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imaginative
prayer



A YEARLONG GUIDE FOR YOUR
CHILD'S SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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God loves so many things



CONNECTION AND FORMATION

The purpose of this imaginative prayer is to help your child experience how vast and wonderful the world is. Your child lives within God's ongoing creation. "It is the visual, fragrant, audible, touchable, and tastable manifestation of God's love, the place where God's desire that others be and be well finds earthly expression."¹ This creation is part of God's revelation, it is full of beauty, and God loves every bit of it.

We are trying to help your child find his or her place in a world that is deeply loved by God. This is the opening session of part one, which explores God's love. He is rich in love. He is not stingy. There are so many things that God loves.

Where we begin the formational journey can often determine where we end up. How we begin to tell the story can determine what kind of story we're telling. And here we begin with beauty and love. Scripture begins with a story about God placing Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden and inviting them to work in it and enjoy it. He placed them in a place where they would develop habits and rhythms that would allow his creation to do the work of forming them. We begin spiritual formation immersed in the beauty of God's creation, receiving it for the gift it was intended to be. What is the most important thing you hope your child will learn through these prayers? What is your intention as you enter into these formational prayer exercises?

St. Francis of Assisi also used his imagination when he considered God's creation. He imagined that God was the Creator and parent of all living things, and that all creatures were brother and sister to one another. Toward the end of his life, St. Francis of Assisi wrote a creation canticle demonstrating how he saw God's love incarnate in all of creation.

Be praised Good Lord for Brother Sun
 who brings us each new day.
 Be praised for Sister Moon: white
 beauty bright and fair, with wandering
 stars she moves through the night.
 Be praised my Lord for Brother Wind,
 for air and clouds and the skies of every season.
 Be praised for Sister Water: humble,
 helpful, precious, pure; she cleanses
 us in rivers and renews us in rain.
 Be praised my Lord for Brother fire:
 he purifies and enlightens us.
 Be praised my Lord for Mother Earth:
 abundant source, all life sustaining;
 she feeds us bread and fruit and gives us flowers.
 Be praised my Lord for the gift of life;
 for changing dusk and dawn; for touch
 and scent and song.
 Be praised my Lord for those who
 pardon one another for love of thee,
 and endure sickness and tribulation.
 Blessed are they who shall endure it in
 peace, for they shall be crowned by Thee.
 Be praised Good Lord for sister Death
 who welcomes us in loving embrace.
 Be praised my Lord for all your
 creation serving you joyfully.²

Q+A

Question: What is the most important part of the story?

Answer: The most important part of the story is that God loves so many things.



IMAGINATIVE PRAYER

Say out loud to your child:

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together.

God, I pray that you will release our imagination and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

*(pause 8-10 seconds)*³

Come, Holy Spirit.

Close your eyes and imagine with me that you have the ability to fly into the air. Imagine with me, that you can fly like Superman. Where would you go? What would you go and see?

(pause 5 seconds)

Imagine that you fly into the air and that you watch as the ground gets farther away from you. You feel the wind pressing against you as you fly faster and faster. Imagine that you begin to notice how beautiful things are. You notice how beautiful and green the grass is. You notice the leaves, and you look across and see a great number of trees blowing in the wind. Off in the distance you see a body of water—the ocean—and you make your way toward the coast.

Imagine now that you dive into the water—and somehow you are able to breathe under water. You are swimming with thousands of fish. There are bright orange fish all around you, and they are beautiful. You swim past an octopus, a sea turtle, and a group of dolphins. You are captivated by the beauty around you. And then you see a big blue whale swim right in front of you.

You are surrounded by God's beautiful creation. There are so many things here beneath the water that God loves.

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Imagine now that you swim to the surface of the water and fly into the air. As you fly, you feel the warm sun dry off your body and you begin to think about where you should fly to next. Fly fast! Fly fast across the ocean and visit the beautiful mountains of France and Switzerland. Fly to the beautiful Victoria Falls in Zambia. Fly to the great rainforests in Brazil.

There are so many places in this world. There is so much beauty, so much of God's creation. There are so many things and places that God loves.

(pause 5 seconds)

Imagine now that you fly straight up into the air, breaking through the atmosphere like the space shuttle. Imagine looking back and seeing the earth get smaller and smaller. And it is beautiful. Look back at this planet. See the blue and the green. Find the reddish brown land of the southern part of Africa and the white polar icecaps. All the people who have ever lived have lived on this little planet. And they have been loved by God from the very beginning.

Keep your eyes closed and imagine that you are floating in outer space. You see the planets. You see the bright red glow of Mars, the perfect rings of Saturn, and a million zillion stars shining their light. Everything here is beautiful. There is so much that God loves.

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Fly now down to earth. Fly as quickly as you can. And go to your favorite forest. Imagine that you are in a forest with tall trees and there are beautiful flowers that line the forest floor.

Listen to the birds sing to you. Watch as little animals gather around you. Squirrels and foxes. Owls and rabbits. Imagine walking through the forest along a path, and imagine that the path is coming to an end. You reach the end of the path and there are two roads to choose from, one to the right and the other to the left. Stand there where the path splits into two.

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Which way do you want to go? Pick a trail: the one to the right or the one to the left. Imagine heading down that trail and you can see that the path is coming out of the forest and into a clearing. As you get closer to the clearing, you can see that it is a giant field of purple and yellow flowers, nearly as tall as you are. Imagine walking into the flowers. Notice their beauty. Pick a flower, smell it, and take in the smell.

(Parent: pretend to pick a flower and smell it. Breathe a deep breath into your nose so that you can hear your breath as you smell the flower.)

What does the flower smell like?

What does it feel like to be surrounded by such beauty?

(pause 5-8 seconds)

Imagine walking through the field of flowers. Feel the cool breeze blowing through. Notice how blue the sky looks.

This world is a good place. There are so many beautiful things here.

There are so many things to explore about the story of God in the world.

The most important part of the story is that God loves so many things.

Q+A

Question: What is the most important part of the story?

Answer: The most important part of the story is that God loves so many things.



FOR THE PARENT OR MENTOR

What do you love about the world? Where is your favorite place? What beautiful places in the world have you visited? When is the last time that you simply looked at a flower? A butterfly? A tree? Many of our children have a nature deficit in their lives. Sometimes our lives are surrounded by plastic and metal and well-trimmed lawns and we can forget about the wild things. The invitation to your child to think about creation and notice the beauty in it is also an invitation to you. Help your child experience the wonder of beauty by nurturing the same in yourself.

Ask your child this question:

“What are some things in the world that you think are beautiful?”

Wait for it. Listen. Engage.

And then ask:

“Is there anything about that thing (the answer to the first question) that tells us something about what God is like?”

- Check out this book from the library: *Natural History: The Ultimate Visual Guide to Everything on Earth*, Smithsonian Series (New York: DK Publishing, 2010). Brew some hot tea or sit with a bowl of ice cream. Sit on the couch with your child and look at the book. Make this part of your routine (once a month?). Take a closer look at all the wonderful things in the world that spring forth from God's power to speak things into life. There are so many things that God loves.
- A few nights this week, as you tuck your child into bed, ask the question, "What did you notice today that was beautiful?" Help your child reflect on the day. Help him or her see the beauty in it.
- Take a long walk through the woods, the prairie, or along the ocean. Make a special trip someplace out of your everyday context, just to see a different part of God's beauty in the things he has made.
- Find a quiet place to sit and read out loud St. Francis's "Canticle of Creation" (see p. 36).

**FOR THE JOURNAL**

Set aside twenty minutes just once this week to sit with your child while he or she writes or draws in a journal. Ask them to spend just a few minutes thinking and writing or drawing an answer to this question: "What did you notice this week that was beautiful?"