

3 Ways to Pray for Your Prodigal Child

One day during his senior year in high school, my son left the house taking a car and money withdrawn from his savings account. He sent me this text: "Don't try to find me." We knew he had depression and was smoking marijuana, but now we realized that he was an addict using all kinds of drugs. I was frantic.

Have you ever thought you were losing the spiritual battle over your child as one thing after another goes wrong even as you pray with all your heart? Do you have a child who is in trouble with drugs, alcohol, sexual promiscuity or sexual identity issues, eating disorders, self-injuring, depression, suicide attempts or other mental health disorders, legal troubles, or behavioral issues?

Continuing to pray boldly when circumstances are getting worse and worse is a struggle. I know. I have been there.

Here are some things the Lord has taught me through our family's journey.

1. Pray in increasing faith not fear.

Over time, I began to see that my prayers, as fervent as they were, needed a totally new framework. With the situation with my son, I felt I had to pray for every possible scenario I could think of each day since I didn't know where he was, what dangers he was facing, or if he was even alive.

The Lord gently revealed to me that this kind of incessant praying wasn't based on faith at all ... it was based on fear. I was trying to control the situation in a different way. I could no longer control where my son was or whom he was with, but I would attempt to through prayer. This verse from 2

Chronicles 20:12 leapt off the page as I read it one morning:

"We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

I kept reading and came to verses 15-17:

"Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours but God's. ... Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you."

And through these verses, the Lord encouraged me to lay my son down at His feet each morning and stop praying all day. I could stand firm in my faith believing the Lord was at work whether I could see it or not. He knew what to do; I didn't. And He always showed me the next step I was to take. I wanted to know the next twenty steps, but He would only show me the next one. This is how He increased my faith. Isaiah 30:15 confirmed it in my heart at the same time: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength."

2. Pray by releasing your prodigal.

There are times when it seems impossible to focus on concentrated prayer as you face one emergency after another. When spiritual attack is heavy and you are down in the miry pit, ask a few trusted friends to pray.

I love knowing that every prayer I have ever prayed sits in the golden bowls of incense in front of the throne of grace that we read about in Revelation 5 and 8. They are outside of time, with the Lord, in eternity. They are working whether we are able to pray another prayer or not. Christ intercedes continuously as pictured in Romans 8:34, and the Spirit intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express (Rom. 8:26). Intercession is happening.

In time, you will be able to pray again and focus. But for now, lay your child down at His feet and know you have put them in the *best* possible place. You may feel like you aren't doing anything, but you have done what's most important by releasing them to the Lord.

3. Pray persistently through hope in Christ.

I've learned new ways to pray for myself and my family. When I cry out to the Lord, here are some things that I ask Him.

For Myself

- To enable me to let go of my shame and guilt, which is the best way I can help my children and others.
- To keep me from deceiving myself and reveal sin that I am overlooking.
- To not try to control or fix others and learn to change my responses.
- To increase my faith (Luke 17:5) and help me overcome my unbelief (Mark 9:24).
- To have faith like those in Hebrews 11 who never received what was promised (v. 39) so that I might pray boldly no matter what the circumstances.
- To have courage to love as He loves, which means not withholding the hard consequences and possibly appearing unloving.

I remind myself that my hope is only in Christ, not in treatment centers, doctors, choices I or my family makes, circumstances, or anything else. My hope is *only* in Christ.

For My Family

- To cause my children to be disillusioned with wrong choices, becoming more and more uncomfortable. Change only happens when we are uncomfortable.
- That they stop deceiving and are honest with themselves

and others, recognizing the lies of the evil one.

- To pour out the Holy Spirit upon our family, knowing He answers this as He promises in Luke 11:13.
- For the Spirit to grant unity and healing, guarding our marriage and the relationships between my children.

We have dealt with eating disorders, anxiety, and other issues among our children. These struggles taught me new ways to pray whether circumstances improved or not.

After my son left home, he came back a week later, beginning a year-long struggle that included three different treatment centers, leaving him at a homeless shelter, three months on the streets, and then the fourth treatment center—through which the Lord humbled him under His mighty hand and set him free from bondage. He is two-and-a-half years clean, attending college, working, and knows it is God who saved him.

Don't give up praying even when it seems like the battle is being lost. May the Lord encourage you and show you how He would have you pray and surrender your children to Him.

God loves them more than you ever could.

Reprinted from Revive Our Hearts.

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