two big surprises that changed the course of our universe.

Telling time by Jesus begins with Advent. Advent is four weeks long, and in it we look at Jesus' surprising arrivals: his first arrival as a baby and his second arrival still to come. We call the celebration of his first coming Christmas, and the church takes four weeks (Advent) to prepare for this mystery and another twelve days (the season of Christmas) to celebrate it.

The second big surprise that changed history is Jesus' death and resurrection. This mystery is so great that the church takes a full six weeks to prepare (Lent) and then another seven weeks to celebrate (Eastertide).

Between Christmas and Easter we spend time looking at Jesus' life in the season of Epiphany. Finally, to close the year, for the remaining six months we see how all these big events are lived out in the lives of God's people, old and new, in a season the church calls Ordinary Time.

Here's a little chart to help you keep it all straight:



<b>Church Season</b>	<b>Months</b>	<b>Lasts (in days)</b>	<b>Color</b>	<b>Pictures/Symbols</b>	<b>Focus</b>
Advent	November–December	22–28 days	blue or purple	four candles, wreath, prophets	Jesus’ first and second comings
Christmas	end of December–January	12 days	white or gold	manger, angels	God, in Jesus, becoming a human being
Epiphany	January–February	40–63 days	white, gold, or green	star, light, gifts, open eyes, staff, fish, bread	Jesus’ life, teaching, and work
Lent	March–April	46 days	purple	ashes, palm leaf, cup/bread, basin/towel, nail, shadows, cross	Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross
Easter	April–May	50 days	white or gold	empty tomb, trumpets, crown, flame, water	Jesus’ resurrection and our new life in him; Jesus’ ascension and the Holy Spirit’s work at Pentecost
Ordinary Time	June–November	182–196 days (about six months)	green	globe, Bible, growing plants, altar, honey	Our life in God’s story; seeing God’s people responding to God in the Old and New Testaments