

PRAYERS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

Principles to pray for your children and grandchildren

Proverbs 1 – 9

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PRAYERFUL LEGACIES

The legacy of the great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon is etched in Christian history and preserved through his influential writings from his ministry. It is estimated at his funeral in England that 60,000 viewed his casket and 100,000 lined the funeral route. His impact on the kingdom of God continues to have influence on pastors and churches today. But it was the steady, praying effect of his mother through his childhood that laid the foundational course for his life. Eliza Spurgeon was only 19 years old when her first-born son, Charles, was born. His father John worked as a clerk in Essex, England but also served as a bi-vocational pastor on the weekends. Eliza would go on to have 17 children, nine of which died during infancy.

Charles also spent some of his early, childhood years with his grandparents when his mother struggled with difficult pregnancies. It was at his grandparent's home he had access to a great library where he developed a love for reading. At age 6 he read John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and continue reading it during his lifetime. Charles would later recall early memories of his mother reading the Bible to the kids and prayerfully pleading for their salvation.

"It was the custom on Sunday evenings, while we were yet little children, for her to stay at home with us, and then we sat around the table, and read verse by verse, and she explained the Scripture to us. After that was done, then came the time of pleading... and the question was asked, how long it would be before we would think about our state, how long before we would seek the Lord. Then came a mother's prayer, and some of the words of that prayer we shall never forget, even when our hair is grey."¹

One prayer of Eliza that Charles famously recorded, *"Now, Lord, if my children go on in their sins, it will not be from ignorance that they perish, and my soul must bear a swift witness against them at the day of judgment if they lay not hold of Christ."* When Charles came to salvation in his later teen years, he immediately wrote to his mother sharing his joy and thankfulness to her.

In one of his early sermons in his first years of pastoral ministry, he paid tribute to her: *"There was a boy once – a very sinful child – who hearkened not to the counsel of his parents. But his mother prayed for him, and now he stands to preach to this congregation every Sabbath. And when his mother thinks of her firstborn preaching the Gospel, she reaps a glorious harvest that makes her a glad woman... Never could it be possible for a man to estimate what he owes to a godly mother."²*

¹ <https://www.challies.com/christian-men-and-their-godly-moms/christian-men-and-their-godly-moms-charles-spurgeon/>

² Ibid.

As famous as Charles Spurgeon is and the legacy of his praying mother is remembered, there are thousands of unknown testimonies of praying parents, grandparents, and fellow church members praying for their young children, grandchildren, and wayward adult children that will not be known on this side of heaven. The well-worn pathway of praying for each generation is a means by which the Lord continues to build His church and preserves the Gospel until Christ returns. The challenge to our church in this era is continuing the stewardship of praying for God's Kingdom to come and His will to be done in each generation. My call and concern is for our church to stand in the gap and take up the apron of prayer for our children and grandchildren. As one generation passes and another assumes their stage of life, we must continue to faithfully petition and plead with the Lord for the next generation to heed the call of salvation and follow Christ until the end.

PURPOSEFUL PRAYER AND BIBLICAL MODELS

When it comes to praying for your children and grandchildren, *what do you pray about? How should you pray for them? What do you specifically petition God for and what are your goals in praying?* In pastor/theologian Dan Phillips' commentary, *God's Wisdom in Proverbs*, he addresses the issue of goals most families have:

- That my child will go to college
- That my child will learn a trade
- That my child will "stay out of trouble", not get pregnant, become addicted, get killed, or contract a disease
- That my child will be a good citizen – and vote _____
- That my child will marry happily
- That my child will become a Christian

*"When we do this, we are in a position to realize that none of these goals goes far enough. Many of the goals listed above are not even distinctively Christian or Biblical. It is not that they are bad goals; no item on the list is a bad goal. It is equally shared by our unbelieving friends, who aim everything toward academic excellence, profession excellence, material wealth, marriageability, politics, and the like. If the fear of Yahweh is to be the foundation of all our knowledge, that lack of clear distinction is a problem."*³

Our prayers as parents and grandparents need to go further and deeper than the ordinary concerns of worldly wisdom. Our prayers should have a Godward pleading attitude and purposely patterned from Scripture. Our prayers should be informed by Biblical examples of faithfulness and filled with the content of Biblical principles. One example is from righteous Job. The Book of Job is the testimony of God's right as ruler over all His creation, while highlighting the righteous character of Job in the midst of tragedy. A brief description of Job's consistent character is referenced in Job 1:4-5, *"And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, 'It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did continually."* In this snapshot of Job's faithfulness before tragedy, we witness his *concern* for

³ Dan Phillips' commentary, *God's Wisdom in Proverbs*, pg.245

his adult children, his *intercession* for his family, and his *devotion* to worship. Even as Job stands as a model of faithfulness in the midst of loss, his righteous character is revealed in his prayers for his children. Scripture also highlights the character of young men and women who grew up to be great servants of God. Brief descriptions of their childhood testimonies provide biblical principles of character to consider praying for your children/grandchildren.

JOSEPH – “*The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had.*” (Genesis 39:2–4)

SAMUEL – “*Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and also with man.*” (1 Samuel 2:26)

DANIEL – “*But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs,*” (Daniel 1:8–9)

MARY – “*And he came to her and said, “Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!” But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”*” (Luke 1:28–30)

JESUS – “*And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.*” (Luke 2:52)

A consistent marker in each of these young people is receiving FAVOR/GRACE from God. As each one grew personally and spiritually, they enjoyed favor from God and others. A biblically informed prayer for your child/grandchild might include, “*Lord, please grow my children in wisdom and maturity, and may they receive grace from you and find favor with others.*” My appeal is that your prayers would be formed by biblical descriptions and filled with biblical prescriptions.

PRAYING PROVERBS

Contrary to popular belief, the Bible does contain a parenting manual in the book of Proverbs. Solomon’s primary teaching to his children in chapters 1-9 form the basis of instruction, prayers and goals for each generation. He offers a practical goal for parents when he summarizes in **10:1**, “*A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.*” Careful study and practice of these biblical principles will help shape your goals as parents, grand-parents and disciple-makers to a younger generation. As Solomon administers wisdom by offering age appropriate instructions from youth to young adulthood, his instructions should be like a trellis for your prayers onto which your children can grow into. **LIKE STEPPING STONES, WE CAN FOLLOW THE KEY PHRASE “MY SON” TO LEARN FROM SOLOMON’S PERSUASIVE INSTRUCTION HOW TO PATTERN OUR PRAYERS AND PETITIONS ON BEHALF OF OUR CHILDREN, GRANDCHILDREN AND THE GENERATIONS THAT FOLLOW.**

1) PRAY FOR LISTENING EARS AND OBEDIENT HEARTS [1:8-19]

^{ESV} **PROVERBS 1:8** *Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, ⁹ for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck. ¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent... ¹⁵ my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths,*

HEARING AND ADHERING

Simply pray that your children and grandchildren will LISTEN and OBEY mom and dad. For young children, this is the starting block that sets the course for the pathway to follow. Wisdom starts in the home with parental instruction that is both formal and informal. Parents have primary responsibility to instruct children in the home, and each parent plays a role. The charge for listening to “*your father's instruction*” refers to “discipline, correction.” The charge to obey “*your mother's teaching*” is a reference to “law, direction.” This implies that while the mother is teaching the rules of life and home to her children, the father supports the mother's instruction by leading in the discipline and correction of their children. It requires the parents to be on the same team, pursuing the same goals, and seeking the same outcomes. When mom and dad are consistent, children reap the reward of godly wisdom and moral correctness.

Teaching our kids to listen and obey brings blessing to their well-being and helps them avoid sinful enticement that leads painful consequences. Proverbs 1:10, 15 further highlights the benefit children receive when they pay attention and obey mom and dad. As parents, you must make godly wisdom attractive in your home by developing a love for godly instruction. Obedience is attractive and desirable in children (“*graceful garland*”, “*pendants for your neck*”). *How are you making godly wisdom (listening and obeying) attractive in your home? Is obedience gained through threats, or through praise?* Pray for what you prize! Pray for your children to be adorned by the gracious qualities that make them attractive (pleasing) to God and others. Pray they will listen and obey godly instruction.

Grandparents have supporting role to encourage, commend and reiterate biblical truth in the home. You no longer have the primary duty of instructing the children, but you can have impact through your gracious influence and model of biblical faithfulness. Pray for your children to be like-minded when instructing your grandchildren. Pray your grandchildren will receive and grow in the grace of their teaching.

2) PRAY THEY CHERISH GODLY WISDOM AND PURSUE THE FEAR OF THE LORD [2:1-5]

PROVERBS 2:1 *My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, ² making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; ³ yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, ⁴ if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, ⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.*

SEEK AND FIND

Treasuring hunting holds an appeal and thrill for those willing to diligently pursue the prize. Adventure stories and characters such as Indiana Jones or “King Solomon’s Mines” draw one into the mystery and excitement involved with the discovery of a precious treasure. Actual treasure hunting requires tedious preparation, meticulous measure and a sustained discipline effort that may or may not be rewarded in the end.

Unlike the risk of modern treasure hunters, the reward of searching and uncovering the treasure of godly wisdom is real and worth more than possessing silver or gold. Solomon’s call involves several “*if... then...*” statements to persuade his children to consider the value of wisdom (vs.1, 3, 4, 5, 9). His appeal outlines the attitude and effort involved with obtaining God’s wisdom through *attentiveness* (“pay attention”), *prayerfulness*, and *discipline* (sustained effort). The true value of the reward is personal relationship and knowledge of God. He is both the Reward and Rewarder to those who seek Him.

Praying that your children/grandchildren will treasure wisdom through the fear of the Lord has practical implications. Obtaining and maintaining this treasure brings discretion (2:11) and deliverance (2:13). Godly wisdom acts as a guidepost through right, moral application of discretion and discernment. Since a chief concern of wisdom is personal holiness and moral correctness, cherishing and pursuing it should be a prime objective in your home. *How is godly wisdom valued and communicated in your home? How are you stewarding the gift of wisdom from God before your children and grandchildren?*

3) PRAY THEY SAFEGUARD THEIR HEARTS WITH GOD’S WORD

[3:1-4, 21-23]

PROVERBS 3:1 *My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments,* ² *for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.* ³ *Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart.* ⁴ ***So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.***

PRESERVE AND ADORN

As Solomon addresses “*My son*” 3x in this chapter (vs.1, 11, 21), he instructs with an adamant charge NOT to forget his teaching (*torah*) which relates to the revealed Word of God. Also his fatherly commands (practical applications) are to be preserved and carefully guarded against forgetfulness. This stresses the importance of actively remembering and intentionally preserving God’s Word in their hearts. Since the heart is the target, children learn best through recitation and repetition. In order for God’s Word to be engraved on the tablet of their heart, it must be repeatedly imprinted upon their minds. *Dads are you opening the Scriptures to show where your instruction is coming from? Moms are you training your children to hide God’s Word in their hearts? Grandparents, can you read the great Bible stories with your grandchildren? Don’t just offer pithy parenting advice or culturally Christian sound bites, instruct them through the Scriptures.*

The rewarding principle for safeguarding God’s Word will affect both the quantity and quality of their life. The Hebrew word *shalom* (“peace, prosperity”) “*includes harmonious relationships within the family, payment of all debts, and the collection of all loans. It means*

rewards or wages, ultimately even a right relationship with God which comes through Jesus Christ, our peace."⁴ Diligence in keeping God's Word will bear the fruit of steadfast love and faithfulness in their life. "Steadfast love" is often translated as *mercy, loyalty, loving-kindness* and *faithfulness*. A fitting description would be "loyal-love," highlighting acts of devotion that go beyond expectation. "Faithfulness" implies *reliability, steadiness, accuracy, dependability* and *truth*. Like exquisite jewelry worn to make a person more attractive, these godly virtues bring God's favor upon them likewise making them truly attractive and more favorable to others.

4) PRAY THEY HUMBLY RECEIVE CORRECTION AS LOVE [3:11-12]

PROVERBS 3:11 *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, ¹² for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.*

DISCIPLINE AND DELIGHT

Praying for your children during moments of discipline will strengthen their roots in accepting heavenly discipline as affirmation of God's love and delight toward His own. The Lord's discipline is not to be taken negatively, and you must model for your children that your discipline is an act of love. Parental discipline should reflect God's practice and purposes by emphasizing the privilege of being in a parent-child relationship. The process of confrontation, confession, correction, forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration will help your children avoid: *a) under-reacting*, failing to take it seriously and thus to despise it; *b) over-reacting*, taking it too seriously and so resent it.⁵

Pray that your children will see God's discipline not as destructive, but lovingly constructive. Discipline from God affirms one's position as His child and His direction for their life. The author of Hebrews expands on our understanding of this passage through his explanation to us as God's sons:

Hebrews 12:4-11 *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

⁴ Roy B. Zuck, *Learning from the Sages*, 206

⁵ Eric Lane, *Proverbs: Everyday Wisdom for Everyone*, 34

5) PRAY FOR THEIR SEXUAL PURITY AND MORAL FIDELITY [5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27]

PROVERBS 6:20 *My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching. ²¹ Bind them on your heart always; tie them around your neck. ²² When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk with you. ²³ For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, ²⁴ to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.*

PURITY AND CHASTITY

As a church and families we need to persistently pray for the purity of our young people and the sanctity of our marriages. The importance of this instruction is emphasized through Solomon's repeated warnings through three extended discourses. In our sex-crazed, sensually saturated culture the expectation of keeping one's self sexually pure and maintaining marital faithfulness is constantly contested. Parents are to teach proactively and discerningly about sexual faithfulness while exposing the deception and destruction of sexually immoral enticements. As your children mature, this includes saying the right things and talking about matters of appropriate sexual intimacy in accordance with God's design.

Most parent's sense of safety and protection are often concerned with physical dangers or areas that hinder development. The God-fearing parent should be on high alert to discern how an immoral person uses sweet words of flattery to seduce their victims. Solomon goes to great lengths warning his children to pay extra attention to the extreme danger of going down the pathway of sexual immorality. The cost of sexual immorality is life-stealing, not life-giving, leading to hurt, regret, shame and humiliation.

A practical prayer and instruction is found in **5:21**, "*For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths.*" Pray that your children live by conviction of the fear of the Lord knowing that all the ways intimacy is pursued – whether in secret or open – are seen by God. A personal conviction to biblical wisdom will provide protection against infidelity. Prayerfully impress upon them how God's Word establishes guardrails against immorality and safely exposes sinful behaviors.

PSALM 119:9 *How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word... ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

One of the greatest gifts parents and grandparents can give to the next generation is by delighting in marital faithfulness (5:15-23). If we are going to fight against the allurements of sexual immorality and temptation towards adultery, then you must delight in your spouse and present your marriage as something to be enjoyed, contained and fulfilled within God's good design. The command to "*Drink water from your own cistern*" insists that the intimacy shared with a spouse is not to be shared with anyone else, since it is reserved exclusively between husband and wife.

The battle for marital intimacy begins by being intimate with lady wisdom in order to avoid sinful intimacy in adultery. Reiteration and reinforcement of biblical truth will provide further safeguards against immoral seduction. Teaching, modeling and warning

your children in this crucial area of wisdom is not something to be embarrassed about or avoided. The stakes are too high not to be actively praying and training in this area.

How is the marriage relationship presented in your home?

Do your children/grandchildren see you delighting in your spouse?

How do you safeguard against temptations to seek intimacy outside of marriage?

6) PRAY THEY FOLLOW THE WAY THAT LEADS TO LIFE [8:32-36]

PROVERBS 8:32 *“And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. ³³ Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. ³⁴ Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. ³⁵ For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD, ³⁶ but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death.”*

KEEP AND RECEIVE

It is tempting that the only spiritual prayer we make for our children or grandchildren is their salvation. It is tempting to believe that if/when they profess salvation that our spiritual concerns are over. But as Solomon presents through Proverbs there are pathways that are either foolish or wise, and a way that leads to life or death.

The pilgrimage through this life is full of pitfalls and dangers, enticements and deceptions, joy and sorrow, delight and despair, goodness and grace. Solomon’s persuasive pleas for his children was a constant presentation how true satisfaction and richness are experienced by those who follow the way of wisdom. God’s blessing of favor is given to those who persevere in following His ways, prizing His wisdom, finding and obtaining His reward for a godly life. All this takes place in the home with parents playing critical roles in formally instructing God’s law and practically applying God’s word. It’s reinforced by grandparents who pass on a legacy of passionately pursuing and prizing wisdom above everything else.

May our petitions for the next generation emulate the pattern of biblical instruction, and may our prayers reflect the goals of our good and gracious God.