



TALES

for the
Prayer Journey

30 five-minute stories
for all-age reflection and discussion,
with Bible links

Eve Lockett

Foreword by Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Reading

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INTRODUCTION

Those who pray have a wonderful resource to help them in a difficult, confusing and dangerous world. Prayer brings us into the company of God. It is adventurous, energizing, intimate, healing. To introduce children to prayer, or to help them deepen their prayer life, is to equip them in a very special way.

And yet, talking to children about prayer, and praying with children, is challenging. For many adults—parents and carers, teachers, children’s work leaders and clergy—talking about prayer with children means facing very difficult questions. ‘What words should I use? What if it doesn’t work? Why does God answer some prayers and not others? How do we know if it’s God’s will?’

There are other challenges facing adults as well. For example, what do we do if children persist in believing that God will do something in situations where we adults would exercise more caution? Again, it is sometimes difficult for us as adults to cope with children praying more naturally and honestly than we do. It is difficult to teach about prayer when we feel we are the ones who need to learn.

The purpose of this book is to engage children *and* adults on a journey where both learn about prayer together. It is not a book of instructions on how to pray; nor does it give watertight answers to all those difficult questions. It is intended to encourage discussion and reflection on prayer itself; to help us grow in our prayer life.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Tales for the Prayer Journey contains ten principal themes on the subject of prayer, with each explored in three chapters looking at the theme from different angles. Themes include the importance of listening to God, being honest with God, trusting God and waiting

for his kingdom. A short introduction to each chapter explains how it relates to our own prayer life and gives examples from the Bible.

Each chapter contains a five-minute story. The story can be read aloud or told in one's own words, in a group of adults, a group of children or a mixed group of adults and children. Equally, the story can be used for personal reflection and read to oneself. Stories are a way of illustrating and exploring truths whilst allowing us to reach our own conclusions. The story is intended as an introduction to promote reflection, discussion and further Bible study.

The story is followed by suggestions for prayer steps, using visual aids, Bible stories and activities. The prayer steps are offered as an aid to deepen an ongoing prayer life, for children as well as adults, and the hope is that adults will use the material to reflect on their own prayer life and as a guide for children.

Four Bible passages have been chosen to go with each theme. The accompanying questions are given as an aid to reflection, Bible study and discussion. Some or all of these references can be used with children, along with the key verse in each chapter.

Suggestions are made for adults and children to pray on their own or in a group. Group activities may take the form of a discussion or game or a drama to help illustrate the theme.

Finally, there is a written prayer offered in two versions so that it can be used as a model for private prayer or said at the end of a group session.

USING A PRAYER JOURNAL

Some people find it very rewarding to keep a prayer journal. It doesn't have to be a daily diary; it can be written at the end of the week or from time to time as you feel you want to record some thoughts for prayer or reflection. It is also a place for writing in any answer to prayer that you feel God has given you or recording the way some situation has worked out. Include any Bible verses that

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strike you and anything you feel God is teaching you or speaking to you about.

A prayer journal is a good place to keep photographs as a reminder to pray, letters from people with specific needs or news, and any pictures that speak to you on a special subject. Children can enjoy making their own prayer journal, decorating the cover, making a bookmark for it and writing down their prayers and thoughts.



GRUMPY OR GRACIOUS: BEING HONEST WITH GOD

Jonah was really upset and angry. So he prayed...

JONAH 4:1-2

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes we think we have to put on a nice smile and sound very polite when we pray. That isn't how people prayed in the Bible. They came to God even when they were angry or upset or confused, and they didn't pretend everything was all right. Jonah was angry with God for blessing his enemies. Mary of Bethany was upset with Jesus because he had not saved her brother's life. Peter was confused that God had asked him to do something he thought was wrong.

If we are honest with God when something upsets us, we often find a better way to deal with it.



THE MIRROR

Prince Julian drew his cloak around him and stood upright. 'Thank you for joining me today, my friends,' he said. 'In a week I shall be king, and I shall not forget you.'

The people gathered around him smiled and bowed and looked grateful. Julian bowed in turn and then left the room. Instead of going down the carpeted hallway to his own room, he walked along the corridors until he came to a quieter part

of the castle. There he breathed a sigh of relief, grateful to be alone. As he reached the door to one of the turrets, he noticed an old silver mirror hanging on the wall. Julian paused and gazed at himself in the mirror's surface. 'I shall be king,' he said, and he tried to look stately and proud, but all he saw was the face of a boy. He practised looking stern and gracious at the same time, but instead he looked rather silly. Annoyed, he tried again. 'An important person, noble, brave, with an air of command,' he told himself, but the mirror showed none of these.

'In a week I shall be king!' cried Julian out loud. 'Mirror, I command you to show me as I am.'

A ripple seemed to go over the surface of the mirror, and the boy's face looked, if anything, younger.

Julian heard people coming down the corridor and he ducked through the turret door. When they had passed by, he came out and looked again in the mirror. This time he made a huge effort to appear older, wiser and more powerful. The ripple happened again, and the prince had the strangest impression that the mirror was laughing. He began to get seriously angry. Taking off his cloak, he threw it over the mirror's surface and then went downstairs to eat his dinner.

The next few days, the prince kept thinking about the mirror, wanting to remove the cloak. But it was not till the night before his coronation, as he was walking to and fro in his bedroom, that he made up his mind to take one more look. 'I must appear like a king now,' he thought. Going along the darkened corridor, he lifted a torch from its bracket and carried it over to the mirror.

Removing the cloak, Julian gazed again at his reflection. What he saw made him cry out in dismay. ‘No!’ he cried angrily. ‘Why do you mock me like this?’

‘I do not mock,’ said a silvery voice. ‘I show what I see. I cannot do anything else.’

Wondering at the voice, the prince looked around him, not quite believing it could have come from the mirror.

The voice went on: ‘If you pretend with me, I will show you pretending. Many, many people at your court have stood where you stand. And nearly all of them were pretending to be happy or good or clever. But I am your friend, prince, whereas many people are false.’

‘You are no friend. Why do you show me like that? As a... a... frightened child?’

The prince turned and ran back down the corridor to his room. But he could not sleep. He knew that the face he had seen was truly his own.

In the early hours of the morning Julian crept back, quiet and pale, and lifted his face to the mirror. When he spoke, he sounded sad and shaken.

‘It’s no use, mirror. The truth is that I am afraid. I cannot tell my friends from my foes. So much depends on a king’s wisdom and strength. I have a king’s crown waiting for me, but I am afraid to wear it.’

‘You have begun to wear it already,’ said the mirror. ‘You have begun by being true.’

And as Julian stood before his reflection, his own eyes looked back at him—eyes that were clear and steady and shone from the heart of a king.

PRAYER STEPS

Praying with a visual aid

Have available some shaving or make-up mirrors. Alone or in a group, look at your image in both sides of the mirror. Follow with a time of personal reflection or shared discussion. How do you feel about the two images? Which of the images do you like better? Which one do you feel is the better likeness?

Praying with the Bible

Use the following passages for personal reflection or discussion.

- ★ **Genesis 17:17–19; 18:10–15:** Abraham laughed when God promised him a son. The name Isaac means 'laughter'. Did Sarah's laughter matter? Was it worse that she lied?
- ★ **Jonah 4:1–11:** Why was Jonah angry with God? Was God provoking Jonah to be more angry? How was he teaching him a lesson?
- ★ **John 11:32–37:** Mary met Jesus with an accusation. How did he react to her accusation and to her grief? Do we voice our true feelings in our prayers?
- ★ **Acts 11:1–18:** What was Peter's first response to the vision? How did God use Peter's natural feelings to teach him something? Do we trust God with our honest responses?

Praying on your own

Quietly reflect on how we enter into prayer. Instead of rushing into prayer, how can we take time to be still and to be honest with ourselves and with God? When we pray, are we hiding or pretending at all?

Praying in a group

Draw some blank faces. Draw different expressions on them, for example sad, happy, angry, frightened, unkind or bored. Pin them up around the room. Think about which face shows how you are feeling right now. Say a prayer like the one written below.

Praying it through

Draw your thoughts together in a time of quiet reflection, or use the appropriate version of the prayer below.

Lord, help me to be honest with you. However I am feeling, draw me closer to you. Amen

Lord, help us to be honest with you. However we are feeling, draw us closer to you. Amen

IDEAL for all ages

Eve Lockett's first book for *Barnabas*, *Tales of Grace*, sold out in less than a year. In this new book she turns her attention to prayer.

Tales for the Prayer Journey is a collection of imaginative stories, each designed to illustrate and explore key aspects of prayer. Each story is preceded by an introduction and key Bible verse and followed by practical prayer steps. The prayer steps include suggestions for praying with visual aids, suggestions for group and private prayer, and a selection of helpful Bible passages with questions to promote further discussion and reflection. The material is designed for both individual and group use. The aim of the book is to encourage reflection and discussion and to nurture prayer as an integral part of life for both adults and children.

The five-minute stories can be read aloud, or told in one's own words, in a group of adults, a group of children, or a mixed group of adults and children. Equally, they can be used for personal reflection and read to oneself. Aspects of prayer illustrated through the stories and explored through the prayer steps include:

- ❖ Praying with other people and praying privately
- ❖ Praying in a particular place and praying anywhere
- ❖ Praying regularly and praying spontaneously
- ❖ Praying for others and praying without specific requests
- ❖ Praying as part of meeting with and listening to God
- ❖ Prayer as part of our relationship with God

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