

How to Pray for Your Prodigal

Do you have an adult child who has run away from God? Does thinking about praying for them leave you with a deep feeling of weariness and despair? If you're a church leader, do you keep the disappointment hidden to avoid judgment by others? Do you feel as though your prayers remain unheard, and you are left hopeless? Or do you feel confused and disappointed with God because you think you did almost everything right in raising your child, and they turned away from God anyway?

I have experienced some of these same feelings. In the process of living through an agonizing season of watching my daughter fall away from God, I learned that He is a loving, sovereign, good, good Father. I also discovered there are redemptive treasures found within difficult seasons. The supernatural peace, joy and growth I received toward the end of that time were undeniable. But more than that, I learned how to love God and others more profoundly and accept His love for me more fully. Likewise, your journey of praying for your prodigal will produce a season of good things if you trust God and don't give up.

Heartbreaking Story

After my husband joined the military, we homeschooled our children to help them adjust to our transient lifestyle of moving from city to city every few years. Graduating from high school a year early, my daughter went to a Christian college. Shortly after that, she became pregnant.

The emphatic statement I made years earlier now flooded my mind. *No, not my children!* Our daughter decided to marry the father of our first grandchild, which brought relief to her dad and me. Together, they added two more babies to their family. Everything seemed to be going well until years later; things began to unravel when our daughter and her husband fell

away from the Lord. They eventually separated and divorced.

The enemy tormented me with fear for her and our grandchildren. I felt bombarded by the what-ifs and the should-haves. I believed the encouraging words I received from God about my children but wondered why things were not moving in the right direction. My relationship with God is strong, and I have an equally strong prayer life, but I felt God didn't hear my prayers for them. After years of struggling, I finally surrendered my right to have my daughter walk with the Lord the way I wanted her to. I began praying differently, and eventually, things began to change.

Vital Truth

God's heart beats for the redemption of man. It's the reason Jesus came to this earth to heal the brokenhearted and set the captives free. Isaiah 61 addresses how God rebuilds ancient ruins and restores what's been broken for generations. He longs to redeem His children, so He celebrates every little movement in that direction. God wants to transform His children, so He never gets weary or tired in the lifelong pursuit of His beloved. He longs to multiply fruit for His kingdom's purpose and His glory. He looks for ways to fertilize and grow the seeds of destiny locked away within the gardens of our souls. God wants hearts fully surrendered to Him, not only the prodigal adult child's heart but the parent's heart as well.

The biblical account of the adult prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 speaks about how the young man learns he cannot do life on his terms without bearing the rotten fruit of negative consequences. It takes time for him to reach and learn from the desperate place in which he found himself. Finally, having come to his senses, he returns to his father's open arms and asks for mercy.

If you find yourself in the situation of loving a prodigal

adult child, you're not in the minority, and you are not alone! No one needs to hide in shame, because healing comes from sharing what we are experiencing with trusted friends and counselors.

Divine Setup

Recent survey results released in George Barna's American Worldview Inventory 2020-2021 reveal that a meager percentage of Generation X and Millennials has a biblical worldview. Although many indicate they are Christians, they do not hold to foundational biblical truths. The way they define Christian living is vastly different from the way older generations believe.

Considering this evidence, we need God to help us in a time of great need. Like the prodigal son, our children need a wake-up call to understand the depravity of their situation. They need a spiritual revelation, opening their eyes to see their need for the one true God.

All these distressing issues are leading to a divine setup of biblical proportions. To help encourage and align us with God's plan for this coming season, I want to suggest a few strategies to help heal your heart from the past discouragement and position you for the forthcoming great awakening. If parents and grandparents join God in doing the specific prayer work I suggest, the benefits will unlock revival in our hearts that will flow down and bear good fruit for generations to come.

Face fear head-on. Decision-making based on fear never takes you down the right path. After reviewing my fear-based decisions, trying to avert the pain and consequential fallout from my daughter's life, I realized they never turned out the way I wanted. Face the fearful thoughts in your life and confess them to God. Read and meditate on such passages as 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Ephesians 6:10-18 and Philippians 4:6-8 to

start the prayer strategy process.

Trust the process. Many weary parents get discouraged because they don't see a quick enough turnaround in their prodigal child. Stories about instant deliverances in the lives of others' loved ones keep parents hoping for the same. When that doesn't come, discouragement can set in.

More times than I can count, God takes people through a process versus an instant transformation. Stand on whatever promises God has given you and trust He is at work in both you and your child, even if you don't see Him working.

Make it personal. If you think your prayers don't matter, think again. When I was at the point of being too tired or disappointed in seeing little to no results from my prayers, the Lord reminded me of my favorite Scripture, Proverbs 3:5-6. He had me repeat it in a first-person manner, emphasizing the word "all." "Trust Me with *all* your heart and do not lean into your own understanding, Brenda." Fear has no place in trusting God and His perfect love for you and your children. So personalize it and place your name in this encouraging Scripture.

Renounce ill-spoken words. In times of frustration, we speak things we later regret. Our words have great power. Proverbs 18:21 tells us how the tongue has the power of life and death; what you say matters. Ask God if there are any negative words you've spoken about or to your children regarding judgments you've made. Speaking words and phrases such as "They will never ...," or, "You're never going to ...," influences and reinforces the behavior you do not want to see. Confess to God negative words you've spoken and renounce them. Then take time to announce opposite words of truth that bring life. Ask your child's forgiveness if they heard you say these things.

Seek to honor authority. Ask God if you or your spouse has modeled rebellion against authority, and seek out the biblical

principles regarding honoring authority. Romans 13:1 says, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."

I recall times when I did not honor God's appointed authority in my life. For example, my children listened as I, in a not-so-nice way, called out a police officer clocking my driving speed. They also heard a disagreement I had with my husband and noticed when I tried to get them to side with me afterward.

We are living in a time of great rebellion; pray that God will reveal any rebellion in your heart, then confess it and pray that He reveals it to your children as well.

Take them off the pedestal. Do the expectations you have of your children come from trying to make them who you want them to be? A wise parent will ask God if the motivation for such behavior comes from a desire to please Him or man. Proverbs 29:25 says fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety. Your children are your inheritance. Be careful not to cross over that boundary into a place of idolatry. Confess this to God and let Him take the reins of your expectations, then allow Him to fulfill His plan for their lives.

Clean up any compromise. Although challenging, we must do this if we hope to see a true turnaround in the lives of the younger generation. We must be willing to own some hard things for their benefit. There are so many reports of husbands and wives and leaders of the church compromising their faith and committing immoral acts for a season of frolic. I must speak tenderly but boldly here: It is time to clean up this behavior. Mercy and forgiveness await you if you come to Jesus with a genuine heart of confession and repentance. The younger generation is running from God in droves, and many attribute this to the hypocrisy within the church. If you sense the Holy

Spirit's tug at your heart right now, would you consider bowing on your knees before God and asking for forgiveness? He wants to set you and your family free. If you haven't walked down this sinful path, please consider lovingly praying for those who need to get right with God.

Fresh Revelation

Song of Songs 4:12 says you are a garden locked up. Seeds of potential are buried within the garden of your soul. When we turn to God with our pain and disappointment, He can redeem everything. I learned that in the place of pressure and fiery trials, the Holy Spirit brings beautiful gems and treasures from the ashes of our lives. From the understanding God gave me of the Song of Songs, I now use this book and my artwork as a strategic prayer template for helping people move into His plan. Pray and ask God to give you a fresh revelation of something new He's unlocking in you.

Abide in the Father's love. Spending daily time abiding with God to seek His love, peace, wisdom and comfort helped me more than anything else. Pray that God gives both you and your child a revelation of the deep love of the Father. Pray Ephesians 1:17-18, that God would provide a spirit of wisdom and revelation for you and your child to know Him more and that the eyes of your hearts would open to see Him in the midst of your lives.

Speak into another mother and father's prodigal child. Speak life into a young adult. Even a word or two spoken to a cashier, waitress or employee you work with can move mountains and set things in motion for their return to God. There is life in your words and the prayers of parents behind those words.

In all things, praise the Lord. Thank God and worship Him. He knows what it will take to turn your beloved around. Trust Him with all your heart and lean not into your understanding.

Don't let the enemy steal your joy! Acknowledge how you feel about your child's decisions, and then let the joy of the Lord be your strength. Keep your eyes on Jesus and trust Him with the process. Read and pray from the book of Psalms for added encouragement and comfort during these difficult times.

Find a battle buddy. God has not designed you to carry your burdens alone. I have a group of trusted friends with whom I pray regularly. Long ago, I prayed and asked God to send me a friend to pray with who had children around my children's age. Weeks later, I was sitting on the Washington, D.C., Metro headed for work; I looked up and saw a woman holding a Beth Moore Bible study book. I immediately went to ask her about it and discovered she and her husband had children around my children's age, and they attended a church my husband, son and I had just visited. She also worked only two buildings up from mine. We quickly became prayer battle buddies and dear friends who have prayed for our children through some tough times. We have seen both little and big victories, but most of all, we have seen God's love abound immeasurably more than we asked, hoped for or imagined (see Eph. 3:19-20). God answered my prayer for a prayer battle buddy, but I got so much more than that.

Let love be your guide. Let 1 Corinthians 13 be your template for how to love your prodigal. Choose to listen to them. Since they have walked away from God, let the Holy Spirit weave together His master plan of how to reach them. We can join Him by continuing to pray for them and showing His love in practical ways.

Over the years, my daughter showed signs of returning to the Lord, usually when a crisis came her way. But when the crisis situation was over, she would revert to her familiar rebellious ways.

That all changed one day when a miracle happened. My daughter found a job working for a Christian man who spoke boldly into

her life. About a month later, she reconnected with a prince, a young man her dad and I both love. Shortly afterward, they were happily married. Together, they love God, one another, their family and friends.

When we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, He helps us walk out our difficult seasons with His grace and strength. Even if you are in the painful years of agony, watching your adult child throw away everything they have learned about God, He will always be with you. You will no longer have to run and hide from the judgment of others but find help and treasures in this challenging season of your life. God can redeem, rebuild and bring beauty from the ashes of your life and your prodigal's as well. He can make everything beautiful in its time (see Eccl. 3:11).

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