

How to Pray Powerfully for Your Children—And Get Results

I want to be famous in my home.

Showing my kids what it means to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength is my deepest desire. It's also the greatest challenge of my life.

Parenting three children is far more important and far more difficult than pastoring several thousand people. Just the other day, I said to my wife, "I feel like we'll finally figure out this parenting thing right when our kids leave home."

The truth is, we'll never figure it out because children are like moving targets. Right when we feel like we have them pegged, they become toddlers or teenagers or 20-somethings and we're back to square one. All we can do as parents is learn a few lessons along the way and enjoy the journey. Before I share some of the lessons I've learned, let me give you some bad news, some good news, and some great news.

The Bad News First

You'll make lots of mistakes. You'll lose your patience. You'll lose your temper. You might even lose your mind. But here's the good news: Your worst mistakes double as your greatest opportunities. How else will your kids learn to say sorry if you don't model it for them, to them?

Your mistakes give you the opportunity to teach your kids one of the most important lessons they'll ever learn: how to give and receive forgiveness. Finally, here's the great news: Prayer covers a multitude of sins. You don't have to do everything right, but there's one thing you cannot afford to get wrong. That one thing is prayer. It's your most powerful

tool as a parent. In fact, it turns parents into prophets who shape the destinies of their children.

Just as each of you has a family genealogy, you also have a prayer genealogy. My grandfather, Elmer Johnson, died when I was 6 years old, but his prayers did not. Prayers never die. They live on in the lives of those who are prayed for. Some of the most powerful moments in my life have been those moments when the Holy Spirit has whispered to my spirit: Mark, the prayers of your grandfather are being answered in your life right now. My grandpa used to kneel by his bed at night and pray for his family. He'd take off his hearing aid, so he couldn't hear himself, but everyone else in the house could. Few things are more powerful than hearing someone intercede for you. It'll leave a lasting imprint on your life.

How to Pray for Your Children

I realize that not everyone inherited a prayer legacy from their parents or grandparents like I did, but you can leave one for future generations. Are you ready to begin a new prayer genealogy? Here are five ways to pray for your children.

1. Keep a prayer journal for your children. Praying for your children can start before they are even born. One of our staff pastors had a wonderful idea before the birth of his first child. He asked close friends and family members to write out a prayer for his son, Torin.

Those prayers were put into a journal that will be given to Torin when his dad feels like he's ready to receive them. I can't even imagine what Torin will feel when he reads those prayers that were prayed over him before he was even born, but I'm guessing his heart will be flooded with a sense of destiny. That journal is his prayer genealogy.

You may feel like it's too late to start a journal because your child is too old, but it's never too late! Though our

children are school-aged, my wife, Lora, and I recently started writing out our prayers in a journal. We identified very specific desires, needs and dreams that are as unique as our three children. We also wrote down promises and passages from Scripture. And we now use that prayer list to pray consistently and strategically for our children.

2. Develop a prayer mantra for your children. You pray very different prayers for your children during different seasons of life. That's natural and normal. But I also believe in the power of a single God-inspired prayer repeated throughout a child's lifetime. Think of it as a prayer mantra. For the Batterson family, our prayer mantra is adapted from Luke 2:52. I have circled my children with this prayer blessing thousands of times: "May you grow in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and with man." I've circled my kids with that prayer mantra so many times that it has become part of the conscious and subconscious of my children.

3. Pray through the Bible for your children. One of my most treasured possessions is a Bible that belonged to my Grandpa Johnson. I love seeing his notes in the margins. I love seeing what verses he underlined. Sometimes I'll even do personal devotions out of his Bible.

I want to leave a similar legacy for my children. In fact, I want to give each of them a Bible that was prayed through specifically for them. I recently got my hands on a Bible inspired by theologian Jonathan Edwards. Edwards loved writing notes, so he hand-stitched blank pages into his Bible. In this particular Bible, every other page is blank, allowing me to craft prayers and record thoughts for my children. I'll give each child his or her own personal copy before leaving for college.

For the record, no form of prayer is more powerful than praying through Scripture. You can pray with holy confidence because you're praying the Word of God and the will of God. As

you pray through the Bible, you will see the promises of God fulfilled in the lives of your children.

4. Form a prayer circle. Most of the parents I know need a support group from time to time. Parenting can be awfully hard and lonely. There are seasons where you feel like your prayers aren't enough. That's when you need a prayer circle. Something powerful happens when a group of parents start interceding for one another's children. It can be the difference between winning and losing the battle. You need prayer partners who will hold you up in prayer, just like Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms during battle.

I recently prayed with a middle-aged couple that was estranged from their son for nearly a decade. They were heartbroken and had nearly given up hope, but we formed a prayer circle and asked God to do the impossible. A few months later, God brought restoration to that relationship. It will obviously take some time to heal and become whole, but that family circle was completed by a prayer circle.

5. Turn your worries into prayers. Is there anything you worry about more than your kids? If there is, then your children obviously aren't teenagers yet. Just wait! But the Bible tells you to turn your worries into prayers. So the more you worry, the more potential you have to pray.

Don't worry about who your children are befriending. Pray about it. Don't worry about who they are dating. Pray about it. Don't worry about them making poor decisions. Pray about it. Don't worry about their personality. Pray about it.

Circle the promise in Philippians 4:6-7. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will protect your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Then stand on it.
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