

Praying for Wayward Children

James Dobson gives advice on what to do when your child has turned away from the Lord.

Question: Our three children were prayed for before they were conceived, and we have held their names before the Lord almost every day of their lives.

Yet our middle daughter has chosen to reject our faith and do things she knows are wrong. She's living with a twice-divorced man and apparently has no intention of marrying him. She has had at least two abortions that we know about, and her language is disgraceful.

My wife and I have prayed until we're exhausted, and yet she has shown no interest in returning to the church. At times, I become very angry at God for allowing this terrible thing to happen. I have wept until there are just no more tears. Tell me what intercessory prayer accomplishes, if anything. Is there a realm into which the Father will not intrude?

Answer: I can certainly understand your pain. Perhaps more people have become disillusioned with God over the waywardness of a son or daughter than over any other issue. There is nothing more important to most Christian parents than the salvation of their children. Every other goal and achievement in life is anemic and insignificant compared to this transmission of faith to their off spring. That is the only way the two generations can be together throughout eternity, and those parents, like you, have been praying day and night for spiritual awakening.

Unfortunately, if God does not answer those prayers quickly, there is a tendency to blame Him and to struggle with feelings of bitterness. The "betrayal barrier" claims another victim!

Often, this anger at the Lord results from a misunderstanding

of what He will and won't do in the lives of those for whom we intercede. The key question is this: Will God require our offspring to serve Him if they choose a path of rebellion? Let me state unequivocally that God will not force Himself on anyone. If that were His inclination, no person would ever be lost. Second Peter 3:9 says, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (NIV).

Nevertheless, there is a condition for claiming this great salvation. An individual must reach out and take it. He or she must repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Without that step of faith, the gift of forgiveness and eternal life is impossible.

Now let me deal with your question about what intercessory prayer accomplishes. John White wrote in his insightful book *Parents in Pain*:

"Here lies a key to understanding how we may pray for our own children or for anyone else. We may ask with every confidence that God will open the eyes of the morally and spiritually blind. We may ask that the self-deceptions which sinners hide behind may be burned away in the fierce light of truth ... and that self-disguises may be stripped from a man or woman to reveal the horror of their nakedness in the holy light of God. We may ask above all that the glory of the face of Christ will shine through the spiritual blindness caused by the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). All of this we can ask with every assurance that God will ... answer.

"But we may not ask him to force a man, woman, or child to love and trust him. To deliver them from overwhelming temptation: yes. To give them every opportunity: yes. To reveal his beauty, his tenderness, his forgiveness: yes. But to force a man against his will to bow the knee: not in this life. And to force a man to trust him: never."

Said another way, the Lord will not save a person against his will, but He has a thousand ways of making him more willing.

Our prayers unleash the power of God in the life of another individual.

We have been granted the privilege of holding the names and faces of our loved ones before the Father in intercessory prayer. In return, He makes the all important choices crystal clear to them and brings positive influences into their lives to maximize the probability of doing what is right. Beyond that, He will not go.