

What the Holy Spirit Told This Pastor at Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church About His Autistic Son

Craig Johnson is the director of ministries at Lakewood Church in Houston. He and his wife Samantha have three children, one of whom was diagnosed with autism. Craig recently spoke with Charisma News about the journey, both spiritual and physical, of raising a son with disabilities. He is the founder of Champions Club, a curriculum for children with special needs. His book, CHAMPION, is out next month. .

Describe the prayer process when your son was first diagnosed.

When we found out that her son was being diagnosed on the middle of the spectrum with autism, we knew this was going to be a tremendous challenge. We knew that there were going to be times where it was going to be overwhelming, but we believed we had to do two things. First we had to pray bold prayers. Psalm 34:4 says, "I sought the Lord and He answered me." Psalm 22:5 says, "They cried to you and were delivered; they trusted in You and were not put to shame."

There are times in your life when you're crying out to God and you can either complain or proclaim. There's no power in complaining. Complaining is the language of the disempowered. When God was bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land, the children of Israel began to complain and murmur, and what was only supposed to be an 11-day journey took 40 years. I know when we're facing things initially we might need to release feelings so we can get it off our chest, but we had to encourage ourselves and we had to say we were not going to stay in the land of complaining and murmuring. We

were going to begin to pray bold prayers and we were going to begin to believe God for miracles. We had to believe that God can do anything.

The second thing that we did is we begin to speak the Word of God over our circumstance. In Hebrews it says the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. I heard God speak to me and say, "Craig, I love how you read my words, but begin to speak my words, begin to pray my words, and watch what I will do."

So when we got the diagnosis we begin to search in God's Word for Scriptures on healing, restoration and peace, and we found 30 Scriptures in the Bible centered around those areas. Every night before we went to bed, we would go to our son's room and speak these 30 healing Scriptures over our son. We didn't just speak them; we began to pray them. Well, not only was God listening, but our son Connor was listening. Later on, when he was five years old, Connor started memorizing the Scriptures and before we knew it, he had memorized all 30 healing scriptures. He would speak them in the car, at school and during dinner.

One time when Connor cut his foot, his mom was putting medicine on it and with tears in his eyes Connor said, "If anyone among you is sick, let them call for the elders of the church and they will pray over them." Wow! My wife and I were amazed he was using Scripture to respond to his emotion of being hurt. This is extraordinary for a child with autism. As we continued to pray bold prayers and speak the word of God over his life, we continued to see miracles.

What did the Holy Spirit tell you about your son and the man he would become?

When Connor was 5 years old, he started having terrible meltdowns. One day I was driving in my car on my way to work and I remember asking God, "Why? Why is he struggling so bad?"

I'll never forget God speaking through his Holy Spirit saying to me, "Craig, your child is not a burden, your child is a gift." I said, "God, we love our son. I know he's a gift to us, but he is struggling so much!" God spoke to me again and he said, "Craig, your child is not a burden, your child is a gift." I said, "God, what do you mean?" Then He said, "Craig, you're looking at what's wrong with him, you are not looking at what's right." I said, "God, what are you saying?" He said, "Craig, I'm going to use your son to reach millions of people."

Now I've got to be honest with you, I could not imagine that at the time. It was a very vulnerable time in my life and I said, "God, how is my son going to reach millions of people? He can't even ask for a drink of water!" At that time, my son hadn't spoken for three years. I'll never forget what God spoke to me in that time of need. He just spoke four words, and these are the four words He's going to speak to you whenever you are a desert, whenever you're going through a difficult time, whenever you need just a cool cup of water: "Do you trust me?"

I didn't give Him the pastoral answer. I said, "Father, you're all we've got. I trust you." After I spoke to God, I thought things were going to get better but they actually got worse. The meltdowns started getting worse. The struggles were getting worse. During that time, I couldn't pray elaborate prayers; all I would say many times is "I trust you, I trust you." I found out with God that was enough.

Three months later, I'm sitting downstairs and hear a loud cry from my wife: "Craig, Craig, get up here!" I knew something was wrong. I ran upstairs into Connor's bedroom and I see her crying. She said, "Craig, I was putting Connor to bed, reading him a couple books, and I was about to pray for him and all of the sudden he began to speak! He began to say one word after another word, one sentence after another sentence." Please understand that I hadn't heard my son speak more than two

words in three years. So I said, "What do you mean he began to speak?" She said, "Craig, he began to speak." She walked me over to his bed and said, "Connor, say it for mommy and daddy, say it again."

My little five-year-old boy looked up at us and began to speak. He said, "This is my Bible. I am what it says I am. I have what it says I have. I can do what it says I can do. Today I will be taught the word of God. I boldly confess, my mind is alert, I will never be the same. I'm about to receive the incorruptible, indestructible, ever-living seed of the word of God. I'll never be the same. Never, never, never, I'll never be the same in Jesus name."

Those were his first words. A few weeks later I spoke on a Wednesday night and showed Connor on a video speaking his first words. A spiritual declaration. The crowd began to weep. Pastor Joel came up to me after the service and asked if he could speak about Connor's miracle. When he shared it through the television broadcast, that video went viral around the world. Millions of people heard Connors testimony, fulfilling God's promise to our family.

This is part one in a two-part series.