

HELPING KIDS TO LEARN HOW TO PRAY

A sweet little kid started to come to my Junior Church not long ago. Let's call him Sam. He told me that he didn't know how to pray.

Sam was in first grade and one week I asked him to point out a country and put a blue star on our **World Prayer Map**. Each week we pray twice for the world. In obedience to Luke 10.2, we ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest. The first time occurs out in the hallway before Junior Church even starts. There is always a plate of international cookies baked from a recipe from some country around the globe.

The kids are not allowed to eat the cookies until they pray that a missionary goes to the country where kids eat those kind of cookies.

I've set up a tiny map near the goodies with a blue "sticky arrow" on the map and each week a kid moves that arrow from the country where it pointed last week to the new country this week. Regular kids get into the drill of telling visitors why they are not allowed to eat the cookies, then showing them where the cookies came from.

The second time we pray for missionaries occurs when we let a kid pick a country and then put the star on our **World Prayer Map**. I give them a choice, "Do you want to find a country yourself, or do you want to pray for the country of the man or lady who made your shirt?" If a girl takes the shirt or sweater option I ask one of the girls in class to look for the name on the tag. If it's a boy, I look. *97% of all clothes in America are made overseas.*

I don't remember what country Sam picked, but afterwards I asked him to pray aloud that a kid from our Junior Church would become a missionary to that country. He looked up into my eyes and said what I had heard him say before, "I don't know how to pray."

He came from a fine ethnic family in our church and I had met his parents who seemed genuinely interested in his growth. Although I didn't feel Sam knew Jesus as his Savior yet, I asked him if he wanted me to help him pray. He nodded. So with a phrase at a time we prayed for our tribe of missionaries-in-waiting to prepare themselves to go around the world.

More than six months later Sam got another turn to choose our country-of-the-day and I asked him to pray again. Now I regularly explain salvation again and again: Wordless Book or John 3.16 or Little Boat Twice Owned or The Wallet Thing or The Bee Stung Mama or the Evangi-Cube box or the story of the life raft or the thief on the Cross or the Walking Wordless Umbrella or Ephesians 2.8,9. You get the idea. It's a habit I've cultivated to explain salvation often even when I believe every kid is saved.

Even though I rarely use a hand-raise invitation, I constantly listen for the "noise" individual kids make when I ask, "What do you think we have to do to go to heaven?" I watch for heads nodding, I ask them individually in class and after class, "Did you know how to be saved from sin before you started to come to Junior Church?" I watch for the gleam in their eyes when I ask them to raise their hands, "How many of you are sure that you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior?" I also have junior high helpers who have learned to talk to the kids about their personal salvation.

By this time I had received several indications from Sam that he was certain of his salvation and understood that he couldn't earn his salvation by just being a good kid. So, again I asked Sam to pray for missionaries to be willing to go. I gave him some hints about the words to use when he prayed by saying something like, "Pray that missionaries go to Iraq and that the people will listen when he gets there."

And in his quiet little voice he said, "Dear God, send missionaries to Iraq and make the people listen to

him.”

This morning I held up 6 signs: **Ask, Thank, Intercede, World, Missionaries, and M.U.F.** [*My Unsaved Friend*].

Enthusiastically I asked, “Who is especially thankful for something God has done and would like to thank God aloud? Come up, and the first one here gets to hold this sign.” Four kids jumped out of their seats [*class usually has about 17 to 24 kids, today it was 25*].

“Who would like to pray for somebody?” [*hold up Intercession sign*]. Same response.

“Country where they really need missionaries?”

“A missionary you know by name and pray for in your home?”

“A new kid at school and you think he might not know how to get to heaven?”

“Name something you are asking God for. Job for Dad. Money to fix family car. New apartment. Roof. Grandma’s leg. That your parents get along better.”

And then they pray. “Just tap the kid next to you on the arm when you’re finished.”

Only God can hear some of these squeaky-voiced prayers, but I sometimes have tears squeezing out of my eyes when they’re finished.

This morning we had 17 kids in a line-up at the foot of the Lord’s Throne.