

DAVE EARLEY

THE  
CHRISTIAN  
LIVING  
SERIES

HOW TO  
PRAY  
FOR YOUR  
CHILDREN

# **HOW TO PRAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN**

**By Dave Earley**

## Chapter 1

# HOW TO PRAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN SO GOD ANSWERS

Would you like to learn how to pray for your children in such a way that God answers and they benefit? Of course, you would. The Bible gives two examples of mothers who saw wonderful answers as they prayed for their children. Let's learn from their examples.

### **THE PRAYER OF HANNAH FOR HER FUTURE SON      1 Samuel 1:1-17**

Like all stories of great answers to prayer, this story begins with a great need. Hannah was a woman who deeply desired to have a baby. Sadly, she couldn't.

*Now there was a certain man ...and his name was Elkanah ... 2 And he had two wives: the name of one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. - 1 Samuel 1:1-2 NKJV*

Note the lonely, desperate, painful words at the end of verse two, "Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children." Hannah had no children in a world in which bearing children served as the chief source of a woman's esteem, provision and protection. Her lifelong passion to be a mother went unfulfilled year after year.

*This man went up from his city yearly to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh... And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. 5 But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the LORD had closed her womb. -1 Samuel 1:3-5 NKJV*

"The Lord had closed her womb." Her barrenness was her burden. Because she had no child, Hannah felt worthless and unfulfilled. Certainly, she tried all of the other mother's suggestions for how to get pregnant, but with no success.

She was getting older. Her biological clock was running or had run out. Out of her desperation she crafted a prayer for a future son.

And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish. **11** Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head." - *1 Samuel 1:10-11*

Hannah cried out for a son. As you may already know, God answered her prayer "yes." But before we look at the answer to her prayer, it is insightful to notice a few of the characteristics of this prayer. Her prayer gives us a pattern for how to pray for our children so God will answer.

## **1. Surrender**

If You will ... not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head." . - *1 Sam 1:11*

Hannah surrendered her future son to the Lord in prayer. One benefit of delayed answers is purified motives. The longer our dreams are heated in the flames of frustrating delay, the more the impurities in our motives are burnt off. Hannah had spiritual leverage to approach God in prayer for her son, because she was willing to dedicate him to the Lord, no matter what. This produced a request that God could no longer deny.

Her future son was already dedicated to the Lord. If, or when, God should give her a son, she promised to "give him to the Lord." She wanted this to be a God-thing. God would be the giver and receiver of the son. The son would come from God and be returned to God. She merely wanted have a part in the middle.

Her dream was deeper than holding a baby. It reached further than herself, or her family , or even her village. It was for a son, given by God, given back to God, who could be used of God to influence a nation for God. So she cried out for a son.

If you want your prayers for your children to strike a chord with the Heavenly Father, be certain that the child you pray for has been surrendered to Him. Like Hannah and Abraham much earlier, give that child to God.

***Lord, I dedicate and fully surrender my child(ren) to You.***

## **2. Persistence**

And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth. - *1 Sam 1:12*

Hannah was stubbornly persistent in prayer. Her desperate desire was not merely offered to God once and forgotten. No. It was repeated over and over as she bared her soul before her God. She was shameless and stubborn. She was persistent and persevering...and eventually she prevailed. Her shameless stubborn persistence won out. Hannah prayed and did not give up. Her faith refused to yield until it was rewarded.

Most of us quit praying too easily and too quickly. The petitions that draw action are often the ones that we have poured out over and over again. Jesus promised that if we keep on asking we would receive (Matthew 7:7).

***Lord, Help me be persistent in my prayers.***

### **3. Passion**

Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. **14** So Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!"

**15** But Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. **16** Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now." - *1 Samuel 1:13-16*

Hannah was supremely passionate in her prayers about a son. Hannah described herself as "a woman of sorrowful spirit." She was desperate. No one or nothing else would do -only God. The possibility of God not coming through was more than she could bear. So she poured her soul out to the Lord.

She was not merely pouring out words to the Lord. So deep was her desire that her voice was not even heard. She was pouring out her very soul. Her's was an extremely deep, highly personal, supremely passionate prayer.

She claimed to be praying "out of great anguish and grief." This prayer erupted from so deep within her soul that it hurt to let it out. It was born from an intensity that was beyond what words could utter.

There is something painful about exposing the subterranean reaches of our soul to God. To let down the drawbridge and leave our greatest dreams and passionate standing naked before God is threatening at best, and often agonizing. Yet she did it.

If we are lackadaisical in our praying, why should God be interested in responding? It is the passionate prayers that bring the most powerful answers.

James promised that it is “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16).

***Lord, Help me passionately pray for my children.***

#### **4. Sacrifice**

Therefore she wept and did not eat... **17** Then Eli answered and said, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.”

**18** And she said, “Let your maidservant find favor in your sight.” So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad. -1 Samuel 1:7, 17-18

“She wept and did not eat” Hannah was sacrificial in her prayer. She did not eat until she was assured that she had broken through. Obviously, she had been abstaining from food as part of her prayer. She was either so determined that she would not eat, or so distraught she could not eat; but either way, she was fasting.

As a parent, there are times when the needs of our children are greater than our need to eat. Some of the greatest breakthroughs in the lives of my boys have come as a result of days of fasting and prayer on their behalf. That was the result for Hannah.

Then they rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD, and returned and came to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. **20** So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked for him from the LORD.” - 1 Samuel 1:19-20

Hannah got her answer. God gave her a son, and what a son! Little Samuel became one of Israel's greatest prophets. He became a mighty man of prayer. His name “Samuel,” meaning “God heard,” was a constant reminder that God heard and answered his mother's prayer for her future son.

#### **It works!**

I have taught on Hannah's prayer for her future son at my church. As a result, barren women and couples have been moved to a deeper level in their prayers. Women “who couldn't get pregnant,” found themselves pregnant. Couples were led to adopt precious babies in need of a home. Spiritual breakthroughs occurred in the lives of children. Even some prodigals returned home.

A friend of mine named Rhonda had had no contact with her adult daughter, Megan, for several years. A few years ago, Rhonda became a part of

our church and returned to God after a couple of decades of distance. Soon she discovered a renewed burden to connect with her daughter. One Sunday morning she heard a message on the Hannah prayer and the power of prayer with fasting. She had become desperate to see her daughter again after all the years of separation. At this point she realized she had nothing to lose, so she gave prayer and fasting a serious try.

She began her fast on Monday, eating nothing and drinking only water, determined to persistently and passionately seek God with desperate prayer in behalf of Megan. On Thursday evening she got a phone call.

It was Megan.

After all those years, she had felt an overwhelming urge wanted to get back together with her Mom. God had heard Rhonda's prayer for her prodigal daughter.

But that's not all Rhonda prayed about. She began to pray about Megan's spiritual condition. Soon Megan began coming to church with her Mom and recently trusted Christ as her savior.

## Chapter 2

# THE PRAYER OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN FOR HER DAUGHTER

*Matthew 15:21-28*

No one on earth has the power to break your heart like your own child. Seeing them hurt and watching them struggle is a gut wrenching, soul shaking, experience. You feel their pain. They have the power in a split second to bring tears of incredible joy and pride to your eyes. But they can also deeply disappoint you it is like a knife jabbed into your heart. When they are treated unjustly, righteous indignation can overwhelm your common sense. But when they hurt, you would do anything you could to take their place.

As parents, sometimes the need is greater than our resources as parents. We feel desperate. There is a very special prayer that is the cry of a desperate parent. It is found in Matthew 15, as Jesus was resting from his heavy schedule in a non-Jewish region east of the Mediterranean Sea. Here he encountered a desperate mom.

## 1. Petition

Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon. **22** And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." Matthew 25:21

The mother took her overwhelming problem to Jesus. She cried out to Him for mercy.

While there is much we don't fully understand about demon possession, we do know that it has gruesome physical results and emotional expressions. We recognize that those possessed by the evil one experience severe pain. Human medicines may relieve symptoms but they are ineffective to produce lasting cures. Modern psychology wrestles to adequately understand, explain, or deal with it.

We also know that it must have been absolutely devastating to this mother to see her daughter in such awful anguish of the soul. So she cried out to Jesus for mercy.

Yet, her first request was ineffective.

But He answered her not a word. - Matthew 15:23

## 2. Perseverance

As a follower of Jesus, I find it most difficult to deal with the unexplained silences of God. We have all been there. There is a legitimate need. You come to the Lord for mercy. But all you get in response is deafening silence of God. Most people quit at this point.

This woman, a Canaanite, was used to the unresponsiveness of praying to her gods. This was not new to her. She could have easily marked Jesus down as just as uncaring or impotent as her gods. But she didn't. She persevered in crying out to Jesus for help.

And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." - Matthew 15: 23

She refused to give up easily or go quietly. She kept coming. Her pain was greater than her pride. So, she persisted...and Jesus finally responded.

But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Matthew 15: 24

### 3. **Pleading**

Ouch! Jesus did not even speak directly to her. He made his comment to his disciples. It certainly was not what she hoped he would say.

But she refused to be denied. She knew that she had no right to ask a Jewish man to help her. She knew that she had no basis for expecting Him to respond. But she had heard that he was mighty and compassionate. Her daughter was in extreme need. She had no choice, so she pressed the issue ahead.

Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" - Matthew 15:15

With all of her faith, all of her emotions, and all of her love for her daughter, she pleaded. The weight of her need, every ounce of her hurt, and the totality of her helplessness were embodied in those three little words, "Lord, help me."

How do you pray when you don't know what to pray? What words can better express the burden of the broken-hearted parent? "Lord, help me."

But again, the Lord was still slow to respond.

But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw *it* to the little dogs." Matthew 15:26

### 4. **Prevailing**

Yet, again her prayer goes without a response. But this heroic mother had the heart of a lion when it came to prayer for her daughter. She would not be denied.

And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Matthew 15:27

"Yes, Lord, yet... This mom was not going to give up until Jesus did something for her daughter. She would not take 'no' as the final answer. Her persistent faith cracked the wall of unwillingness she encountered in the ways of the Almighty. Finally, Jesus did something.

Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

. – Matthew 15: 28

How do we pray for our children so the Lord answers?

Like this mother, we must have great faith. Jesus commended her on her great faith. A look back through this passage reveals the greatness of her faith. She was a Canaanite, a non-Jew, a not-yet fully devoted follower of Jesus. For her to come so openly to Jesus for help shows that she had great faith considering the small amount of truth and light she had received in her life. She had not had the privilege of growing up hearing about the powerful love of the God of the Bible. For her to come to Jesus meant that she had to turn from pagan deities and familiar gods in order to trust Him to help her. Her faith was great for someone from her background. Coming to Jesus, persistently asking, and not giving up until she was helped, took all of the faith she had.

Her faith was great because it was not based on a sense of her own merit, wisdom, or strength. It was based completely on her strong conviction that Jesus was able and willing to help those in need. She positioned herself as dog seeking crumbs from its master.

## **It Works!**

Several of my children suffer from bi-polar disorder. The chemicals in their brain misfire in such a way as to make them very easily susceptible to depression

and anxiety. A few years ago one of them was struggling mightily to function because of severe social anxiety while the other was practically paralyzed by depression. Our daily prayers were just not getting the job done on their behalf.

We were scared, as we felt like we had in many ways “lost” our sons. We were desperate and nearly defeated.

I determined to spend a week fasting and praying like Hannah and persistently pleading their case to the Lord as did the Canaanite mother. Again and again, over and over, I cried out to God to “Show them mercy” and to “Help us.” I pleaded with Him to “Give us our sons back.”

After a week, nothing seemed to change, but I did not feel called to continue fasting.

Slowly God worked. Little by little they got better and were functioning in their college studies. Today both are doing great, serving the Lord and studying to be pastors!

### **Your Turn**

This desperate mother was granted a glorious answer to their prayers. She saw her daughter healed. The Canaanite mother taught us that prayer is most effective for our children when it is an expression of all the faith we have, it refuses to quit and is humbly pleads to the Lord.

Read slowly through the list below and ask yourself, which of these practices do I need to take into my own prayers for my children?

1. I have fully surrendered my child/children to the Lord.
2. I am stubbornly persist in my prayers in their behalf.
3. I pour my heart to the Lord in prayer for my children.
4. I will sacrifice food or others things in order to pray most effectively for my children.
5. I pray for my children with as much faith as I can possibly express.
6. I refuse to quit until the Lord responses.
7. I keep praying because I know I don't have all the answers, but the Lord does. He is willing and able to answer.

## **Chapter 3**

# **PRAYING WITH JESUS FOR YOUR CHILDREN**

Would you pray for your children more if you were confident that what you were praying for them aligned with God's desires for their lives? Sure, you would.

Maybe you are like I was when our first son was born. I was very willing to pray for my child, but was not exactly sure *what* to say when I prayed.

Who better to model our prayers after than Jesus? Of course, He was not the biological father of children. But He clearly served as a spiritual father to the men we call "the disciples." As their rabbi, he was teacher, counselor, mentor, trainer, leader whose task was to raise up His followers to the point of being able to replicate His life and teachings in order to become the next generation of followers of the Law of God.

In many ways, Christian parents have a similar set of roles and responsibilities. We must teach, counsel, mentor, train, and lead our children. Our job is to raise up our children to become the next generation of Christ follower's. Clearly the role Jesus played in the lives of His disciples is very similar to the role we have as the parents of our children. Therefore, we can confidently take the prayers He prayed for them, and apply them to our situations as we pray for our children.

### **THE JOHN 17 "HIGH PRIESTLY" PRAYER OF JESUS FOR HIS DISCIPLES**

John 13-17 contains the final discourses Jesus gave before His death, burial and resurrection. As such, these chapters contain some of the greatest words of comfort, instruction, and prediction ever given. John chapter 17 is the consummation of His dissertation. This farewell prayer for His disciples is the longest recorded prayer of Jesus. In it He prays for Himself (vv. 1-5), His current disciples (vv.6-19), and those who would follow in the future, including us, and our children (vv.20-26). This prayer focuses on three primary requests.

#### 1. Glorification

Before we look at the four requests He offers for His spiritual children, we should note the basis and context of the petitions for the disciples was Jesus own request that the Father would glorify Him.

Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You...

**5** And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. John 17:1,5 NKJV

Jesus was hours away from going to the cross to die for our sins. When Jesus asked the Father to glorify Him, it was not a selfish request. Jesus wanted the glory that would come from the immense love, vast power, and infinite wisdom of God that was about to be revealed through the work of salvation to ultimately reflect back upon the Father. What this means to us is that we should condition all of our praying for our children with the passionate desire that the result of these requests always point back to reflect not our glory as parents, but glory to God. Too often parents pray that their children will do well so that the parents will look good. No. We should pray that our children do well so God is glorified.

## 2. Protection

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. **15** I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. **16** They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. **17** Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. **18** As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. John 17:14-18

There are several truths we can learn from this prayer. **First, Jesus did not ask God to remove his followers from the world.** The concept of “the world” as used most frequently in the Scriptures describes the fallen system of society that is dominated by “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:15-17). It is like a river guided by the enemy that naturally flows away from God. It is fallen, corrupted, and will eventually pass away. It

Jesus knew that because of Him, His followers would face intense hatred from the world. Therefore, we could assume that His request would be that God would take them out of the world. But nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, Jesus said, “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”

Too often well-meaning parents try to overprotect their children by attempting to take them out of the world. Yet, it does not work, as the world is the system, not a place. When the child gets out from the parent’s protection, they often run head long into the world, their curiosity being their downfall.

**Second, Jesus did send His followers into the world.** He said, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). Later He would commission them for ministry with the words, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (John 20:21). Nowhere in the Bible did Jesus express the desire that His children were to totally isolate themselves from the world. He told us that as salt we were to get out of our salt shakers, and as light we were to shine among men (Matthew 5:13-16). Jesus send His followers *into* the world.

Prior to third grade, we educated our children at home in order to instill a love for reading and for the Lord. In third grade, we felt they were ready, so we put them in a public school with the message, “You will either be a missionary, or you will quickly become a mission field.” They were effective missionaries who led many of their schoolmates to Christ. In middle school, they led Bible studies on the school campus before school on Thursday mornings. In high school, they helped led a Wednesday night home Bible study where many of their friends came to Christ. As a result of “being in the world, but not of it,” they learned to defend their faith, gained a passion for the lost and developed a deep desire to reach them. Two of our sons are currently studying to be pastors.

In our church at that time, there were several families who severely criticized us for “sending our children into the world” instead of homeschooling them all the way through. It is interesting to note that in those families that tried to keep their children from the world, the opposite occurred. When they were old enough to get some freedom, most of the children dove headlong into the world. Only a few are still walking with the Lord. Understand the issue was not so much a matter of home school versus public school (or Christian school for that matter). The issue was one of motivations.

**Third, Jesus did not pray His spiritual children to be removed from the world, but that they would be protected from the evil one.** One of the twelve disciples, Judas, had already surrendered to the power of the evil one (John 13:27). Jesus had taught the disciples to pray for each other that the Father would “deliver them from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13). Like Jesus, we should pray for the spiritual, mental, emotional physical safe-keeping of our children even as they live in a fallen, crooked world. Even when Satan may attack their bodies, may he be unable to get their hearts.

### 3. Sanctification

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. - John 17:18

There are several truths we can learn from this prayer. **First**, *Jesus' second request flowed from the first*. Jesus had prayed that the Father would not remove them from the world, but protect them from the evil one. Now he prays that they'd become more holy in the process. The word "sanctify" is from the root word for "holy." It means separate from sin and separate to God. It describes a person who in heart, mind, thought, words, and actions is avoiding sin and drawing closer to God. When we pray this prayer for our children, we are asking God the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of our children to make them more holy.

**Second, Jesus said that sanctification is the product of truth.** One is sanctified only to the extent that they are governed by the truth. The truth is revealed in Jesus Christ and is found in His Word. When Jesus gave these words, He would soon no longer be personally available to them as He had been the previous three years. From now on their lives would need to be governed by His Word.

When we pray this prayer for our children we are asking God to open their eyes to see wonderful truth in His Word (Psalm 119:18); to motivate them to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:21); and to use His inspired Word to reprove, rebuke, correct and instruct them in righteousness that they may be fully equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Praying with Jesus for your children: John 17:5, 14-18

- *Glorification: Our Heavenly Father, the ultimate goal of all of my prayers in behalf of my children is that You would glorify Yourself in them.*
- *Protection. I ask, that you would not remove them from the world, but send them into it as missionaries. As you do, please protect them from the evil one.*
- *Sanctification: Please make them more holy. Use Your word to sanctify their lives.*

### **THE PRAYER OF JESUS FOR PETER: LUKE 22:31-32**

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus had many extremely important things He needed to tell His spiritual children so they would be prepared for all that was about to occur. As He washed their feet, during their final meal

together, as they walked across the Kidron Valley, and into the Mount of Olives, Jesus made the most significant statements He ever said. He knew that in just a few hours He would be arrested, tried, whipped, crucified, buried, and resurrected. By the end of that weekend, His relationship with His followers would be forever altered. They would have to stand on their own. He was leaving and they would need to be ready to assume the immense human responsibility for advancing the Kingdom of God. I guess in the sense of a child standing on the steps of independence, the importance of what was said that night was similar to the conversation a dad may have with his son the night before he is to enlist in the Army or a mom with her daughter the night before the wedding.

What is highly interesting about His last evening talk is a short comment Jesus made specifically to Peter. These two short sentences are often overlooked as they are only recorded in one of the four Gospels. Yet for those of us looking for insights into how to most effectively pray for our children, they stand out and shine like buried treasure.

And the Lord said, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. **32** But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." Luke 22:31-32 NKJV

Think of it. Jesus told Peter *that* He was praying for him and exactly *what* He was praying for him. His words can encourage us to pray for our children and provide us with a pattern we can use to pray for our children. Before we look at the content of the prayer, note several insights into this prayer:

First, note that Jesus referred to him by his given name "Simon," instead of the nickname "Peter" ("the Rock"). Why? Probably to signify the fact that in himself, apart from Christ, Simon was weak and susceptible to temptation.

Second, Jesus began, "Simon, Simon." Why? The repetition indicates emphasis and deep concern. What is about to be shared will be very serious information

Third, Jesus said, "Satan desired to sift you as wheat." What does that mean? Sifting wheat refers to the swift, violent, repeated shaking of wheat in a sieve in which the grain drops to the bottom and the chaff rises to top to be blown away. Jesus is warning Peter that Satan would hit him with swift, severe, repeated temptation with the goal of separating Peter from Jesus. As we know,

Peter would soon be tempted three times to deny Jesus. Interestingly, while Jesus is speaking specifically to Peter, He uses a plural sense of the word “you” to indicate that Satan will face severe testing. Parent let me remind you that we are in a spiritual war that must be taken seriously. Satan wants to hit your child with such sudden, severe and successive temptation and testing that the child will turn from God.

Fourth, Jesus said, “But, I have prayed for you.” Even though Satan would attack, Jesus had prayed. Jesus is saying that He was covering them in general and Peter in particular in prayer. He had prayed that night and probably many times previously. Parents we must let this word from Jesus spur us to pray for our children.

In this prayer of Jesus for Peter we two significant requests that we can pray for our children.

### **1. Prevailing Faith**

First, Jesus told Peter, “I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail.” Initially we might assume that Jesus is praying that Peter would not yield to temptation, but if we have read the rest of the story we know that Peter did yield to temptation and denied the Lord three times. Plus the next phrase gives it away, when Jesus said, “and when you have returned to Me.” Jesus is assuming that Peter would get off track, even if only briefly. Therefore, we can assume that the essence of this request is that even though Peter might get knocked down, he would get back up. Ultimately his faith would prevail.

As our children get older we cannot shield them from every time and type of testing, nor should we. They will never successfully make the trek to independence from us and dependence on Christ without learning to weather the attacks and the appeals of the enemy. Sometimes they will win and sometimes they will stumble and fall. We need to pray that when tested they will not give in, but even when they fall, they will get back up and keep going for God. Sometimes they will get off track. We need to pray that those times are brief and that they will retrace their steps back to the Lord. As Jesus prayed for Peter, we need to pray that our children will learn from their mistakes to depend more completely on the Lord.

Recently one of my sons was hit with a severe and sudden temptation. He was already exhausted from lack of sleep and the test completely

overwhelmed him ,and unfortunately before he knew it, he yielded and apart from the grace of God he might have very easily been removed from college and lost his relationship with his finance', if not his own life. It could have been a giant mess. Interestingly, that very morning I had happened to pray for him this prayer for prevailing faith. At the time, I of course had no idea how applicable it would be. Fortunately the Lord answered my request. His stumble resulted in minimal damage but maximum life change. He quickly got back up and got going harder for God than before more keenly aware of his need to rely on the Lord.

## **2. Resulting Ministry**

The second part of Jesus request for Peter is also very applicable for us. He told Peter that He prayed, "when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." Jesus request was that Peter would use his fall in order to better minister to others. God answered that petition. Read the book of Acts and read how much the Lord was able to use Peter to bless others. In the face of great opposition and persecution, Peter became the leader of the first and largest church in the world at that time. Can you imagine what an arrogant jerk Peter might have become with such "success" if he had not yielded to temptation that night? God could have never used him.

I have found that every time I go through a difficult experience, I gain a key of ministry effectiveness that unlocks people's hearts. People connect much more easily with our failures than with our successes. We need to pray that even when our children stumble and fall, they would not only get back up, but they would use the lessons they learned to better serve and minister to others.

Prayer requests for your children: Luke 22:31-32

- *Prevailing Faith: Our Heavenly Father, when my children are tested, may their faith not give in or give up. Keep them from stumbling. But, if and when they stumble, may they get back up and keep going toward You and for You.*
- *Resulting Ministry: May they use everything they experience - good and bad - to better minister to others.*

## **JESUS SET ASIDE A SPECIFIC TIME AND PLACE TO PRAY**

Mark's Gospel records a sample twenty-four hour time period in the life of Jesus. Its dizzying level of activity rivals one of a mother with several small

children at home. In the span of twenty-four hours, Jesus gave an amazing teaching at the synagogue (Mark 1:21-22), cast a violent, belligerent demon out of a man (Mark 1:23- 28), and healed Simon-Peter's mother so she can fix Jesus and His disciples lunch (Mark 1:29-31). He then spent the rest of the day and late into the night healing sick people and casting demons out of the terrorized (Mark 1:32-34). Whew!

It's hard to imagine a more draining day. If He was like many of us, after such a draining day, the next morning might have been spent sleeping in and chilling out. But Jesus had a deep capacity for ministry because He practiced a few holy habits that yielded powerful results.

Was Jesus sleeping in the next day? No. Read verse 35 carefully.

Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. - *Mark 1:35 NKJV*

Note carefully that Jesus had a specific *time* for prayer (in the morning) and a specific *place* for prayer (a solitary place). I have been training people in the area of prayer for thirty years. Again and again, I have found that if they will select a time and place for prayer, they are halfway home in developing a powerful prayer life.

*Determine a set time each day when you will pray for your children.* It could be first thing in the morning or last thing at night. Some do it over their lunch hour. The right time is the time that works for you.

*Select a place for prayer.* We read in Mark about Jesus going out to a "quiet place." In Matthew Jesus mentioned going into your room and closing the door – "when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6). Your place could be at a desk or the kitchen table or kneeling beside your bed or in the car on the way to work. I often enjoy taking a prayer walk in the middle of the day. The right place is the place that is right for you.

*Try to pray a set amount of time for your children each day.* Susanna Wesley was the mother of 19 children. Imagine the chaos in a home with so many children and an often absentee husband! Her goal was to spend one hour in prayer for her children each day. When Suzanna wanted to spend time with God, she had a unique way of finding her "quiet" place. She would sit down in her kitchen and pull her apron up over her head. She would then spend time in prayer and the children knew not to disturb her! Her prayers made an impact. Her sons, John and Charles later led the great spiritual awakening of the eighteenth century and founded the Methodist church. Of his mother's prayers John was to write, *I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from*

*all the theologians of England.* <sup>1</sup> There are 24 hours in a day or 1440 minutes. Setting aside 15, or 30, or 60 minutes a day to pray for your children may be the best investment of your time you could possibly make.

## **Your Turn**

Which of these prayers from Jesus do you need to especially focus on as you pray for your child(ren)?

1. *Glorification: Our Heavenly Father, the ultimate goal of all of my prayers in behalf of my children is that You would glorify Yourself in them.*
2. *Protection. I ask, that you would not remove them from the world, but send them into it as missionaries. As you do, please protect them from the evil one.*
3. *Sanctification: Please make them more holy. Use Your word to sanctify their lives.*
4. *Prevailing Faith: Our Heavenly Father, when my children are tested, may their faith not give in or give up. Keep them from stumbling. But, if and when they stumble, may they get back up and keep going toward You and for You.*
5. *Resulting Ministry: May they use everything they experience - good and bad - to better minister to others.*

When and where will you pray each day?

1. *My time(s):*
2. *My amount of time:*
3. *My place:*

Notes

1. John Wesley, <http://www.anchoryourlife.com/prayer/wesley.html>

## Chapter 4

# PRAYING WITH PAUL FOR YOUR CHILDREN

The apostle Paul was an outstanding spiritual father for the young Christians in the many churches he started (see 1 Cor. 4:14-16; 1 Thess. 2:11). The role of spiritual parent was one he took very seriously as he taught, modeled, encouraged, and especially prayed for his spiritual children. Fortunately for us, he recorded many of the prayers he regularly offered in behalf of his spiritual children. From those prayers, we learn a great deal about how we can pray for our children.

In one sitting, I read the content of each of Paul's prayers, in four translations. Wow! Reading them all at once shook me, convicted me, challenged me, and powerfully encouraged me as I pray for my children. They are found in Romans 1:8-10; 15:5-6,13; Ephesians 1:15-19, 3:14-19; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; 3:11-13; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; Philemon 1:4-6). Before we look at each of the prayers separately, let's look at them as a group. In doing so, we can learn several powerful insights into how to most effectively pray for our children.

## PAUL'S KEYS TO EFFECTIVE INTERCESSION

### CONSISTENCY

The first thing that jumps out at you as you study Paul's prayers is his repeated mention of how consistently and constantly he prayed for them. Obviously, Paul viewed regular, consistent, frequent, fervent, constant prayer as a primary responsibility he held for his spiritual children. Note the words I italicized.

Romans 1:9 "*without ceasing* I make mention of you *always* in my prayers"

Ephesians 1:16 “do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers”

Colossians 1:3 “praying always for you”

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing

1 Thessalonians 3: 10 “night and day praying exceedingly”

2 Thessalonians 1:11 “we also pray always for you”

2 Timothy 1:3 “without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day”

Philemon 1:4-5 “I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers”

Look back through those verses and observe the drumbeat repetition describing the consistency of Paul’s prayers for his spiritual children – “without ceasing,” “always,” “do not cease,” “always,” “without ceasing,” “night and day,” “exceedingly,” “always,” without ceasing,” “day and night,” “always.” You get the idea that he never missed a day, let alone an opportunity to pray for his spiritual children. Every time they came to mind, he offered a prayer on their behalf.

Maybe you are like me. I will pray much when there is emergencies or crisis, but I tend to slack off when the pressure lets off. I need to learn to pray consistently even when there is no crisis. If I did, maybe there would be fewer crises.

Often, we think about our children, talk about our children, even spend time with our children, but how much time do we actually spend praying for them? I would guess that most of us would have to say that the frequency of our prayers is too little, too rarely, and often, too late. As mentioned previously, I want to strongly encourage you to have a set time, at least once a day when you pray scripture for your children.

## GRATITUDE

Paul was not only consistent in his prayers, but he was constant in his gratitude. Again and again he mentions how thankful he was for his spiritual children and the work God had already done and was doing in them. Read these verses and note Paul's heartbeat of gratitude.

Romans 1:8 "First, I *thank* my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world"

1 Corinthians 1: 4-7 "I *thank* my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you come short in no gift"

Ephesians 1:15-16 "after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to *give thanks* for you"

Philippians 1: 3-6 "I *thank* my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ"

Colossians 1:3-4 "We give *thanks* to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints"

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 "We give *thanks* to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father"

1 Thessalonians 2:13 "For this reason we also *thank* God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

1 Thessalonians 3:9 "For what *thanks* can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God?"

2 Thessalonians 1: 3 "We are bound to *thank* God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other"

2 Timothy 1:3-5 "I *thank* God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers *did*, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day...when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you."

Philemon 1:4-5 "I *thank* my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, 5 hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints"

Do you thank God for your children everyday? Or are you like I am, often taking for granted that God has given them to you as a gift, taking for granted that He already been working in their lives? We should learn from Paul to spend time each day thanking God for our children.

Parenting can be the most discouraging task we ever face. Some of our children go through stretches when it is a best three steps forward, two steps back. Paul spiritually parented Christians who could have worn him out and driven him crazy. But they did not make him bitter or cynical, or discouraged. Why? He always thanked God for them. What I find challenging is that he not only was thankful for the famous faith Romans and the amazingly influential Thessalonians, but he was also grateful for the Corinthians. His Corinthian children were always struggling to follow his leadership. They continually fought with each other. They got off track easily, quickly and often.

We should not only note *that* Paul was grateful, but also for *what* he was grateful. He did not mention thanks for their good health or easy lives. Instead he was grateful for to God for what He had done in their lives, what He was doing in their lives, and what He would do in their lives. Paul's base of gratitude was spiritual, not physical, or material. I am not saying that we should not thank God for the physical, material, educational, vocational blessings he gives our children. But the primary content of our gratitude should be focused on the spiritual work He has, is and has yet to do in their lives.

## **EXPECTANTLY**

Paul was not only consistent in his prayers, and constant in his gratitude, he was also confident in his expectation. He prayed believing that God was not finished yet. God still had more and better ahead. Let's look at several examples.

*Romans 15: 13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. 14 Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*

Notice that Paul bases his prayers on the confidence he has in them. Because God is in them they have goodness, knowledge, and ability.

*1 Corinthians 1:4-9 4 I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, 6 even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, 7 so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Note that this is what he prays for the Corinthians, his most troublesome group of spiritual children. Yet, he was confident that one day even they would end up blameless because *God is faithful*. We can pray for our children with great expectation because we are praying to a great and faithful God.

*Philippians 1:4-6 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident*

*of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

Note carefully verse six. Paul said that he prayed from a foundation of confidence that the same God who had begun a good work in them would complete it. Eugene Petersen renders this verse, as "There has never been the slightest doubt in my mind that the God who started this great work in you would keep at it and bring it to a flourishing finish on the very day Christ Jesus appears." As we have said, there will be times when our children disappoint us. We must be like Paul and remember that our faith is not so much in them as in the God who is at work in them. As long as they are breathing, He is not finished working.

*Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Read those verses again, slowly. What an encouraging promise! We pour our hearts out to God in behalf of our children and it not only makes us feel better, it accomplishes something. God is able. He can do far more than we could ever imagine or guess or request in our wildest dreams. He is powerful. His power works in us and in our children so that it will all ultimately add up to His glory.

Too often, the aim of our prayers is much too low. Paul prayed expectantly that his spiritual children would not just barely make God's team and ride the bench, but that they would hit spiritual homeruns and end up in the hall of faith. God is able and willing to work. He can do more than we can ask or imagine.

## **SPIRITUALLY**

Paul was not only consistent in his prayers, constant in his gratitude, and confident in his expectation, but he was also consumed with their spiritual progress. He prayed that they would know God and all God had available for them (Ephesians 1:17-19); that they would have inner strength and live open to Christ, experiencing the full dimensions of His love (Ephesians 3:14-20); That they'd learn to live much and wisely, bear spiritual fruit (Philippians 1:9-11). Paul prayed that they'd be in step with God's will and live well as they work for Him with glorious and joyful endurance (Col. 1:9-12); that they'd overflow with love, strength, and purity (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13); and that God would make them holy and whole inside and out (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). Paul prayed that they'd be fit for what God has called them to be, and God would energize their efforts (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12); that they'd experience spiritual encouragement and empowerment in their words and works (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17); and that as they share their faith they'd understand just how amazing it is (Philemon 1:6).

Unlike most of our prayers that tend to be based on our children's physical needs, academic challenges, sporting competitions, financial situations, and so forth. Paul's prayers are consumed with the spiritual state of his spiritual children. I am sure that he did mention other areas of need on occasion, but what comprised the vast majority of his requests was their spiritual condition.

Beyond that, he prayed that they would not remain at their current levels of spiritual maturity. Repeatedly his prayers are entwined with requests for their ongoing spiritual development and progress. For example, he asked that they would be "increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10); that they would "increase and abound in love to one another and to all" (1 Thessalonians 3:12); and told them that he prayed that their "faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other (2 Thessalonians 1: 3).

As I read Paul's prayers I came away with the strong sense that I needed to make some changes. The content of my prayers are too often too temporal, too external, and too superficial. We need to learn from Paul to focus our prayers on that which is most important, the spiritual development of our children.

## A SUMMARY OF THE REQUESTS PAUL MADE FOR HIS SPIRITUAL CHILDREN

We are fortunate that Paul recorded so many of his prayer requests for his children. They show us that he prayed for every possible aspect of the relationship with God and their spiritual development. I have summarized them below. Read slowly through the list of 26 requests and mark the ones that you feel would be especially appropriate to pray for your children at this time.

*Paul prayed that his spiritual children would...*

Romans 15:5-6	Learn to live in unity and harmony with others
Romans 15:13	Be filled with joy, peace and spiritual energy
Ephesians 1:17	Know God personally
Ephesians 1:18	Know what God is calling them to do and be, all that is available to them in God and how great God's power can be in them as they believe in Him.
Ephesians 3:16	Be inwardly strengthened with Spirit-imparted power
Ephesians 3:17	Have faith to be fully open to Christ and make Him welcome in their hearts
Ephesians 3:18	Experience an every growing realization of every possible dimension of Christ's extravagant love
Ephesians 3:19	Live full of God
Philippians 1:9	Possess abounding, insightful, discerning, appropriate love
Philippians 1:10	Wisely prioritize the best things
Philippians 1:10	Be blamelessly pure
Philippians 1: 11	Be filled with righteous fruits

Colossians 1:9	Be filled with a clear knowledge of God's will
Colossians 1:10	Live worthy of the Lord consciously
Colossians 1:10	Fully please Him in everything
Colossians 1:10	Bear fruit in good works
Colossians 1:10	Be filled with a clear knowledge of God
Colossians 1:11	Be invigorated with glorious strength and endurance
Colossians 1:12	Joyfully thank God for all He has made available to them
1 Thessalonians 3:12	Abound in and overflow with love
1 Thessalonians 3:13	Be infused with strengthened and blameless holiness
1 Thessalonians 5:23	Be made holy and whole inside and out
2 Thessalonians 1:11	Be made fit for what God has called them to be
2 Thessalonians 1:11	God would energize and fulfill their spiritual ideas and efforts
2 Thessalonians 2:17	Experience spiritual encouragement and empowerment in their words and works
Philemon 1:6	Share their faith and understand just how amazing it is

### ***Putting it all Together***

Take a few minutes and pray through the requests that grabbed your attention. As you do so, mark your prayers with gratitude for all God has already done, is currently doing, and will do for your children in the future. Pray expectantly that God will be bringing this request to pass. Also pray for wisdom as to how you can make this request a consistent part of your prayers for your children.

***For More information on this subject see***

- ***Praying for Your Children***