

A Word from Nancy before You Begin

PARENTING BRINGS INCREDIBLE, indescribable joys. But because our children matter so much to us, parenting can also bring incredible challenges and even devastating heartbreak. For such an important task, we need to have our thoughts and attitudes and our dreams and desires shaped by Scripture. So I've written this devotional as a way to allow God to speak into this all-important task on a daily basis.

In putting together *The One Year Praying through the Bible for Your Kids*, I set out to write the book that I have really needed myself. While many of my desires and expectations for my child might be godly, I recognize that they are easily corrupted by things like the culture around me, a twisted sense of competition with other parents, an inadequate understanding of what a parent should be and do, as well as my own idolatries and blind spots. So I need the Scriptures to go to work in me to reshape my deepest longings for my child. I also need a daily dose of perspective, a daily infusion of hope, and a daily reminder of grace in regard to my parenting.

I need the Word to convict me of my own sin because I easily become overly focused on my child's shortcomings. I need the Word to challenge me to change because I can be tempted to think it is only my child who needs to change. I need the Word to remind me of the gospel—that my sins have been paid for in Christ's death and my future hope is anchored in his resurrection—because I sometimes think that my child is more in need of the gospel than I am.

Maybe you do too. If so, *Praying through the Bible for Your Kids* is for you.

Another reason I set out to write this book and wrote it in the way I have is that I know I need to pray for my child more than worry about my child. I need to pray for God to do what he has promised to do rather than presume upon him to do it. I need to talk to God about what only he can do in my child's life more than I talk to others about my anxieties about my child's life. But over the years, my prayers have tended to be more self-directed than Scripture-saturated, which means that I pray the same things over and over. My prayers have often been shaped more by my stunted and sometimes selfish desires for my child than by God's grand purposes for all of his children. So I need the Scriptures to inform and direct my prayers and to encourage me to persevere in prayer. I need the Word of God to provide me with fresh words and renewed passion to pray for my child day by day.

Maybe you do too. If so, *Praying through the Bible for Your Kids* is for you.

What I don't need is another list of things I've got to be or do if I want my child to turn out "right." I don't need a how-to guide to getting my child to have self-confidence, avoid drugs, say no to premarital sex, and keep the faith. It's not that I don't want these things or that I'm not open to fresh ideas or expert advice about how to approach this difficult job of parenting.* It's that I've seen too many great and godly parents bring up children who struggle significantly or walk away from faith, and too many less-than-great—dare I say ungodly—parents raise terrific kids. As a result, I know there are no simplistic formulas for parenting.

I need much more than good advice. I need the commands and expectations of Scripture to keep me from complacency in parenting, and the grace and mercy presented in Scripture to save me from guilt in parenting. I need Scripture to puncture the pride that rises up in me when my child is doing well and I'm tempted to take the credit. And I need Scripture to save me from the despair that threatens to sink me when my child is floundering and I'm tempted to take all the blame.

* In fact, I consulted a wide variety of sources while writing this book—from Christian parenting classics to Bible commentaries to recorded sermons—as I explored what Scripture has to teach us about rearing our children. I've listed many of the reference materials in the "Notes" section, which begins on page 367. The sources for direct quotations within the daily readings are listed there as well.

I need the constant reminder that while I have influence and responsibility, I don't have control over my child or everything about his or her world. While I can teach my child the Scriptures, I can't be the Holy Spirit in my child's life. While I can confront sinful patterns that need to change, I can't generate spiritual life in my child that will lead to lasting change. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. What I can do is pray for my child and parent my child the best I know how, which will always be imperfectly. I can seek to trust God and keep trusting God to do what I cannot.

At this point in parenting I recognize that the things I want most for my child are things only God can do. And I want to be faithful and persistent in asking him to do them.

Maybe you do too. If so, *Praying through the Bible for Your Kids* is for you.

Hearing from God and Responding in Prayer

As parents, we want to hear everything God has to say to us. So we want to grow in our consistency of opening up his Word day by day to listen. In writing *Praying through the Bible for Your Kids*, I haven't searched out passages specifically about parenting. The truth is, there aren't that many. Instead, this book works its way through the whole of the Bible over the course of a year, mining every day's Scripture reading for insight for parents. *Praying through the Bible for Your Kids* provides and follows the One Year Bible Reading Plan. I strongly encourage you to read through the listed passages each day, knowing that God promises that his Word "always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it" (Isaiah 55:11). But if you miss a day or more, don't give up! You don't even have to try to catch up. Just pick up the daily readings whenever you can.

Each day's devotion drills down into one part of that day's Scripture reading to find a nugget of truth and hope for parents to take hold of. Each day offers fresh words to begin your prayers for your child based on the text for that day.

By coming to the Word this way, we receive the whole counsel of God

rather than simply going to the parts that interest us. We let God set the agenda and provide the emphasis for our conversation with him.

And after we listen to what he has to say, as we do in any good relationship, we respond. In the prayer starter for most days, you'll find a blank in which you can insert your child's name or your children's names. In this way you will deepen your ability and develop the habit of praying through the Bible in a specific way for your child or children.

Making Adjustments as You Read

Because I've sought to write this book so that it will be applicable to a wide range of readers, you may need to make some adjustments as you read. Out of my desire to be as inclusive as possible, to keep sentences as uncomplicated and unencumbered as possible, and to make reading and praying with this book as personal as possible, I've used a variety of pronouns and plurals throughout. You'll find that I go back and forth between referring to your child as a him or a her. Sometimes the reference is to a singular child and sometimes to children. When I use "him" and your child is a "her," I hope you'll make the needed adjustment in your mind as you read. When I speak in the singular and you have multiple children, I hope you'll make the needed modification.

I use "we" most often in the prayers as I'm hopeful couples will read these devotions together as they get ready in the morning, over the phone during the day, after the kids go to bed, or before they drift off to sleep at night. But I also recognize many moms and dads will be reading alone—either because their spouse is not reading with them, or because they are single parents. If you're working through this book on your own, when I use "we" in prayers, I hope that you'll make the adjustment to "I" and that this "we" wording will never be off-putting to you.

Another challenge to applying the Scriptures broadly is that all of our families and our children are in such different places spiritually. In fact, we often have a hard time knowing where our children are. None of us, no matter how tuned in we are as parents, can clearly see into the interior of our child's spiritual state. The continual focus throughout this book is on asking

God to save and sanctify us and our children. To pray for God to draw your child to himself does not imply that he or she has not already been drawn to Christ for salvation. To pray this way recognizes that Scripture speaks of salvation as something God has accomplished in the past, is doing now, and will do in the future. He *has saved* us by putting our sin upon Christ and crediting Christ's righteousness to us. He *is saving* us by sanctifying us through his Word and Spirit. And he *will save* us by glorifying us and bringing us into our forever home with him at the Resurrection.

Some who read this book will be confident that their children have been savingly connected to Christ by faith. Others will be hopeful but honestly unsure if this has happened. Still others will be quite sure that their children have not yet taken hold of Christ. My desire has been to write the prayers so that parents in every category will find fitting words to pray for their children. We all share the desire for our children to be drawn to Christ and, once brought into his family, to grow in godliness and be increasingly conformed to the image of Christ. And because we know that this is the will of God, we can be sure that this is a prayer he delights to answer.

Praying through the Bible for Your Kids is not written for parents of children of a particular age range. From the day our children are born until the day they watch as we are put into our graves, we will be always in need of godly wisdom for guiding and encouraging them. Likewise, they will always need the Spirit of God to do work in their lives as only he can do. So no matter how old our children are, the Scriptures help us to pray that God will continue to draw them to himself, transform them into his image, keep them, and one day take them to himself.

My Prayer for You as You Begin

As I've written *Praying through the Bible for Your Kids*, I've not only been taking in these truths for my own parenting and praying these prayers for my own child, but I've been praying for you and all the other parents who will pick up this book. I've prayed for all of the unique joys and satisfactions you are finding along this path of parenting, as well as the challenges you face

and the fears you fight against. I'm praying that the year ahead will be one in which you will discover new insights in regard to parenting and that you'll also experience a fresh sense of the grace that covers you.

But it seems only right that my prayers for you are shaped by Scripture. So this is my prayer for you, my friend, adapted from Ephesians 1:

I'm praying for you as you work your way through this book, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight as parents so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance.

I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. I pray that you will sense this power at work in your parenting and see it at work in your kids. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. May this resurrection power bring new life to you and to your family over this coming year.

Nancy Guthrie

Genesis 1:1–2:25
Matthew 1:1–2:12
Psalm 1:1-6
Proverbs 1:1-6

JANUARY 1

Formless, Empty, Dark

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. GENESIS 1:1-2

IN THE BEGINNING, when God spoke the Creation into being from nothing, the earth was a mass of raw material, a dark and barren wilderness with no shape to it. But it was brimming with possibility because the Spirit of God was hovering over it in anticipatory power, waiting for the Word to go out. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. The power of God’s spoken word penetrated and eradicated the darkness. As he continued to speak, the formlessness of creation gave way to the order of earth and sky, land and sea. The emptiness was filled with plant, animal, and human life.

And still God’s Word goes out with shaping, filling, illumining power. Still the Spirit hovers over homes and families where there is chaos and emptiness and darkness with the power to bring something out of nothing. Still the Spirit works through the Word so that what emerges is truly good.



Creator, we need you to do a creative work in our home that only you can do. We need your Spirit to hover as we open up your Word day by day this coming year. Let there be light in our home. May it penetrate the dark corners and expose what is hidden. Bring order to our disordered ways of relating to each other and to you. Fill up the empty places with your beauty and life.

As parents, we don’t have the power to create spiritual life in _____. Only you can do that. So won’t you do your creative work in _____? Shape his life into something beautiful for your glory. Enlighten his eyes to see you. Fill his life with your good gifts.

Unashamed

She took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

GENESIS 3:6-7

WHEN GOD'S FIRST CHILDREN, Adam and Eve, rebelled against him by eating what they were told was forbidden, they went from being naked and feeling no shame to being keenly aware of their nakedness and full of shame. They went from intimate relationship with God to alienation from God. They went from living in a world of blessing to living in a world under a curse.

It could have been the end of the story; instead, it was the beginning of a new story of grace. There in the Garden of Eden, God covered the nakedness of his disobedient children with the skins of an animal, a preview of the greater sacrifice of one who would provide a covering once and for all. And God gave them a promise. God assured them that one day a descendant of Eve would be born. He, too, would be tempted, but he would obey instead of rebel. He would take the curse upon himself and put an end to the evil that now infiltrated all creation.

In the midst of the curse, the Lord offered a word of grace, a word of hope. Today he offers that same favor to you—no matter how deep or prolonged your family's struggles are.



Father, it helps me to know that you understand how it feels to have a child disobey your clear instruction. You have felt the disappointment and heartbreak of having a son and daughter assume that you are keeping them from something good rather than protecting them from something evil.

Father, you are the only one who can provide an adequate covering for _____'s shame through the righteousness of your obedient Son. Help _____ to accept and embrace that all of her shame was placed upon Christ on the cross so that she can stand before you forgiven and blameless, with no need to hide.

Genesis 5:1–7:24
Matthew 3:7–4:11
Psalm 3:1–8
Proverbs 1:10–19

JANUARY 3

Favor

The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. And the LORD said, “I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. . . .” But Noah found favor with the LORD. GENESIS 6:5–8

HUMANITY had become thoroughly and pervasively evil. There was no goodness, no kindness, no joy—just never-ending selfishness and never-enough indulgence. This is the world Noah was born into and the nature he was born with. Noah was born a sinner like everyone around him. The same selfishness came naturally to him, and the same debauchery tempted him. But Noah was not like everyone around him. Noah’s life was not guided by his environment and inherited tendencies. How do we know? Noah found favor, or grace, with the Lord. Or perhaps it would be better to say that grace found Noah.

It’s not that God looked over humanity and found the one person who sought to please him, thereby granting Noah favor and providing him salvation in the ark. The grace came before the goodness. Noah did not earn this favor from God. It was a gift, pure and simple and undeserved. In fact, God’s favor is never something that can be earned or purchased. It is always a gift. The grace that found Noah changed Noah. In fact, it shaped everything about his life and identity. Though he was surrounded by evil and perversion, the grace at work in Noah’s life implanted within him the desire to keep himself pure and uncontaminated.



Lord, may _____ find favor with you. Would you grant him your grace that cannot be earned through good behavior and therefore cannot be lost by bad behavior? And may the grace that finds _____ change him so that he might, like Noah, be a blameless person in his generation, one who walks in fellowship with you.

JANUARY 4

Genesis 8:1–10:32

Matthew 4:12-25

Psalms 4:1-8

Proverbs 1:20-23

Wisdom Shouts

Wisdom shouts in the streets.

She cries out in the public square. . . .

Come and listen to my counsel.

I'll share my heart with you

and make you wise. PROVERBS 1:20, 23

ALL OF US, if left to ourselves, are naturally foolish. But God is too good to leave us floundering in our foolishness. He comes to us offering wisdom. Yet he is even more active than that. God does not quietly make the offer of wisdom known; he shouts it in the streets. It's as if he is standing on the back of a flatbed truck waving his hands, trying to get us to stop barreling down the highway of life and choosing our own way so that he can point us in another direction. He wants to save us from ending up where that dead-end road will take us. He wants us to find our way home—to him.

In the pages of the Bible, and especially in the book of Proverbs, God calls out from the highest heights to us, and to our children, insisting that there are really only two paths in this life—one that leads to death and misery, and one that leads to life and joy. He offers exactly what we need to navigate life while enjoying his presence along the way and finding him fully at our final destination.



God of all wisdom, we hear you shouting in the street, offering to share your heart with us and to make us wise. As much as we love our children, we want to love them the way you love them. So please share your heart with us. And as much as we want to lead and guide our children, we know that we can't do it without the wisdom that comes from you. So please make us wise.

Lord, please keep shouting in the streets to _____. Keep crying out to her to come to you and listen to your counsel. Give _____ the will to open up your Word day by day to hear from you. Don't let _____ be a fool who hates knowledge. Make _____ wise.

Genesis 11:1–13:4
Matthew 5:1-26
Psalm 5:1-12
Proverbs 1:24-28

JANUARY 5

Blessing from God

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” GENESIS 12:1-3

IN GENESIS 11 we read about the people in Babel who, wanting to make a name for themselves, built a tower into the heavens intending to make their way to God. Then in Genesis 12, we discover something radically different. God came down to a man who wasn’t even looking for him and made incredible promises to him. God told Abram that he would make his name great and that he would bless him. God promised to be Abram’s security and to give his life significance. God’s promise of blessing was a sheer gift of grace.

Surely we want this name, blessing, and significance for ourselves and for our children too. We don’t want the name we can make for ourselves. We don’t want the security we can assemble for ourselves or the wealth we can amass for ourselves. We want the blessing of God that is a work of God.



Lord, as I think about the life that lies ahead for _____, I find myself wanting him to make something of himself. I want him to be somebody. I want him to do what he needs to do to create financial and relational security. But I’m also realizing that I don’t want _____ to have a life that is all about what he can accomplish. Rather, I’m asking you to bless him in the way only you can. Shower him with the blessings that are ours in Christ. Make his life all about what you have done, what you will do, what you will give. Make his life all about your grace and goodness to him.

JANUARY 6

Genesis 13:5–15:21
Matthew 5:27-48
Psalm 6:1-10
Proverbs 1:29-33

Counted Righteous

The LORD took Abram outside and said to him, “Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!” And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith. GENESIS 15:5-6

ABRAM COULD HAVE taken stock of the promises made to him by God and discounted them. He could have simply deemed them too good to be true and disregarded them. Instead, he went against intuition and logic, against what he saw and felt, and believed God. Abram trusted God’s promise, not only that he would have many descendants, but that one of them would bless the world and be its Savior.

Because Abram believed God, a miraculous and mysterious transaction took place. Abram was “counted” as righteous. A deposit was made to Abram’s spiritual account in the sight of God, a deposit of righteousness. It wasn’t wages that he earned, and neither was it something that magically appeared out of nowhere. This was real righteousness. But it was not Abram’s righteousness. Abram believed God, and his faith became the channel through which he received the perfect righteousness of another. When Christ came, living a life of sinless obedience and loving devotion to God, the true and perfect source of the righteousness credited to Abram was revealed.

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Oh, God, would you give _____ this saving faith? Would you give _____ the faith to take stock of your promises and grab hold of them? Please deposit to her account the same righteousness that was deposited to Abram’s account—the righteousness of Christ.

Genesis 16:1–18:15
Matthew 6:1-24
Psalm 7:1-17
Proverbs 2:1-5

JANUARY 7

Pray like This

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.* MATTHEW 6:9-13

IT SEEMS SIMPLE ENOUGH: Prayer is talking to God. And yet we struggle with it. Often when we pray as a family, such as before a meal, our prayers sound like we're just going through the motions with no real desire to connect with our Father in praise, thanksgiving, confession, or petition. Just the same old "bless this food."

But we want so much more for ourselves and our children. We want them to know how to truly commune with God in prayer. Just like Jesus' disciples, we need to learn to pray. We want to learn to begin not with our requests, but with his honor. We want to welcome his Kingdom to come and his will to be done in our home and in our hearts. We want our children to know that God is our ultimate provider who delights in being depended upon. We want to be a family who is real about our sin and our need for forgiveness as well as our need to forgive. So as parents, we humble ourselves to name our sin and ask forgiveness. We humble ourselves to name the temptation from which we need to be rescued.



Father, may we keep your name holy. May our home be an outpost of your Kingdom, and may all who live here gladly conform to your will and your ways. You are the source of everything we need, and we ask you to provide as you see fit. You are the only one who can grant us forgiveness and the grace to forgive each other. You are our only source of power to say no to sinful desires, and our only source of rescue from the evil one who wants to claim us and our children as his own for eternity.

Hidden Dangers

When Lot still hesitated, the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and rushed them to safety outside the city, for the LORD was merciful.

GENESIS 19:16

BACK IN GENESIS 13, we read that Lot surveyed the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley and chose to settle there. When he took that long look, did he not see what Moses later wrote about that place? “The people of this area were extremely wicked and constantly sinned against the LORD” (Genesis 13:13). Yes, it was fertile, but it was also perilous. Lot seemed so enamored by the obvious comforts that he ignored the hidden dangers.

As Lot and his family made their home in Sodom, they evidently became desensitized to the pervasive sin and evil. Even when the wickedness in the city threatened his daughters, and even though he was warned of the coming destruction, Lot “hesitated” to leave. Clearly he and his family were in need of a rescuer who would overcome their attraction to the city. If Lot and his family were dependent upon their own wisdom, their own response, their own choices, they would have been destroyed with the rest of Sodom. But at the center of this horrific, even sickening, story, we find hope. Though Lot and his wife and daughters had been seduced by the allures of Sodom and lulled into ignoring the danger, and though they were far too slow in turning away from the evil of the city, the Lord was gracious. In mercy, he saved those who had closed their eyes to danger as they made themselves at home in the world.



Lord, give us eyes to see the hidden dangers in what may look good on the surface as our children move out of our home and into the world. Give _____ discernment beyond her years to wisely assess opportunities that are presented to her. Even as _____ seeks to be salt and light in the world, keep her from losing her saltiness and being pressed into the world's mold. Don't let _____ become desensitized to sin and evil. And as you write our family's story, would you make it a story of your mercy? May your mercy overcome our compromise and outweigh the influence of our surroundings.

Genesis 20:1–22:24
Matthew 7:15-29
Psalm 9:1-12
Proverbs 2:16-22

JANUARY 9

Too Hard?

The LORD kept his word and did for Sarah exactly what he had promised. She became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son for Abraham in his old age. This happened at just the time God had said it would. GENESIS 21:1-2

WHEN WE MEET SARAH in the Scriptures, she seems to be defined by her emptiness. “But Sarai was unable to become pregnant and had no children” (Genesis 11:30). Her situation appears even more poignant when we read that God had promised to give her husband descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven (Genesis 15:5), descendants who would come from a son born to her. This promise seemed to be an impossibility.

Sarah knew her own body—that it was worn out and dried up. The idea of becoming pregnant was laughable. And so she was amused when she heard God say that life would emerge from her lifeless womb. Hearing Sarah’s laughter of unbelief, God asked her, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” (Genesis 18:14). Sarah had been focused on whether it was too hard for her and Abraham, and there was no question it was. But the Lord turned to her with the more important question, which was, “Can I do it?” And of course he could.

Isaac was born so that, by a miraculous work of God, “a whole nation came from this one man who was as good as dead—a nation with so many people that, like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them” (Hebrews 11:12). In fact, God still accomplishes the impossible, creating life out of death apart from human effort. “God . . . when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. . . . And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:4-5, 8, ESV).



Lord, sometimes the growth and change we want to see in _____ seem impossible, even laughable. We need faith to keep believing that what is impossible in human terms is not too hard for you. Indeed, our hopes for ourselves and for _____ are grounded in the reality that you still accomplish the impossible. You create life out of death, which is not dependent upon human effort. Nothing is too hard for you!

You Can Heal Me

Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached him and knelt before him. “Lord,” the man said, “if you are willing, you can heal me and make me clean.” Jesus reached out and touched him. “I am willing,” he said. “Be healed!” And instantly the leprosy disappeared. MATTHEW 8:2–3

HIS DISEASE probably started with just a few painful spots. Then the spots went numb. Slowly his body became a mass of ulcerated growths. To be a leper in Jesus’ day was to have no future and no hope, to know only ongoing deterioration, disfigurement, and despair.

The effects of leprosy on a person’s body provide a vivid picture of the effects of sin on a person’s soul. Just as it takes only one spot to indicate that a person’s body is permeated with leprosy, one spot of sin in our lives reveals that we have the spiritual disease that has permeated our whole selves. Our thoughts, our emotions, and our wills have all become infected with sin. Like leprosy, it infects the whole person, and it is ugly, loathsome, corruptive, contaminating, and alienating. Ultimately our transgressions lead to death.

So in reaching out to heal leprosy, Jesus showed that his touch can heal us of the most destructive, deadly disease in our lives—the disease of sin. When he touches us, we become joined to him so that his very own life and health flow into us. And as much as we pray for our children to be physically healthy and whole, we realize that this is the health and wholeness that matters most of all.



Lord, we come to you knowing that you are the only one who can deal with the deadly disease of sin. And we are desperate for your healing touch. Won’t you please touch _____ and bring healing to the wounded places where sin has left its ugly mark? Won’t you please cleanse _____ of the sin that only leads to death? Give to _____ your very own life and health. We know that this healing will be a lifetime process, but we beg you, do not delay or withhold your healing touch even as we look forward to the day when we will be completely healed and whole.