

Great Prayers: Six Brief Studies in Prayer

By Rick Ezell

Study 1

Praying for People Facing Hard Times - Part 1

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

The church at Thessalonica was facing hard times. They were being persecuted. Their faith was being tested as they faced spiritual opposition. The situation was so grim that Paul feared that they would give up on their faith. So much so that Paul, according to verse 5, wrote, "For this reason, when I could stand it no long, I sent [Timothy] to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless" (1 Thes. 3:5 NIV). Hardship and opposition can cause one to question their faith, and, at times, people have given up on their faith.

Paul sends Timothy, who brings a good report of the Thessalonians' faith. Paul is encouraged (v. 7); can now enjoy life (v. 8); and thanks God for the joy they bring to him when he prays for them (v. 9). This causes Paul to pray for the believers at Thessalonica all the more.

Paul's prayer in verses 10-13 is an excellent way to pray for those going through hard times. It's worth pondering because every week we're asked to pray for people facing difficulty. Very rarely does anyone say, "Things are going great. Pray for me."

One of the most endearing activities a person can do for another is to pray for them. The following are some things to remember when you pray for someone who is facing hard times:

Pray constantly (v. 10). Paul prayed "night and day" for the believers in Thessalonica. When is the last time you stayed awake all night to pray for someone? Effective prayer engages the heart and mind at all hours of the day and night.

Pray earnestly (v. 10). Paul stated that "we pray most earnestly . . ." Paul uses a very unusual expression, a double Greek compound, when he describes the intensity of his prayer as "most earnestly." It is like someone describing something as "more better." While it is incorrect grammatically, it communicates the idea of going above and beyond all normal measures. The phrase could be translated "super abundantly."

Prayer must be earnest to be effective. Weak, shallow, half-hearted prayers produce weak, shallow, half-hearted results. The apostle James reminds us that “the earnest prayer of a righteous man has great power and wonderful results” (James 5:16 NLT). *Fervent* or *earnest* prayers are “boiling” in their intensity. Boiling prayers get God’s attention because they bubble up from a heart wholly focused on the Lord and totally concerned about the one being prayed for.

Pray practically (v. 10). Paul continues his prayer, “that we may see you again.” These people were on his heart and on his mind. He loved them. He wanted to be with them. It seems such an insignificant request. But, Paul’s example is critical for us to follow in our prayers for those who are hurting. It reminds us that we are to pray about our everyday affairs and the everyday affairs of those who are going through difficult times. Often when people are facing difficulties that look beyond the simple and routine matters of life. They don’t eat properly. They don’t get sufficient sleep. They overlook time with loved ones. Paul understood that all of life is to be lived under God’s watchful eye. Nothing is too small to bring to his attention. If it matters to you, it matters to him.

It carries another implication, too. Sometime we need to be with people in order to know what to pray and what to do. Prayer is about action as much as talking. Whenever I ask anyone to help and hear “I’ll pray about that,” I know to starting working on plan B. John Perkins says, “When you see someone who needs a handicap ramp, don’t go pray for a ramp! Build them a ramp.” If we were to listen to our prayer, “God, why don’t you do something?” we might hear God say, “I did do something. I made you.”

Pray specifically (v. 10). Paul prays, “. . . and supply what is lacking in your faith.” Paul had a particular goal in mind for the believers of Thessalonica. He wanted to supply or complete or make new what was lacking in their faith. The word *supply*, often translated *restore*, was used for mending torn nets so they would be ready for the next day’s fishing expedition and for setting broken bones so that healing would enable the person to live healthily. The same word is used in Galatians 6:1 for restoring sinning saints and in Ephesians 4:12 for equipping all the saints for the work of ministry.

Supplying or equipping is what an equipment manager does before the start of a football game. He makes sure the players have their helmets because if they go into the game without a helmet, they are going to get clobbered in the head.

In praying for those who are facing hard times, request that they are spiritually prepared for the battle. Difficulties test our faith. Satan seeks a crack in our spiritual armor to inflict damage on our physical life and our character. Pray that hurting people are spiritually protected.

Study 2

Praying for People Facing Hard Times—Part B

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

In seminary a professor would always say, “Be kind to the people you minister to, they all are going through hard times.” We all face difficulties, adversity, pain, hardship, confusion, and problems. Whoever said that becoming a Christian would cause all your problems to go away was a liar.

As we continue this study about praying for people facing hard times, let me encourage you to—

Pray for compassion (v. 12). Paul begs God on behalf of the Thessalonians, “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you” (v. 12). The goal of the Christian life is love: love God and love people. Paul was praying that God would make their love for one another overflow so that it spills outside the banks and washes the hearts of anyone and everyone that comes in contact with them. It’s not enough to be kind and polite. Our love must constantly be growing, ever extending outwards toward others.

Why would Paul pray for their compassion toward others? Usually, when we are faced with difficulties and hard times our focus turns inward, doesn’t it? We become self-absorbed and self-centered. It is all about our problems, our loss, our worries, our struggles. We hardly have time for others. Paul was praying that that wouldn’t be the case for the Thessalonians. He was praying that their love for one another would not be the casualty of hard times.

Pray for their strength (v. 13). Paul prays that God will “strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones” (v. 13). The word *strengthen* means to buttress something, like the famous “flying buttresses” of cathedrals in Europe. Our hearts must have a strong foundation, one that is free of cracks, flaws, and weak areas, if we are going to stand strong in the time of trial. Nothing reveals the true condition of the heart like difficulty, setbacks, opposition and hardship. Most of us can be strong while the sun is shining and life is good, but when the thunder clouds of trouble rumble overhead, all the inner flaws are likely to be revealed. Whatever is in the heart must come out eventually. If there is anger in the heart, or greed or lust, they will come out most surely in difficult times. By the same token, if there is love and kindness and

forgiveness and mercy, that will also be revealed. And nowhere will your heart be on clearer display than in the trials of life.

Pray that believer's hearts will be "blameless and holy." In other words, that their hearts will be pure, set apart, and different than the people in the world.

So when you pray for people facing hard times, ask God to make them strong in their weak places so that they will be strong and endure the difficulties, like the house built on the rock.

Pray anticipating (v. 13). In the back of Paul's mind was the visible, bodily return of the Lord. He prayed knowing that one day "our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones." It is helpful to remember that one of two things will eventually happen, either we will die or Jesus will return and take us to heaven. Either way, on that day we will be free of difficulties and our hard times will turn to joy. Even though Jesus did not return in Paul's lifetime, and obviously, he has not come yet, with each passing moment his return grows more and more imminent. Knowing that Jesus will return, our problems and hardships are put into perspective. They will pass away. They will not linger for eternity. The by-product of the "blessed hope" of Christ's return is that our problems will cease when we are with Jesus.

Consider the words of S. D. Gordon: "The greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is to pray. It is not the only thing. But it is the chief thing. The great people of the earth today are the people who pray—not those who talk about prayer; nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor those who can explain about prayer; but those who take time to pray." (Prayer Powerpoints, p. 184)

Think about this for a moment. You are where you are today because somebody prayed for you. Somebody prayed and you came to Christ. Somebody prayed and you found a job. Somebody prayed and you were healed. Somebody prayed and you won a game. Somebody prayed and you were rescued in the middle of the night. Somebody prayed and your marriage was saved. Somebody prayed and you didn't give up. Somebody prayed and you made the right decision. Somebody prayed and you experienced God's power. No one knows how much sin and sorrow we've been saved from because somebody prayed for us.

With that in mind, it's your turn to pray for those people who are facing hard times. And, when you do:

Pray constantly: Don't stop praying for them.

Pray earnestly: Let your prayers boil over with intensity.

Pray practically: Look for the everyday things you can pray for them.

Pray specifically: Pray that they will be equipped and prepared in facing the battle before them.

Pray for their compassion: Pray that they will be less self-focused and more other-focused.

Pray for their strength: Pray that they will be blameless and holy in all that they do.

Pray with anticipation: That one day Jesus will return or we will die, either way, our troubles will be over.

Study 3

Praying for Leaders in High Places

Nehemiah 1:4-11

Oswald Sanders in his classic book, *Spiritual Leadership*, states: "Because leadership is the ability to move and influence people, the spiritual leader will be alert to discover the most effective way of doing that. . . . (quoting Hudson Taylor) 'it is possible to move men, through God, by prayer alone.' . . . In prayer, we deal directly with God and only in a secondary sense with men and women. The goal of prayer is the ear of God. Prayer influences men by influencing God to influence them. It is not the prayer that moves men, but the God to whom we pray."

Never was this statement truer than in the life of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a man of prayer and understood the power of prayer. It is obvious that Nehemiah was a man of faith who depended wholly on the Lord to help him accomplish his work. The book of Nehemiah opens and closes with prayer, containing twelve instances of prayer recorded in this book. Those instances can be found in 1:5-11, 2:4, 4:4-5, 4:9, 5:19, 6:9, 6:14, 9:5-37, 13:14, 13:22, 13:29, 13:31.

While in Susa as the servant of the king, Nehemiah had learned of the desolate condition of the Jews and the deplorable condition of the wall in Jerusalem. He had sensed God's leading him to go to Jerusalem to lead the construction project. But the king stood in his way. Nehemiah was the servant. Artaxerxes was the king. Kings make demands of servants. Servants do not make demands of kings. But Nehemiah was a man of prayer who prayed for people in high places.

In Nehemiah 1:5-11, Nehemiah prays for an open door with the king.

He focused on God (v. 5). He begins his prayer by ascribing praise to God. The title "God of heaven" is the title Cyrus used for the Lord when he announced that the Jews could return to their land (Ezra 1:1-2). The heathen God's were but idols on the earth, but the God of Jews was the Lord in heaven. Nehemiah began his prayer in much the same way as Jesus modeled prayer for us: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name" (Matt. 6: 9).

This statement reveals the secret of his faith. His faith was not in men or things or money or position, but in God. You can only have faith in someone to the degree that you know them. In particular you must know two things about them: That they are *able* and that they are *willing* to do

what you want them to do. These are the two attributes that Nehemiah saw in God. God is the “great and awesome God” that can do everything. And, God “keeps his covenant of love” who *will* do anything. Nehemiah doubted neither his power nor his kindness. His God could. And his God would.

When we understand who God is and what he is capable of doing we can only respond to such a great and awesome God by “loving him and obeying his commands.” God is the covenant making God. He loves us. We in return love him. It is a love relationship that we are in with God. We talk to God, not as a distant monarch who cares little about our plight on earth. Rather we talk to God as a Father who loves us with an everlasting love and wants nothing but the best for us. And, since he loves us so deeply we respond to him in obedience. We are ready and willing to follow his lead and his direction.

He confessed his part in the problem (vv. 6-7). Look closely at what Nehemiah is praying. It differs radically from anything most of us have ever heard. He confesses other people's sins as though they were his own. Notice the word “we.” “I confess the sin . . .”

“we Israelites, including myself and my father's house have committed toward you. . .

“We have acted very wickedly toward you. . . .

“We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.”

Examples of identifying with the people would be: Daniel in Daniel 9:5-6 and Jesus in Matthew 3:15. Great leaders identify themselves with the people for whom they are praying.

Nehemiah had a sense of corporate responsibility which most of us lack today. We are individual members of the church. We don't confess the church's failure as our own. Joshua 7:1 (Achan sinned at Jericho. The sin of the one man was the sin of the whole nation.)

A few years ago, when the “media scandals” brought great reproach to the church, Warren Wiersbe wrote in his book *The Integrity Crisis*:

To begin with, the integrity crisis involves more than a few people who were accused of moral and financial improprieties. The integrity crisis involves the whole church. I am not saying that people didn't sin, nor am I preaching “collective guilt,” whatever that is. I only want to emphasize that, in the body of Christ, we

belong to one another, we affect one another, and we can't escape one another. The press did not create the crisis, the church did; and the church will have to solve it.

He claimed the promise of God (vv. 8-9). The promise was two-fold: If Israel disobeyed, God would punish by sending them to a foreign land; when the time of captivity was ended, God would bring the Jews back to Jerusalem.

Nehemiah's quoting of Old Testament reminds us of the importance of knowing scripture and using scripture in our prayer.

He petitioned God (v. 11). Curiously, Nehemiah has not so far asked God for anything. And, when he does it seems utterly trivial. "Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man" (v. 11). *Today* refers to an opportunity. *Him* is a reference to Nehemiah himself. *This man* obviously refers to King Artaxerxes for whom Nehemiah was cupbearer. *Favor* would be the permission for Nehemiah to go to Jerusalem, along with the provisions for the project to rebuild the wall and protection as he traveled there. Without official authority to govern, an official guard for the journey, and the right to use material from the king's forest, the entire project was destined to fail. Maybe Nehemiah knew another Bible verse: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases" (Prov. 21:1 NIV).

The word *success* grabs my attention. Nehemiah boldly requested God's to help him succeed. Here's the idea intertwined in the word: "Help me find that place in the center of your will where heavenly prosperity rests." Nehemiah's request is specific, but does not box God in. It allowed God room to work.

He looked for an opportunity (2:1-9). Nehemiah had been praying for four months after learning of the plight of the Jews in Jerusalem for an opportunity to speak to the King. Nehemiah's journal opens in the month of Kislev (Neh. 1:1) and resumes in the month of Nisan (Neh. 2:1). Kislev is December; Nisan is April. For four months Nehemiah prayed and nothing happened. For four months the hope of an opportunity to return to Jerusalem seemed to be dashed on the rocks of disappointment like a sailboat caught in a hurricane. But just when hope was almost gone there was a glimmer of light.

The door opened. Nehemiah took a deep breath, feeling the strength of God, and asked the king, "If it is alright with you, may I go to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall?"

Nehemiah saw an opportunity. He took advantage of it. He was granted permission to leave. He went to Jerusalem all because he prayed.

Would the king have granted Nehemiah permission to go to Jerusalem had he not been praying? Perhaps, but we have no guarantee. We do, however, have an example: The power of God was triggered by prayer. God opened the heart of King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah was granted permission to rebuild the wall in Jerusalem. And, the key that unlocked that door was prayer.

Study 4

Praying that We Will Do More for God

1 Chronicles 4:9-10

Have you ever wanted to do more for God? Have you ever wanted a bigger vision? Have you ever wanted to make a greater impact?

In the Old Testament we find such a person. He is relatively obscure. If you read fast you might pass over him unnoticed. He stands out because of his praying. His life story takes up only two verses. His name is Jabez, which means pain. His account is found in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10. He wanted to do more and more for God. "And god granted his request" (v. 10).

Among the myriad of names, over 500 in all, tucked away in the first few chapters of 1 Chronicles, the name of Jabez stands out. This man gained the attention of the Chronicler because of his reputation. One is known for what he or she does the most. Jabez was known as a man of prayer. He had made prayer not only a habit, but a way of life.

John Hyde of India made prayer such a dominant characteristic of his life that he was nicknamed "Praying Hyde." Because he prayed Christianity made substantial inroads into the country of India.

George Mueller, a native of Germany, did not believe there was a God until he was 21. When he was converted he instantly decided to give his life to his new-found Christ. A few years later he moved to Bristol, England. He began the work for which he was to become famous—the care of orphans. He began with a handful of children and soon there were as many as 2,100 children. Through the years this man actually prayed for every need every day. He kept a diary. He told no one of his needs. He did not have someone in charge of raising money. He did not publish a brochure. He did not have any direct mail campaigns. He simply told the Lord: "I need this for your work." The Lord provided him 7.5 million dollars. He educated 123,000 students throughout the world. He supported 189 missionaries. He hired 112 men and women as assistants.

Some commentators indicated that Jabez's prayer is a selfish prayer. Others say it is an un-Christian prayer. Granted there is more to prayer than what Jabez prayed. But it does provide us with an example of how we should pray for ourselves. There are four specifics to his prayer.

Pray for God's blessings. Jabez prayed, "Oh, that you would bless me" (v. 10). How often have you heard someone pray using the word *bless*?

People often ask God to bless their lives, the food, the offering, the church, etc. What does it mean to ask for God's blessing. In a Biblical sense, a blessing is an act of God by which he causes someone or something to supernaturally produce more than would be naturally possible. To ask for God's blessing is a prayer of the supernatural. The normal Christian life is a supernatural life. The ordinary is the extraordinary.

But notice that Jabez left it up to God to decide what the blessing would be and where, when, and how it would come.

Pray for greater influence. Jabez prayed, “. . . and enlarge my territory” (v. 10). A person's territory marks the limit of his influence. This was a prayer for lengthened influence and heightened opportunity. It is praying big and boldly. Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, stated, “It brings no honor to God to ask for peanuts, when he wants to give us continents.” Phillips Brooks wrote, “Pray the largest prayers. You cannot think a prayer so large that God, in answering it, will not wish you had made it larger. Pray not for crutches but for wings.”

Bruce Wilkinson, author of *The Prayer of Jabez*, wrote, “To pray for larger borders is to ask for a miracle—it's that simple. A miracle is an intervention by God to make something happen that wouldn't normally happen.”

Pray for God's guidance. Jabez prayed, “Let your hand be with me” (v. 10). God's hand is a picture of God's guidance in one's life. How foolish to ask for God's blessing and lengthened influence without God's hand of leadership and direction. Jabez was not on a power trip. He was giving God an open hand with his life. He was asking to be controlled, directed, and taken over by the hand of God.

Pray for God's protection. Jabez prayed, “. . . and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain” (v. 10). Jabez is not praying that evil might be kept from him, but that he might be kept from evil. He is not praying that he would be exposed to evil but that he would not succumb to evil. This is a prayer of protection.

A powerful prayer is a specific prayer. It brings no honor or answers to pray vague and general prayers.

Jabez is begging. He is pleading. He knows that if God does not come through he is doomed.

Have you ever prayed prayers like that? Usually it takes a tragedy or a loss or a sickness before we get that intense.

Jabez was that intense about God using him to do something great in the world.

What would happen if we got that intense with our prayers?

Jabez prayed. And God answered. "And God granted his request" (v. 10).

Answered prayer is not abnormal; it is normal. It is not unusual; it can be an everyday experience. It is not to be marvel at, but to be expected.

Someone once said, "When we work, we work; but when we pray, God works." An English archbishop once observed, "It's amazing how many coincidences occur when one begins to pray."

Study 5

Praying for God to be Famous

1 Kings 18:36-39

God delights in taking people who may or may not have accomplished something and making these people into mighty channels of his power and might when they act in accordance with all that he has spoken in his Word.

Such was the case with Elijah.

Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. The people of Israel were following the false religion of Baal. They had abandoned the Lord's commands. They were wavering between two Gods: Baal and the Lord. Elijah proposed a contest, where two altars would be set up. The prophets of Baal, all 450 of them along with another 450 prophets of Asherah, would pray for Baal to send fire from heaven on their altar. Then Elijah would make the same request of the Lord. And the god who answered by fire would be the true God. The false prophets agreed, but saw no response to their all day ranting and raving.

Then Elijah set up his altar, drenched it with water, and offered a prayer (1 Kings 18:36-37). Let's examine the prayer more closely.

Elijah identifies God. "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel let it be known today that you are God in Israel" (1 Kings 18:36 NIV). Elijah, as all the great prayers in the Bible, begin with God. They focus on God. They acknowledge God.

Our God is the LORD. Notice that it is all capital letters. It is the name Yahweh, the most sacred of the names of God. The name Yahweh and its short form Yah occurs over 6,800 times in the Old Testament—more than any other word. Yahweh is God's self revelation. It means absolute being. It indicates the close, personal, revealing character of God.

Our God is the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel (or Jacob)." We read this statement a lot in scripture. What does it mean? Remember in ancient times there were a lot of gods. Each tribe or clan had a god. Each region had a god. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel was unique in that this God was not identified with a shrine, a locale, or one clan. He was a God associated with persons—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was the God of history that had entered into a covenant agreement with his people.

Elijah sees himself. “. . . and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.” The title servant reveals Elijah’s function as a prophet. He demonstrates that he has followed through on all the assignments that God had given him. He recognizes his status before a holy and righteous God. He sees himself standing in contrast to God.

Sometimes we need to be reminded that God is God and we are not. At best all we can attain to is the status of servant. It would do us well to remember the pecking order in our prayers. How often have we reversed the roles? We play the role of God demanding that God be our servant, carrying out our demands and requests.

Elijah makes a request. “Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.” The request is two-fold. First, that people will know that Yahweh is God. We find God desiring this throughout Scripture. He wants the whole world to know that he is God. He wants to be famous, to be well-known, to be renowned. Does God have an identity problem? No. God is God, who created and redeemed the world. It is his place to be known. When we pray for God’s glory and God’s honor, we are praying that the world will know that God is God. Second, we, as God’s people, play a key role in whether the world knows that God is God. It all comes back to the heart. Elijah saw that these people had turned their hearts away from God. They were following Baal. They were disgracing the name of God by turning to idols. They had lost their love for the Lord. In church vernacular, they needed to be revived. They needed to be made new again. Their hearts that were as stone cold and lifeless as that wooden altar needed to be aflame with the life giving power of God.

In his book *Revivals of Religion* Charles Finney offers seven signs of a church that is need of revival:

1. A lack of brotherly love among believers.
2. Division, jealous, and gossip are prominent.
3. A worldly spirit enters the church.
4. Some of its members fall into gross and scandalous sins.
5. Arguments break out between members.
6. Nonbelievers justly criticize the church.
7. The damnation of the lost fails to stir believers to action.

Then, the answer came in vivid demonstration. The fire fell from heaven. “Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench” (1 Kings

18:38 NIV). The fire shows the power of God who recognizes a humble servant praying for God to be known.

The people fell prostrate. “When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate . . .” (1 Kings 18:39 NIV). When you see God as he truly is, you will fall before him in humility and adoration. Could there be too much standing in our churches today? Do we need more kneeling?

The people acknowledged God as God. “. . . and cried, ‘The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!’” (1 Kings 18:39 NIV). Elijah’s prayer was answered. The people acknowledged God as God.

One lonely servant (plus the Almighty God) stood up on Mount Carmel and prayed a very simple prayer. His appeal was to the God of the fathers of that country, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. His motivation was simply that God would be known in Israel and that the people would know that he indeed was God.

Study 6

How to Pray for Your Children

Matthew 20:20-28

Catherine Booth, wife of The General William Booth, of The Salvation Army, just before she died in 1890 told her children, "I gave you all to the Lord before I had any of you. I said, "Lord, they shall be Thine down to the third and fourth generation.' . . . I covenanted from the bottom of my heart that all mine should be his, and I pleaded with him . . . till he accepted And he has been faithful."

Catherine Booth left a legacy of prayer for her children, and they have served faithfully in leadership positions for The Salvation Army around the world.

Catherine Booth knew that parents have influence on their children. They make a permanent difference in the lives of their children. They impart values, stimulate creativity, develop compassion, modify weaknesses, and nurture strengths.

Case in point: Recent Ads regarding children not to drink or have sex. "Parents talk to your children."

Fact: "Most people come to Christ before they are fourteen years old."

For Christians the greatest desire is that their child would become a member of God's kingdom and live life for his glory. Thus, prayer becomes one of the most important things a parent can do to influence their child's life.

Jesus faced a mother, the wife of Zebedee, and the mother of James and John, two of Jesus' disciples. Her story is told in Matthew 20:20-28.

Her request was made. She stated it concisely (verse 21). What an astounding request. What more could you ask of a king than to be ranked second and third in his kingdom? This woman either possessed tremendous courage and vision, or tremendous gall.

Even though most Bible teachers today give this woman little praise, there is plenty here to challenge our thinking about prayer.

She made time to ask. The woman made the time to approach Jesus—to kneel and ask. We too must take time for prayer. In Quiet Talks on Prayer, S. D. Gordon observed:

The great people of the earth are the people who pray. I do not mean those who talk about prayer; nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor yet those who can explain about prayer; but I mean those people who take time and pray. They have not time. It must be taken from something else. This something else is important—very important, and pressing, but still less important and pressing than prayer.

Unless we schedule time for serious prayer, we neglect it. Unless we use the daily occurrence of life to pray, we neglect it. Time to intercede for our children may seem scarce, but if we plan at least a brief time to pray each day, and combine prayer with routine activities, we may greatly increase the prayer we invest on our children's behalf.

She knew what she wanted. When Jesus asked this mother what she wanted, she didn't hesitate. Obviously, she had already thought about what her request would be.

What should you be praying for your children?

Salvation
Marriage Partner
Life's Vocation

Do you pray specific prayer or do you ramble in generalities? Specific prayer is needed.

She asked big. However defective her theology, this mother knew that Jesus would soon be king, so she acted to ensure that her sons would have two of the key positions in the kingdom. Even if her motives were questionable, we can learn something about asking God to do something big for our children from her example.

What is a big request?

Jesus gives the answer in verses 25-28. If we want our children to be great, we must first pray that they become servants.

Several guidelines help us check our motives and gauge whether our prayers are for God's glory or our own. As you "ask big" these guidelines may be helpful:

Pray for your children to have a place in the kingdom. Our first consideration is for our children's salvation. If they are to have a place in the kingdom of God, they must personally come to Christ and experience the new birth.

- Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine, persevered in prayer for her son. As a young man, Augustine strayed from God and became involved in a religious cult of his time. He lived a drunken, immoral life. But his mother never gave up praying for him and asking others to do so as well. He was 31 when he finally came to faith in Christ.
- Hudson Taylor's mother prayer for the salvation of her son.

Even when it seems God does not hear our prayers for our children, we must keep on praying persistently. Prayer may be our most effective ministry in our children's lives. It is never too early to begin praying for our children's salvation.

Pray that your children would be a credit to the kingdom. If our first prayer must be for our children's salvation, our second must be for their character. Praying that they would gradually mature becoming more and more like Jesus Christ.

Pray that your children would be used to promote the kingdom. God has entrusted the advancement of his kingdom to men and women whom he calls shepherds, laborers, harvesters, ambassadors, teachers, stewards, servants, and soldiers. To do this work, God looks for those who care about his concerns, his honor, and the advancement of his kingdom. This is the attitude we wanted our children to have, and we should pray to this end.

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