



PRAISE FOR

Praying the Scriptures for Your Children

It's obvious to any well-meaning parent that our children need our care, our guidance and wisdom, our love, and our discipline—but do we remember how desperately they need our *prayers* as well? It can be tempting to put prayer on the back burner amidst the demands of parenting, but Jodie Berndt reminds us that the Lord works mightily in our kids' lives as we intercede for them. What's more, he has provided us with a feast of prayer “prompts” within the very pages of God's Word.

JIM DALY, president, Focus on the Family

Jodie Berndt's magnificent book is a powerful companion to our prayer life. *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children* comes alongside us to enliven and make specific our prayers for our children and our families. With prayer as natural as breathing, Berndt reminds us again and again of the power of God's Word for prayer, peace, and healing. A mighty book with mighty power!

PATTI CALLAHAN, *New York Times*
bestselling author of *Becoming Mrs. Lewis*

With worn, ear-marked pages, this book has traveled with me across state lines, and it has found a home on my bedside table. I've gifted copies to scores of friends. This book continues to bring me back to the best parenting strategy I know—prayer. I will revisit it again and again and again.

SARA HAGERTY, bestselling author of
Unseen: The Gift of Being Hidden in a World
That Loves to Be Noticed and Adore



Many mornings, I'll find my husband using Jodie's books to pray for our five boys. What a gift to see our boys' earthly father talking to their heavenly Father on their behalf. *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children* has enabled us to witness the immeasurable power of prayer in our children's lives, and it will do the same thing for your family!

JEANNIE CUNNION,
author of *Mom Set Free*

If I could choose only one book to help me pray for my children, this is it! Not only has Jodie given us a rich treasure of true stories, practical prayers, and relevant Scriptures for our children, but a surprise awaits. In reading this, I found my own confidence in God growing. RUN and get this book for moms, dads, and grandparents.

SUSAN ALEXANDER YATES,
author of *Cousin Camp*

Using the Scriptures as a framework for my prayers has been incredibly fruitful for me. Jodie's book has given me an extremely practical and intentional way to pray for my children. You will find yourself being led by the Spirit as you pray God's promises over the people you love.

EMILY MAYNARD JOHNSON,
former bachelorette, *New York Times* bestselling
author of *I Said Yes: My Story of Heartbreak,
Redemption, and True Love*

I have a long list of hopes and dreams for my boys. Slowly I've learned to trade that list for the good that God planned in advance for each of them. This daily surrender can happen with prayer. But for years, I overcomplicated praying for my kids, which led to not praying at all. Thankfully I found *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children*. Because of Jodie's thoughtful work, I have a guide to pray God's Word for my boys. This spiritual practice aligns my heart with God's. And in this new edition, prayer prompts for technology help lead me in one of the greatest areas of stress for this generation.

HEATHER MACFADYEN,
host of the *Don't Mom Alone* podcast

I can't think of anything more powerful a parent can do for their children than pray for them—unless it's praying the Scriptures for them. In my experience, some of our best parenting happens when we're down on our knees! So I find *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children* a particularly encouraging and helpful resource and have it tucked alongside my Bible as I call out to God for my family each day.

LISA JACOBSON, author,
cohost of the *FAITHFUL LIFE* podcast,
founder of Club31Women.com





Praying the Scriptures
for Your Children

May the LORD cause you to flourish,
both you and your children.

Psalm 115:14

Also by Jodie Berndt

Celebration of Miracles

Praying the Scriptures for Your Adult Children

Praying the Scriptures for Your Adult Children

Study Guide (available at jodieberndt.com)

Praying the Scriptures for Your Teens

Praying the Scriptures for Your Life

Praying the Scriptures for Your Children

Discover How *to* Pray God's
Purpose *for* Their Lives

20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

JODIE BERNDT

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Requests for information should be addressed to:
Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

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For information, please email SpecialMarkets@Zondervan.com.

ISBN 978-0-310-36152-7 (hardcover)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Berndt, Jodie, author.

Title: *Praying the scriptures for your children : discover how to pray God's purpose for their lives / Jodie Berndt.*

Description: 20th anniversary edition. | Grand Rapids : Zondervan, 2020. | Includes bibliographical references. | Summary: "An inspiring guide to help parents pray effectively for their children, with encouraging true stories and powerful Scripture-based prayer prompts. This expanded edition of the bestseller features updated content on issues like technology and identity, and comes with new material designed to invite children into the family prayer circle"—Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020019518 (print) | LCCN 2020019519 (ebook) | ISBN 9780310361497 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9780310361503 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Bible—Devotional literature. | Mothers—Prayers and devotions. | Christian children—Religious life.

Classification: LCC BV4847 .B45 2020 (print) | LCC BV4847 (ebook) | DDC 248.3/2085—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020019518>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2020019519>

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Cover design: Studio Gearbox
Cover photo: Johnner Images / Getty Images
Author photo: Natalie Puls Photography
Interior design: Kait Lamphere

Printed in the United States of America

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 33 34 /LSC/ 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my parents, Claire and Allen Rundle,
whose steadfast love,
faithful example,
and constant prayers
pointed me—and countless others—
toward the God who *loves* us enough
and is *powerful* enough to do immeasurably more
than we could ever ask or imagine.



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Foreword to the 20th Anniversary Edition

As far back as my memory goes, I remember my mom praying for me and with me. It was a part of my daily bedtime routine throughout my childhood. I remember praying before meals, sport competitions, going to friends' houses, and long car rides. Prayer became a daily rhythm in my life from a young age because of my mom.

When I started kindergarten, she prayed over me every morning before I left for school. Those before-school prayers continued through my senior year of high school! Not a day went by that my mom didn't pray for me and my siblings before we left the house. In our garage we had a laminated piece of paper hanging on the wall with thirty scriptural prayers. Each prayer was only a few sentences long, so they were short and easy to pray before heading to school. My mom modeled a beautiful example of praying for her children, and she still does to this day! Her testimony of prayer is an encouragement that it's never too early to start praying for your children—and you should never stop.

When I was pregnant with my first baby, I knew I wanted to carry on the prayer legacy my mom had started. I was inspired to

Foreword to the 20th Anniversary Edition

write out a prayer for my unborn daughter, asking God to bring to mind Scriptures to pray over her life. My college mentor had gifted me with the first edition of *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children* during my pregnancy, and I used it as a guide while writing out a prayer for my daughter. Through this book, I leaned on the wisdom of Scripture and a seasoned mom like Jodie to offer insights as to what to pray for—my child’s faith, her character, her safety, her relationships, and her future. As I lay awake in bed during the uncomfortable third trimester, I would read the prayer I had written out for our daughter, Ember, and browse through the chapters of this book, discovering new ways to pray more intentionally for her.

As a young mom, I’m so grateful for the help and encouragement of praying moms—like my college mentor, my own mom, Jodie, and others—who remind me to not underestimate what God can do through my prayers. When my mentor gave me this book, she wrote a note on the inside that read, “There is nothing more powerful than praying Scripture over your child and future children. May these pages get worn and be another tool for your new adventure.” Now I have two children, and while I’m only a few years into this adventure of motherhood, this book has been a gift that keeps on giving. I love how easy it is to insert my children’s names into the scriptural prayers that Jodie offers at the end of each chapter—trusting that when I don’t have the right words, I can use these prayers and be confident that I’m praying God’s will over their lives.

Jodie’s guidance has helped me pray passionately, purposefully, patiently, and persistently for my children in the little things and the big things. It has helped me be more creative, specific, and intentional when it comes to praying for them *and* with

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them, all while comforting my own soul as I resonate with the Father's love for me. My children are still in the baby and toddler phases, and so this book helps me forecast the kinds of things I'll be praying for more often in the future so I can start praying for them now. I keep this prayer manual in my nightstand drawer where I can easily grab it while nursing a baby at night or lying in bed early in the morning before the kids are awake. Sometimes I'll take pictures of certain pages and put them in a photo album on my phone so I can easily turn to them on the go.

As my kids grow older, I want to invite them into the powerful practice of prayer and praying out loud for them and with them. I want to model prayer the same way my mom so beautifully modeled it for me, and I'm excited to have *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children* as my handbook on what to pray and how to pray for my children. When my kids are a little older, I plan to use this book to print off my own sheet of thirty scriptural prayers to hang in our garage or home, just like my mom did for us.

I am forever thankful for Jodie's heart in these pages. This book will change your life right now, and it will continue to change your life—and your children's lives—again and again. It is a beautiful resource that I plan to give to all my new mama friends for years to come—and one day to give to my own children, with the hope of passing on a life-changing prayer legacy.

Audrey Roloff, mother, coauthor of *New York Times* bestselling book *A Love Letter Life*,
and cohost of *Behind the Scenes* podcast



Foreword to the Original Edition

I believe the greatest influence a mom can have in the life of her child is through prayer. As she stands in the gap for her beloved child, the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth hears and answers her prayers. In this book, Jodie Berndt teaches us simple prayer principles that can transform our prayer life. One of the most powerful principles is *Scripture praying*. When we pray the promises of God for our children, our faith increases because we are praying back the very words of God. I love this book because I love God's Word, and this book is filled with God's Word. Your soul will be revived, restored, and given great hope as you read it.

I am thrilled to see how God has used *Moms in Prayer* in Jodie's life. She states, "The *Moms in Prayer* tactic is to use the Bible itself—God's actual words . . . Because they come straight out of the Bible, they carry the full weight and power of God's Word." Faith in the Word of God is the most powerful force there is. Those things we see as impossible mountains in the lives of our children can be removed by praying the promises of Scripture—God's Word.

And I appreciate Jodie's vulnerability as a mother. She is a

Foreword to the Original Edition

real mom with a real family, facing challenges like every other mom. Jodie honestly portrays the struggles and victories of mothers who desire to be godly women wanting to raise godly children. Her humor is uplifting, and the stories will touch your heart. You will be encouraged as you hear how God works in the lives of children through the prayers of their mothers—and also their dads!

When we pray in the name of Jesus, believing the promises of God, his power is released at that moment. Psalm 56:9 declares that the day we call for help, the tide of battle turns. We are in a battle for the very lives of our children. What a comforting truth to know that when a righteous mom intercedes, using the Word on behalf of her children, God hears her prayers and Satan's power is dispelled. Yes, the Word is the most powerful weapon we wield for the protection of our children.

I loved taking time at the end of each chapter to put my children's names in each of the recommended Scriptures. It was a faith-building time. God's peace flooded my soul as I prayed in faith, believing he would answer my prayers.

What an incredible joy it has been to read this book of hope. It is a life-changing book—a book you'll want to read, meditate on, pray through, and be encouraged by again and again. My prayer for you is that God the Holy Spirit will grant you increased faith as you believe with all your heart the Scripture promises given for your children in this book, and that it will cause you to search the Scriptures for yourself. I also pray that you will experience, as Jodie has, the joy of answered prayer and the loving support that comes from praying with other moms in a Moms in Prayer group. The battle for our children's lives is waged in prayer. It is never too late to start praying.

Foreword to the Original Edition

Father, may you use this book for your honor and for your glory. In the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Fern Nichols, founder and president
of Moms in Prayer International



Introduction

How to Use This Book

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

1 John 5:14

The Brothers Grimm tell the story of *Sleeping Beauty*, which opens with all of the fairies in the kingdom bringing baptismal gifts to an infant princess. One fairy gives beauty, another offers virtue, a third bestows kindness, and so on until the little girl has everything she needs to grow into a wise and lovely young woman.

Reading this story to my own young daughters, I used to wish that such blessings were so easy to come by. Just throw a christening party, invite all the fairies, and—presto!—your child would be covered.

But God gives us another—better—way to provide these gifts (and so many more) for our children. He invites us to pray. And, in fact, according to many biblical scholars, God *requires* us to pray before he can go to work. About 250 years ago, British evangelist John Wesley wrote that “God does nothing on earth save in answer to believing prayer”; many contemporary pastors and authors echo this thought, noting, as nineteenth-century

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evangelist Andrew Murray did, that “God’s giving is inseparably connected with our asking.”¹

The Bible supports this connection. Over and over again God says, “Ask me, and I will . . .” and “If my people . . . will humble themselves and pray, . . . then I will . . .” and “Ask and it will be given to you.”² Moreover, there is scriptural evidence that there are times when our failure to ask God for something results in his holding back on the blessings or protection he wanted to provide (see, for example, Ezekiel 22:30–31). No matter how you interpret passages like this one, one thing is clear: *God wants us to pray.*

PRAYER PRINCIPLE

God’s giving is inseparably
connected with our asking.

Andrew Murray

As a mother, I’ve always seen prayer as a natural part of the parenting process, and I have always prayed for my children. But for many years my prayers tended to run along the “God bless Johnny” lines. I’d ask God to help my kids on their spelling tests, protect them on field trips, and restore their health when they got the flu or ran a fever. Rarely, though, did my prayers get more creative than that, and almost never did I sense that they packed any real punch.

And then I got involved with a group called Moms in Prayer.³ On the basis of Scripture verses like John 15:7 (“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you”) and Jeremiah 1:12 AMP (“I am [actively]

How to Use This Book

watching over My word to fulfill it”), the Moms in Prayer tactic is to use the Bible itself—God’s actual words—as the foundation for our prayers. The more we dig into the Bible, letting the words we read shape our perspective, the more our desires (and our prayers!) will line up with what God wants to do.

It can help to think about prayer as a conversation with God, one that he starts. When we pray the Scriptures, all we are really doing is taking words first breathed by God and speaking them back to him in prayer form. “The Bible wasn’t meant to be *read through*,” writes Mark Batterson, “The Bible was meant to be *prayed through*. And if you pray through it, you’ll never run out of things to talk about.”⁴

Indeed. There is not a need we will face in parenting—or that our kids will face, as they grow—that God has not already thought of, and provided for, in his Word.

PRAYER PRINCIPLE

There is not a need we will face that God has not already thought of, and provided for, in his Word.

Here’s what I mean. Verses like Ephesians 4:32 (“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”) represent a communication style any family would want. And this one can be reworked into a terrific prayer for how your kids treat each other:

I pray that Hillary and Annesley would be kind and compassionate toward each other, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave them.

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Verses like 2 Timothy 2:22 (“Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart”) can serve as a prayer for the friends your children choose:

I pray that Virginia and Robbie would flee from evil desires and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, enjoying the company of children who call on the Lord and have pure hearts.

Not only are prayers like these more interesting and creative than the ones I could come up with on my own, but because they come straight out of the Bible, they carry the full weight and power of God’s Word. As God says in Isaiah 55:11, “my word . . . will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” And as the author of Hebrews points out, “the word of God is living and active and full of power [making it operative, energizing, and effective].”⁵

Using the Bible as the basis for many of my prayers made them more interesting, creative, and powerful, but as a young mother, I still found myself hanging back, more comfortable sitting on the bench than actually charging onto the playing field of Serious Prayer. Serious Prayer was, I figured, reserved for life’s *real* prayer warriors—people who had fewer kids and a lot less laundry to do than I did. Reading about Christians who spent hours in prayer did little to inspire me; in fact, it made me want to give up and throw in the prayer towel. *I’m just not that holy*, I’d tell myself. *I’m just not like that.*

Then I met Cynthia Heald, a bestselling author whose books include *Becoming a Woman of Prayer*. “I’d like to be a ‘woman of

How to Use This Book

prayer,” I told her, “but I’m not. The way I see it, if I don’t spend at least a half hour sitting down, with my notebook and Bible in hand, and really *pray*, then my prayers won’t count.”

Cynthia set me straight. “You can pray in the carpool line,” she said, “or while you’re washing dishes. Pray while you walk through your neighborhood or while you clean the bathroom. It doesn’t take a lot of time or preparation to meet God. Just go to him, and you’re there.”

Now, I’m sure that Cynthia Heald would encourage all of us to make time in our daily schedules for some concentrated, uninterrupted prayer, but her gentle advice to “just do it” got me started. I began to pray while I drove, while I made lunches, while I cleaned—and I even added my own little trick. Thinking of the temple incense that wafted toward heaven in Bible times, I began to use the smell of Lysol or Tilex as my own “fragrant” reminder to send my prayers heavenward while I scrubbed the toilet! (No matter how limited your own prayer life might be, it can’t be any more pathetic than that.)

PRAYER PRINCIPLE

God’s Word always accomplishes what he desires.

Now that I’m an older mom, an empty nester with four adult children and two sons-in-law, I am more convinced than ever of the power—and the necessity—of prayer. It’s been twenty years since this book first released, and I’ve been humbled and amazed to see how God has worked in answer to the prayers of the moms and dads who shared their stories with me more than two decades ago. Sure, there have been seasons of heartache—periods when

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God seemed to be silent or didn't act in ways these parents thought they wanted him to—but the overwhelming majority of the prayed-for children you'll meet in these pages are walking with the Lord today. And in more than a couple of cases, they are praying the Scriptures for their own little ones. God is so good!

A quick word to get everyone on the same page though.

In his classic book, *How to Pray*, R. A. Torrey noted that “the true purpose in prayer is that God may be glorified in the answer.”⁶ As parents, we can be tempted to glorify or idolize our kids. Not overtly, of course, but when we center our thoughts on them—either because they have made us so *proud* or because they have made us so *anxious*—we inadvertently elbow God out of the picture. When you pray the Scriptures for your children, I encourage you to do so with a heart that desires, above all else, to bring honor and glory to God. He loves our kids and really does have good plans for their lives; let's give him the freedom, in prayer, to accomplish these purposes according to his timetable and in the way he has designed. Let us “enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise”⁷—no matter what the circumstances look like. God has it all under control.

If praying the Scriptures is a new concept for you, consider yourself among friends. I meet people all the time who tell me they hang back, like I once did, for fear that they won't sound good enough when they pray or that they don't know the Bible well enough to actually use it. Or they worry that they will “bug God” if they come to him with their seemingly minor concerns. More than one parent has confided that he or she doesn't want to be “clogging the lines” in case somebody with a more serious problem is trying to get through. Does God, we may wonder, *really* want to hear the little details of our lives?

How to Use This Book

Yes. *Yes!* “Don’t worry about anything,” the Bible tells us. “Instead, pray about everything.”⁸

Pray. About. Everything.

I love my kids—Hillary, Annesley, Virginia Jane, and Robbie. And I know you love your kids. Don’t let Satan rob you of the joy of praying for them—and of seeing God work in their lives—by making you think you’re somehow not up to the job. You are. And God is. His Spirit is ever ready to help. We may not know what we’re supposed to pray for (or what God wants), but the Spirit does—and he prays, interceding for us with groans that can’t find their expression in words.⁹

So here’s how this book can help.

Each chapter deals with a different prayer topic or area of concern that parents often have for their children. Each chapter includes illustrations that bring these topics to life, and while I’ve sometimes changed names and minor details, all of the stories are true. I am grateful to the many parents who were willing to share their concerns as well as their prayers.

At the end of each chapter, you’ll find several Bible verses, all written in the form of prayers you can personalize for your family. You can use just one of these prayer prompts, or you can pray your way through all of them. You can read and pray through all twenty chapters, or pick and choose the sections that address particular needs you may face. Once you find out what’s here, you may want to keep this book someplace handy, like you would with a flyswatter or a tire pump for your bike, so that when you come up against something tricky or just feel like your prayer life could use a breath of fresh air, you’ll have a ready tool you can use.

(Much to my kids’ mortification, I kept copies of this book in my family room, in my office, and on my bedside table—and

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they caught me, more than once, nose deep in the pages. “You’re reading your *own* book?” Virginia once observed. “Mom, that is just so *sad*.”)

And speaking of kids . . .

As I’ve traveled the country talking about the power that comes with praying God’s Word, I’ve met untold numbers of parents who say they want to raise children who pray, but they don’t really know how to. “I didn’t grow up in a home where people prayed—at least not outside of church” was how one young mom put it. “It feels awkward and unfamiliar sometimes. But I don’t want it to be that way for my kids. I want them to know they can pray and can depend on God’s promises. What can I do?”

What can I do?

That’s a beautiful question—and one for which I hope this fresh edition of *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children* can lend a hand. In addition to the updated prayer prompts in these pages (including sections on your child’s sense of identity and belonging, as well as stories and prayers about things like our kids’ use of technology), you’ll find some brand-new pages at the end of the book—pages designed to help you pray not just *for* your children but *with* them. Even the youngest children have concerns about their own lives—their friendships, their future, their faith—and the sooner they learn to anchor their prayers in God’s promises, the better equipped they will be to trust him as they grow.

PRAYER PRINCIPLE

The sooner our children learn to anchor their prayers in God’s promises, the better equipped they will be to trust him as they grow.

How to Use This Book

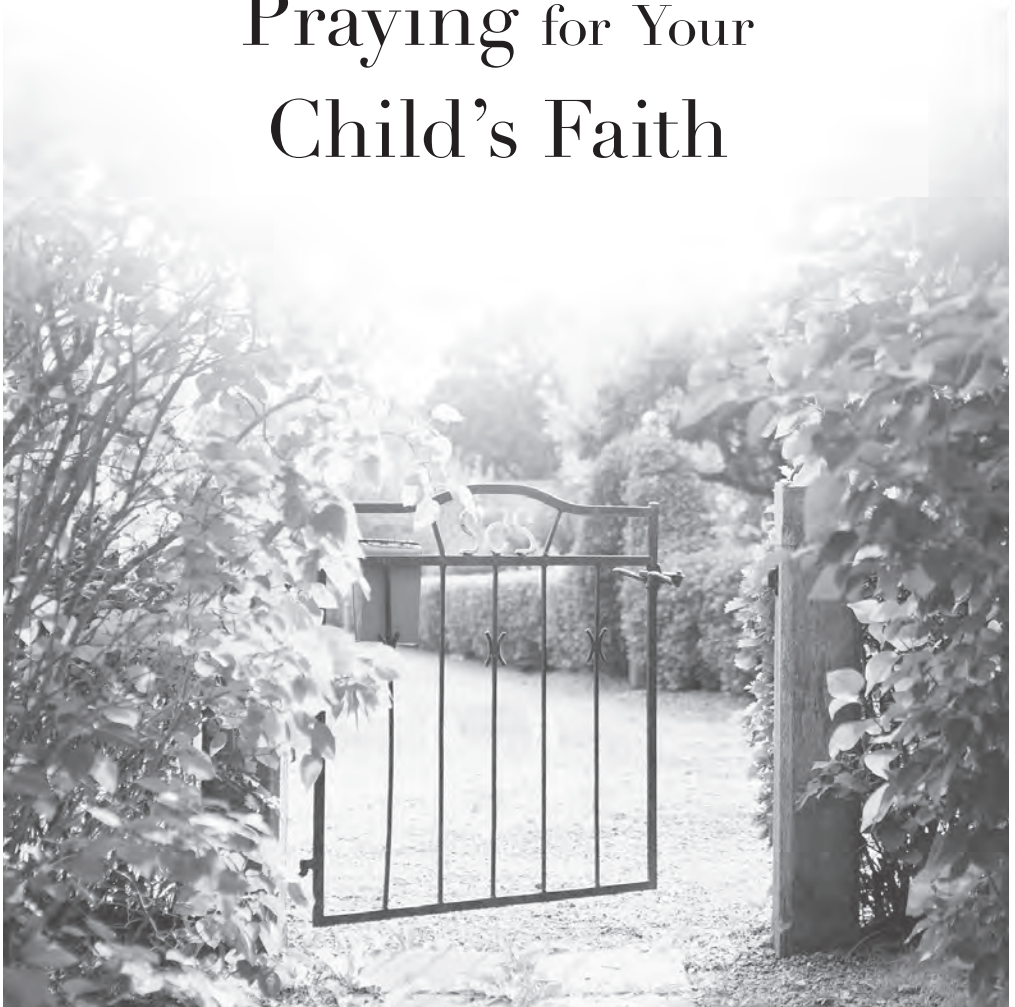
Pastor and author Jack Hayford likens prayer to a “partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand in hand with God toward the realization of his redemptive purposes on earth.”¹⁰ As you slip your hand into your heavenly Father’s, prayerfully working with him to see his purposes fulfilled in the lives of your children, I pray that you will come face-to-face with the God of Ephesians 3:20—the One who is able to do immeasurably more than all you could ask or imagine. And as you encourage your kids to do the same, I pray that they will discover the confidence that comes with knowing (and loving) the God of Romans 15:13—the One who promises to fill them with all joy and peace as they trust in him, so that they will overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Sleeping Beauty may have had a bevy of fairies in her nursery, but we have access to the throne room of the King of kings. And given a choice between the two, I know which one I’d pick.

What about you?

Part 1

Praying for Your Child's Faith



Chapter 1

Praying for Your Child's Salvation

*Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me,
and do not hinder them, for the kingdom
of heaven belongs to such as these."*

Matthew 19:14

Julie grew up in a home where church attendance was sporadic and Jesus was never mentioned by name. It wasn't until high school that she found out who Christ really was. She became a Christian then, and, years later, when she married her high school sweetheart, she resolved that things would be different when they had their own family. They would introduce their kids to Jesus at an early age and bring them up to love and fear God. Secretly, though, Julie wondered whether she could do it. The Christian life had never been modeled for her as a child; how was she supposed to teach her children everything she had missed? What if she blew it? What if they didn't respond? What if they rejected the faith she held so dear?

Mollie had no such doubts. She and her husband strode confidently into parenthood, armed with principles gleaned

from countless seminars, books, and personal devotions. They “cleansed” their home of anything that might be an obstacle to faith: out went secular books, movies, and music; in came Bible stories, family-oriented games and sports, and praise songs. Theirs was a close-knit, “model” Christian family in every way—until their oldest son met and fell in love with a Muslim girl in college. *Where did we go wrong? Mollie wondered. Did we push our kids too hard? Will our son abandon his Christian convictions for this girl?*

Barbara didn't become a Christian until four years after her divorce, at a time when her children were well into their teenage years. She had no illusions about her limitations; as a single mom it was all she could do to make ends meet, let alone offer her kids much in the way of emotional support or guidance. She assumed, as most of her friends did, that her kids would naturally experiment with things like sex, drugs, and alcohol—she just hoped nobody would get pregnant. But when Barbara met Christ, she began to wonder, *Is there hope for our kids? Or has the divorce, our financial struggles, and the total lack of any sort of Christian influence or instruction left them “too far gone” for God?*

Julie, Mollie, and Barbara are not their real names, but these women are all friends of mine. Their questions are genuine. The good news for them (and for all of us) is that God is not bound by our human failings. No matter how many parenting mistakes we make, his grace is more than sufficient to redeem them. The bad news is that no matter how many things we do right in terms of pointing our kids toward Christ, we cannot *make* them love the Lord. We cannot force them into faith or convince them that God's grace is real. As Jesus put it in John 6:44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them.”

Praying for Your Child's Salvation

Does the fact that only God can draw people to himself mean that our job is simply to sit there and watch? Absolutely not. *Experiencing God* author Henry Blackaby says that seeing God at work is our invitation to adjust our lives and join him.¹ As parents, we can “join God” in countless ways: We can expose our children to stories of God’s faithfulness and protection. We can model the Christian life and introduce them to other believers. We can teach them, encourage them, sing to them, and love them.

And most of all, we can pray.

The sooner we realize that it is not about what *we* do but about what *God* does, the sooner we will stop focusing on ourselves and our shortcomings and begin focusing on God and his power. Likewise, the sooner we quit worrying about doing our part, the sooner we can start rejoicing in the fact that God is doing his part. And the sooner we recognize that God *is* at work, the sooner we can jump in and join him.

PRAYER PRINCIPLE

When you pray for your children, you join
God in the work he is doing in their lives.

Salvation as the Starting Point

Before I started writing this book, I polled more than one hundred mothers to see what they wanted most for their children. My informal surveys, tucked into our family’s Christmas cards and randomly distributed to friends and neighbors, listed everything from health and safety to academic success and strong family ties. I asked folks to tell me their chief desires and prayer

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requests—what was it that they really wanted God to do for their children?—and I used this feedback to shape the book's table of contents.

On the survey I also included space for folks to comment on the topics or add their own thoughts. My friend Troy Lee shared this story of how God answered her prayers for her children:

Before each of my children was born, I prayed that they would be *first* a Christian and *second* healthy. I prayed that as long as we would be allowed to enjoy our children on earth, it would be long enough for them to accept Christ as their Savior. In other words, please let them live to be saved—however old or however young.

This prayer has been answered for two of my children so far, but very significantly in Abner IV's life. You may know that he died at age seven and a half. Seven months prior to his unexpected death, Abner prayed with his father to accept Christ and was baptized the next week. God let him live long enough to be saved.

This is even more interesting as we found out exactly what Abner died of (it took nine weeks to determine). Endocardial fibroelastosis is very rare. We were told that Abner's case would be published in a medical journal because in the last forty years, only two other people in the world had ever lived past age one with this condition.

And I keep thinking, *God let him live long enough to be saved.* Praise him!

Isn't this an amazing story? Where others might see only pain and loss, Troy Lee recognized the hand of God and the answer

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to her prayers. But, you might ask, shouldn't she have asked God to make her children healthy—*no matter what*? And if she had, would she have been spared the anguish of losing a child?

I can't answer these questions, but I know that in placing her children's salvation at the top of her prayer list—and in praying for them even before they were born—Troy Lee demonstrated an incredible maturity and depth of insight. She recognized what so many of us miss: that a relationship with the Savior is more important than anything else. A child can be blessed with a healthy body, good grades, an outstanding character, a wealth of friends, and an athletic scholarship to the college of his or her choice—but without a relationship with Jesus, it all counts for nothing.

PRAYER PRINCIPLE

Praying for your children's salvation is asking God to give them the only gift that lasts forever.

Never Give Up

Salvation may be the starting point of our prayers for our children, but God doesn't always answer this prayer first. Praying for our children to know and love God often demands incredible patience, perseverance, and trust.

Helen has been praying for her three children for more than twenty years. Two of them love the Lord; one is what Helen calls "a work in progress." As she looks at the young mothers in her church, Helen remembers the days when nurturing her children's faith came easily, as their little hearts opened up to the Bible

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stories she read, the songs she sang, and the prayers she prayed. Now, though, Helen knows what it means to weep for her children, to long for them to come to faith, and to cry out to God on their behalf. “We mothers who have older children really grieve when they are not in the fold,” she says.

Even so, Helen is not discouraged. Holding on to verses like Habakkuk 2:3 (“Though [the revelation] linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay”), she envisions the day when all three of her children will have a vibrant relationship with the Lord, and she is quick to encourage other mothers with some of the promises God has given her:

- “‘Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,’ declares the LORD. ‘They will return from the land of the enemy. So there is hope for your descendants . . . Your children will return to their own land’” (Jeremiah 31:16–17).
- “All your children will be taught by the LORD, and great will be their peace” (Isaiah 54:13).
- “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten . . . and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you” (Joel 2:25–26).

Along with promises like these, Helen has the assurance that her prayers line up perfectly with God’s will for her children’s lives. As 2 Peter 3:9 reads, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” God wants our children to be saved.

PRAYER PRINCIPLE

When you pray for your children's salvation,
you can be confident that you are praying
in accordance with God's will.

Poised for Prayer

If you are like Helen, and you have prayed long and hard for your children's salvation, you may be wondering why God has not yet answered your prayers. Author Jeanne Hendricks points to the example of Elizabeth, who lived faithfully and righteously despite the heartache of her inability to have children. But rather than become bitter over this unanswered prayer, Elizabeth chose to trust God and wait. As a result, she acquired an inner strength and fortitude that, Hendricks says, allowed her to become a "stronger woman and a better mother."² Eventually, Elizabeth gave birth to John the Baptist—and God used her to encourage and strengthen Mary, the mother of Jesus.³

"Godly patience," Hendricks says, "is the art of letting God set the timer."⁴ Whether you are just beginning to pray for your children, or whether you have spent years holding them up before the Lord, here are three things you can do to develop godly patience and the same kind of inner strength that sustained Elizabeth:

First, pray with an attitude of thanksgiving. Colossians 4:2 reads, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful." Remember that God loves your children and does not want them to perish. Thank him for the work he is doing in their lives—even if you cannot see it at the moment.

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Next, build your faith. Memorize verses like 1 John 5:14–15: “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” Ask God to show you promises from his Word and make them a focal point of your prayer life. You can use the verses at the end of this chapter if you like and insert your child’s name into the blanks to turn them into personal prayers.

Finally, be persistent. In Luke 18:1, Jesus tells us we should “always pray and not give up.” Whether we are praying for our children’s salvation or for something else, we can benefit from this advice found in the book of Hebrews: “You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”⁵

Prayers You Can Use

Heavenly Father . . .

Shine your light in _____'s heart to give the light of the knowledge of your glory displayed in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:6

Put people in _____'s life who will gently instruct them, and grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth so that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil.

2 Timothy 2:25-26

Open _____'s eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Christ.

Acts 26:18

Don't let _____ be haunted by past mistakes. Remind _____ that if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come; the old has gone, the new is here!

2 Corinthians 5:17

May _____ confess with their mouth that "Jesus is Lord" and believe in their heart that you raised Jesus from the dead so that they will be saved.

Romans 10:9

Thank you for loving _____ so much that you gave your one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16



I pray that _____ would continue to live in Christ, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith, and overflowing with thankfulness. *Colossians 2:6-7*

Cause _____ to call on your name and be saved. *Romans 10:13*

Give _____ a singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear you and that all will go well for them and for their children. Make an everlasting covenant with _____. Never stop doing good to them, and inspire them to fear you so that they will never turn away from you. *Jeremiah 32:39-40*

Put a new spirit in _____. Remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Prompt _____ to follow your decrees, keep your laws, and be your people. *Ezekiel 11:19-20*

May _____ be rooted and established in love and have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses all understanding. Fill _____ to the measure of all the fullness of God. *Ephesians 3:17-19*

Jesus said that no one can come to him unless the Father draws them. Draw _____ to Jesus, O Lord. *John 6:44*



Chapter 2

Praying for Your Child to Love God's Word

*I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.*

Psalm 119:11

I looked up from my gardening to see my two youngest children, Virginia and Robbie, in animated conversation. They made such a pretty picture, sitting in the grass with the sunlight dappling their little blond heads, that I couldn't resist creeping closer to listen. Picking up my trowel and a clay pot, I inched forward and made a pretense of planting a few geraniums.

As I fiddled with the flowers, five-year-old Virginia plucked a handful of long green aucuba leaves from a nearby bush and handed several to her three-year-old brother. "Now wave them," she commanded.

Robbie complied, and Virginia continued to talk. "They saw him coming on his donkey," she said, "and they waved their branches, saying 'Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

Watching the two of them wave their leaves to dramatize the story of Jesus' last days on earth, I wanted to laugh out loud—more from delight than from amusement. Virginia told the story with such passion (“They put *nails* into his *hands*, Robbie! *NAILS!*”) that I found myself drawn into their little circle, overwhelmed by the power in her simple words. Speaking in the language of a five-year-old, she managed to communicate the anguish of the cross, the fear and confusion of Christ's followers, and the incredible triumph of the resurrection—all in the space of about two minutes.

“Now,” Virginia concluded suddenly, breaking the spell, “*you* tell the story, Robbie. Start with the part where the disciples found the donkey.”

God's Word: Guiding Light, Protective Shield

As this story illustrates, a love of Scripture can begin at an early age. How well we “read-aloud” moms know the tender joy of snuggling a small one on our lap or tucking them into bed with an adventure-come-to-life from the pages of a colorfully illustrated children's Bible.

But these bedtime rituals are only the beginning. Psalm 119:105 likens God's Word—his laws, his commandments, his promises—to a lamp that sheds light on our path. Perhaps nowhere is this guiding light more necessary (or more welcome!) than when our children have outgrown our laps, when peer relationships, academic challenges, and other pressure points can generate a cloud of darkness or confusion in their lives.

Praying for Your Child to Love God's Word

Our prayers are undoubtedly the first line of defense against these clouds—and against the satanic schemes and assaults they often mask. Make no mistake: Satan wants to destroy our families, and he is always on the lookout for ways to sow seeds of tension, rebellion, and destruction. As 1 Peter 5:8 warns, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” But as important it is for us to pray, it is equally vital for our kids to be equipped to withstand Satan’s attacks when they come. And their number one defense against the devil’s pressures and temptations is the knowledge and prayerful application of Scripture.

PRAYER PRINCIPLE

Praying for your children to know, love,
and use God’s Word is the most effective
way to pray for their protection.

Learning from Jesus’ Example

Here’s an example of how this defense can work. In Luke 4, the devil finds Jesus in the desert, hungry and alone. “Tell this stone to become bread,” Satan suggests. Jesus replies, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”

Next, Satan shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. “If you worship me,” he says, “it will all be yours.” Here again, Jesus doesn’t argue; instead he simply says, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”

Finally, Satan takes Jesus to the top of the temple and says (my paraphrase), “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down

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from here. The angels will lift you up in their hands—you won't get hurt!" Once again, Jesus refuses to take the bait, choosing to quote another Scripture verse: "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Jesus withstands the devil's schemes—not through intellectual prowess, physical strength, or willpower, but simply by knowing and using God's Word. And like Jesus, the child or teen who has moved beyond bedtime stories to the place where they know and love the Bible will be well-equipped to withstand the attacks and temptations that come their way. The pressures themselves do not disappear; rather, they become easier to address, given the lessons learned from Scripture.

God's commands are not meant to limit our freedom but rather to teach us and train us so we'll be equipped for everything God wants us to do.¹ They show us how to live life to the fullest—to release us so we can run!²

Let's pray that our children will see God's Word for what it is: a guiding light that protects them from sin and illuminates the pathway to God's blessings.³

PRAYER PRINCIPLE

When you pray for your kids to know and love Scripture, you are asking God to equip them for every good work.

A Teenage Transformation

Our friends, Gail and Tim, have four active, intelligent children. Gail is one of the most energetic mothers I know, and she is

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always coming up with new ideas for family devotions and Christ-centered celebrations. Some time ago, though, she confided to me that she found it increasingly difficult to deal with the changing needs of all four kids.

Their oldest child, Emily, had just entered high school. Devotional subjects that appealed to the younger children failed to capture her interest, and the pressures of homework, peer relationships, and after-school sports tended to limit the time Emily was willing to spend on things like prayer and Bible study. “I could force her to participate,” Gail told me, “but what Tim and I really want—and what we constantly pray for—is to see Emily start to take the initiative on her own.”

Several months later, their prayers were answered when Emily volunteered at a summer camp run by Young Life, a national organization that shares the gospel with high school students. There she forged friendships with other teens on the work crew, and, almost without realizing it, Emily found herself imitating the habits of the other volunteers. She began to spend time reading her Bible, and she looked forward to discussing what she had read with her coworkers.

Emily spent a month at the camp, and when she returned, Gail and Tim couldn't help but notice the transformation. Gail was delighted when Emily decided to give her best friend a devotional book so that the two of them could study the Bible together. Emily seemed like a new person, and in the last few weeks of summer, her faith seemed to grow by leaps and bounds.

Then school started again.

Classes hadn't even been in session for a week when the “old Emily” began to reappear. She won a spot on the varsity soccer team, and that—coupled with the heavy workload in her college

prep curriculum—left her with little time to get together with friends, and even less room in her schedule for Bible reading and study. “She’s pretty stressed-out,” Gail told me. “Please pray for her.”

I did pray for Emily—and as I did, I was reminded of the parable of the sower found in Luke 8:1–15. In this story, a farmer sows his seed. Some of the seed falls on a path, where it gets trampled and eaten by birds. Some lands on rocky ground, and the plants die for lack of water. Other seed falls among thorns, which grow up and choke the plants. And some falls on good soil, yielding a hundredfold crop.

In answer to his disciples’ questions, Jesus explains the parable. “The seed is the word of God,” he says. Each of the soils—the path, the rocks, the thorns, and the good soil—represent a different condition of the heart. As I prayed for Emily, a picture of a healthy plant being choked by thorns—homework, sports, peer pressures and relationships, family life, busy schedules—came to mind. I began to pray according to Luke 8:15, that Emily’s heart would be “good soil” and that she would “hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”

As I write this, Gail and I are still waiting to see how God will answer our prayers. Although we don’t know what his answer will look like, we are confident that it *will* come, since God always keeps his promises. One of those promises comes from Matthew 18:19–20: “If two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” I feel privileged to agree with Gail in prayer for her daughter—and I count Gail’s prayers for my children as one of the greatest blessings of our friendship.

PRAYER PRINCIPLE

Enlisting the support of a praying friend multiplies the power of your prayers and invites God into your prayer circle.

Poised for Prayer

It's been said that the more you know about something (and in at least one study, the "something" was wine), the more you love it.⁴ And one of the best ways we can foster a love for God's Word is to encourage our kids to memorize Scripture. Young children, especially, have a seemingly limitless capacity for memorization—a lesson I learned when Hillary, as a three-year-old, recited the entire preamble to the *Beauty and the Beast* story on video, word for word. For me, that did it. I figured that any child who could recite a Hollywood script could certainly learn a couple of Bible verses!

I laughed when my friend Susan told me how adept her daughter, Christie Ray, was at Bible memory—so much so that Susan suggested to the third grader that she consider using her skill as her "talent" in the school talent show. Christie Ray—not too surprisingly—balked at the idea, but I got a kick out of it, and I looked forward to seeing what God would do in the life of a girl who had so diligently hidden his Word in her heart. Now, more than two decades later, this young woman is living proof of God's promise in Psalm 1:3. She is bearing fruit in her friendships, prospering in her career, and living deeply rooted in Christ.

Looking back at my own kids' growing-up years, I am convinced that, apart from salvation, there is nothing more life-

shaping and beneficial than knowing and loving the Bible. Whether it's the 2 Timothy 3:16 power to rebuke and correct (I remember hearing about a would-be con man who found that every time he tried to pull a fast one, the Bible verses he learned as a child would spring to mind to keep him honest) or the ability that God's Word has to bring security and peace to our lives ("You are my refuge and my shield," reads Psalm 119:114. "I have put my hope in your word"), God's Word really does accomplish what he desires.⁵

And as parents, it's our job—and our privilege—to continually point our kids toward Scripture. "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts," God says in Deuteronomy 6:6–7. "Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

If that sounds like a tall order, just take it one step at a time. Start with a single memory verse—maybe one you pick from the pages at the end of this book. Talk about it with your kids. Write it on an index card that you post on their bathroom mirror, or tuck it into their lunch box or their book bag. Say the verse out loud, perhaps over breakfast, and return to it at night, maybe with a note on a pillow or as part of your bedtime prayers.

And then add to your collection. Every family is different; do what works for your kids. There was a time when our family devotions consisted of hearing the school bus come up the road, my yelling "Bus!" to get the kids to hustle up, and then praying the quickest of blessings over them as they scrambled out the door.

You do what you can.

And you pray.

Prayers You Can Use

Heavenly Father . . .

Let _____ keep your commands so that they will live; write them on the tablet of their heart.

Proverbs 7:2-3

Show _____ that your way is perfect and your word is flawless, and that you shield all who take refuge in you.

2 Samuel 22:31

Teach _____ that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16

May _____ continue in what they have learned, knowing that the Holy Scriptures make us wise for salvation and equip us for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Do not let _____ merely listen to the word, and so deceive themselves. Let them do what it says.

James 1:22

Give _____ a good heart so that they will seize the Word and hold on, no matter what, sticking with it until there is a harvest.

Luke 8:15 MSG

Let _____ take delight in your law, meditating on it day and night so that whatever they do will prosper.

Psalms 1:1-3



Teach _____ to know your commands and obey them, demonstrating love for you. Let _____ know your promised reward: that “the one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” *John 14:21*

Make your word a lamp for _____’s feet and a light on their path. *Psalm 119:105*

Let the message of Christ dwell among _____ richly as they teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as they sing psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit with gratitude in their hearts. *Colossians 3:16*

May _____ not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. *Matthew 4:4*

Show _____ the joy that comes when a person sets their heart on your laws and can run in the path of your commands. *Psalm 119:30-32*

