

Pray Up A Child In The Way He Should Go

My wife and I have entered a new phase of our lives, one that many of you have already experienced. This phase inaugurated with a family pilgrimage from Orlando, Florida to Nashville, Tennessee. No, this was not a vacation, nor a time to indulge in the music life of Music City, but the mixed emotion endeavor that parents have when they take their first child to college. Vanderbilt University welcomed us warmly, with a handshake and a greeting from faculty resident and head of house Dr. Roger Cone and a throng of students who carried all of my son's belongings to his room. After settling our son in his room, and meeting his roommate and his family, we enjoyed a day of festivities that allowed us to experience the campus and spend more time with our son.

On the day we were to "abandon" our son, the school hosted a breakfast, which was designed a "last meal" of sorts before we were instructed to leave our students behind and go home. I woke that morning with a heavy heart and soon had tears in my eyes as it already felt different as there were only two of us in the hotel room. In anticipation of the dreaded goodbye my wife and I arrived early to the campus to do a prayer walk. As we made our way around the campus we prayed at each building asking God for His blessing and protection for our son. We were keenly aware of our total helplessness, and through tears, we asked God to do what we could not.

Words cannot describe how hard it was for us to drive away that day. We were not only experiencing sending our first child to college, but empty nest. We left our only child in world where he will face temptations and challenges like neither his mother nor I ever did. I am sure I

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don't need to remind you that Vanderbilt hasn't exactly presented a pro Christian stance. The last time I felt that helpless as a parent was when we brought him home from the hospital almost eighteen years earlier. At that point I had been a youth pastor for nine years and fully understood how messy the world is. In fact, in 1994 every four minutes a young child was sexually abused an experience that could blight them for life. The violence and brokenness of our world overwhelmed me, how would he face the temptations of drugs and alcohol abuse, pornography secularism etc.? I was also soberly aware of my inability as a parent and was overwhelmed by the reality that his mom and I were could do little for him without God. Our little family was in desperate need of God's grace.

As is now, there was plethora of resources on parenting that gave helpful suggestions and much needed guidance to parents as they journey down the confusing path of parenthood. Sadly, the process of simply finding the right resource was overwhelming as the opinions of the authors often contradicted each other or made brash claims that their method was God's way. Though helpful, these resources could not guarantee anything, and in fact some could be dangerous! Sadly, few if any spoke of the need for God's providential hand in the life of our children. How did parents survive before the books, CD's and seminars?

Those of you who have spent any time with me know that my father is my hero. I love that man more than words can express. He and my mom raised four of us in the heart of Africa where dangers of different sort were rampant. Each of us has come to faith in Christ and experienced the grace of God in our lives. When I asked him about his parenting methodology, his humble reply was powerful. Rather than give me the ten essential steps to parenting, he implied that he wasn't as good as a parent as I made him out to be, and had made more mistakes then I recalled.

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His advice was simple, pray with, for and over your children.

My parents had prayed for their children from the moment they knew they were conceived. My life was covered in prayer through all the hours I spent climbing snake-infested rocks, to all the years in boarding school separated from my parents, and as I rode my Yamaha RD 350 much faster than I should have down the streets of Nairobi, Kenya. They not only prayed for my welfare but for the woman I would one day marry. In fact if you were given the opportunity to sit at their breakfast table with them today, both in their eighties, you have the honor of hearing them still praying for each of their children and their wives, grandchildren and now great grandchildren. I am convinced that it was not because of my parent's excellent parenting skills that all four of us are walking with God, but the mighty hand of God working in us through the consistent prayers of faithful parents.

The story is told of a man who had just bought his first model T Ford car. As he was driving it one day the motor sputtered and it came to a chugging halt. Knowing nothing about these new horseless carriages he opened the hood and just stood by his vehicle. Before long a gentleman came by and stopped. After looking over the engine for a moment, he quickly fixed the problem. The owner was amazed! "How did you know how to fix it so fast?" he asked. The tall gentleman replied, "I am Henry Ford; I designed the car."

God has wonderfully and beautifully designed each of our children. He has created them as complex individuals, no two are alike. Yet as complex as they are God knows them individually, he knows their name! Matter of fact, He knows them far better than we do! Though we live in a "quick fix" society and would like God to fix every concern and hurt when we

want it done, we must learn to rely on Him and trust His timing. It appears much easier to go to a book or a counselor for a "quick fix" rather than go to the Father in prayer. Please don't make the mistake of regarding prayer as a useless ritual, but understand it as a powerful and intimate way to ask the Father for His direct assistance. Don't make it a last resort, but a first priority!

My wife and I made that commitment to pray for our son. In fact, I made it a ritual to put my hand on his head and pray for him and bless him every night. When I traveled, if it got late and he had heard from me, he would call or text me and say he was ready to go to bed and wanted me to pray for him. And more than once, I stepped out of a meeting to do just that. It was that important to me! My primary time to pray for him was at night, while my wife on the other hand is the early riser, and poured out her heart to the Father, before he woke up each day. I cannot list the number of ways that we have seen God answer our prayers and work in our son's life. God has done exceedingly more than we could ever have asked or imagined! (Ephesians 3:2).

If any of us are honest with ourselves, we will admit that prayer is often extremely hard. When we sit down we are bombarded with everything from items we need to do, to projects we forgot to do. Often when we slow down we get sleepy or distracted with thoughts that creep into our minds. Thus we have a tendency to give up on prayer. In giving up on prayer we are indirectly admitting its lack of importance to us.

With our western "can do" mindset we have become very self reliant and extremely impatient! We often do not honestly feel like prayer will do any good, and we more often are far too impatient to wait for its answer. As we look at scripture we find it full of commands for the Believer to pray. We even see the example of Jesus Christ as He took time to talk to the Father (Matthew 14:23).

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Ephesians 6:18 exhorts the believer to "pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayer and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for - *your little* - (the) saints." Prayer is direct communication to the Father, through Jesus Christ, and as long as that communication is open we are safe from the schemes of evil one.

James 4:2 reminds the believer that "we have not because we ask not." Thus, James goes on to write in verse 7 of the same chapter, "submit yourselves to God." Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 reminds us that we are to "pray continually." In this brief article there is no room to expound on the command to pray, but it is clear that God has commanded us to pray, thus it is obvious that He uses prayer to work out His sovereign will.

As I write this article, I am sitting in our quiet and clean living room. Honestly, it is too quiet and clean. I miss the tennis bag, shoes, books and other paraphernalia that so often cluttered the room. The TV is off and there is no music playing. No interruptions... But I miss the boy that interrupted my concentration, blared music and left his junk lying around the house! And once again, I find myself at another helpless stage. It would be easy for me to write that there is nothing I can do but pray, however as I look back I find great comfort and hope in the fact that I still have the best tool of parenting at my disposal, and it is both an honor and a comfort that God has given me the precious gift of prayer! I can no longer put my hand on his head to pray, but I still pray for him like his in the room and then send him a text reminding him that I prayed for him and love him more than he will ever know. In my heart, my hands are still on his head when I pray!

Regardless of where you are in your parenting journey, I hope that you will receive the gift of prayer, use it, and find peace in it. Below are some suggestions on how to pray up your child in the way they should go. Remember that as God's children He loves your children more than you

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do! Read a book or two, but don't take any of them too seriously. Trust me your child does not have an owner's manual! They are all uniquely mysterious. God designed each one that way so we would rest in Him and enjoy every minute you have with them. Please make time to pray daily for your children in at least these 12 basic areas. Then if you and I meet one another in the golden years of our lives, when all our nests are empty, we will not spend the time boasting of our parenting skills, but rather will rejoice together in the grace of God and sing from the depths of our souls the beloved hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." Amen?

1. Pray that your children will come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior early in Life. (Psalm 63:1; 2 Timothy 3:15)
2. Pray that your children will learn to hate sin. (Psalm 97:10)
3. Pray that your children will be caught when guilty. (Psalm 119:71)
4. Pray that your children will be protected from the evil one in each area of their lives: Spiritual, Emotional, Physical. (John 17:15)
5. Pray that your children will have a responsible attitude in all their interpersonal relationships. (Daniel 6:3)
6. Pray that your children desire the right kind of friends and be protected from the wrong friends. (Proverbs 1:10-11)
7. Pray that your children will respect those in authority over them. (Romans 13:1)
8. Pray that your children will be kept from the wrong mate, and saved for the right one. (2 Corinthians 6:14-17)
9. Pray that your children, as well as the one they marry, will be kept pure until marriage. (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)
10. Pray that your children will learn to totally submit to God and actively resist Satan in all areas of their lives. (James 4:7)

11. Pray that your children will be single hearted, willing to be sold out to Jesus Christ. (Romans 12:1, 2)

12. Pray that your children will be hedged in so they cannot find their way to the wrong people or places and that the wrong people cannot find their way to them. (Hosea 2:6)