

*Dear God,*

*How do I give my children what they need the most? I watch birthday and Christmas presents lose favored status, wear out, and end up in the trash or a garage sale. I don't want to spend time and money on gifts that don't last. Even good parenting skills aren't enough. Is there anything that will make a lasting difference?*

*Waiting to Hear*

**Dear Waiting,  
Will you pray?**

**The God Who Hears**

# Prayer: The Gift That Lasts

*Prayer seeks the presence of God  
and releases the power of God.*

—Stormie Omartian, *The Power of a Praying Parent*

“Inoperable cancer,” the doctor said. The words hung like flies permanently caught in a spider web. Kay, 30-year-old wife and mother, could not disengage herself from the death grip of the diagnosis. What about Lisa, her 18-month-old daughter? As a mother, she had applauded Lisa’s first words, cheered her first steps, laughed at her first expressions, and enjoyed the emergence of her unique and delightful personality. There was so much of this little girl’s life ahead and so little of her own left.

In what would become the last three months of Kay’s life, she prayed often for Lisa. She prayed that she would come to know God in a special way. She especially prayed that Lisa would lose her traumatic insecurities demonstrated by an unrelenting fear of the church nursery.

When Kay died, she took her dreams for future motherhood with her—but she left her prayers with God. Prayer is the gift that does not die. I know, because I stepped into the circle of love from which Lisa came when I married Lisa’s father. I became Lisa’s “new” mother. I have been first-person witness to the answers of Kay’s prayers for Lisa. For example, Lisa developed a spiritual sensitivity early in direct contrast to increasing learning problems. In addition, God gave Lisa an abundant sense of security, which she has needed in her life that has been limited by a tangled set of disabilities. I thank God for Kay’s

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prayers, because I have had the opportunity to build upon them. I have never been more convinced that prayer is the most important gift we can give our kids. The prayers we pray stay in God's heart forever. They never die.

Too many of us are novices when it comes to prayer. We're kindergarten students dealing with high school trigonometry problems when we barely know basic arithmetic. At least that's what it feels like. When the stakes are high and we know we must depend on prayer to make a difference, do we know how to make that difference through prayer?

From the beginning, Old Testament and New Testament writers attributed many things to prayer:

- Isaac prayed about his wife's barrenness, and she became pregnant (Gen. 25:21).
- David prayed about the plague devastating Israel, and the plagues stopped (2 Sam. 24:25).
- Hezekiah prayed about the illness that threatened his life, and God healed him (2 Kings 20:5).
- Isaiah prayed for protection from Israel's enemy, and God took care of the enemy (2 Chron. 32:20-21).

These prayers resulted in changed circumstances, restored health, and gave protection from enemies. They came from people who believed that God had right answers to the cries of their hearts. That certainly covers the ground we cross in parenting.

However, nowhere does Scripture tell us that we control the answers to our prayers for our children or ourselves. Nowhere does the Bible promise that we can obtain a detailed printout to tell us how circumstances will change if we pray. Instead, the Bible encourages us to pray often, always, and without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).

To be honest, crisis sends me to prayer more quickly than anything else. It's when nothing is working that I think about praying. Unfortunately, when I can think of something to try to solve a problem or relieve a situation, I usually try it before prayer. I look back over my years of parenting, and I cringe to remember when I spoke or acted before I prayed. I worried before I prayed. I looked in a book or called a friend before I prayed.

**If I really believe that prayer makes the biggest difference, shouldn't I pray first?**

**What do you do first?**

When your child has a problem, what is your first response? Prioritize the following list based on what you actually do most of the time, not on what you wish you did.

- \_\_\_ Talk about the problem.
- \_\_\_ Talk about your child with a friend.
- \_\_\_ Worry about what will happen.
- \_\_\_ Blame someone for the problem.
- \_\_\_ Pray about what your first response should be.
- \_\_\_ Take a guilt trip over your shortcomings as a parent.
- \_\_\_ Seek advice from a friend.
- \_\_\_ Read or reread a book on parenting.
- \_\_\_ Lecture your child about what he or she should do.
- \_\_\_ Look for wisdom from God's Word.

**Another Question**

When your child is in some difficulty and you come to the place of praying, what is the focus of your prayer? Do any of your prayers start like this?

*Lord, don't let . . .*

*Why did this have to happen?*

*What are we going to do if . . . ?*

Do you know what the problem with those prayers is? They all focus on circumstances. Nothing breeds more fear than focusing on circumstances. That's because we have no control over circumstances. The choices our children make often create circumstances outside of our control. Or someone else's choice creates a circumstance we can't change. Accidents and health changes are other forms of circumstances that we can't manipulate. What do we do then? How do we pray in the face of circumstances we can't control?

Instead of focusing on the destructive details from circumstances, we need to focus on God. We need to pray the questions that will bring us transformational answers. We need to pray transformational questions. We need to ask God, *What do you need from me? How can I pray for this? How can I change my attitude about this? How do you want me to help?* God will always answer those questions, because the answers will transform us. Besides, the answers to those questions will make more difference than anything a mere circumstance can bring about.

### Praying Transformational Questions

Transformational prayers ask questions that obedience answers. They don't accuse anyone. They don't focus on circumstances. They can't be answered with new information about circumstantial changes. When you're ready to obey, you will pray questions that God will answer with instructions that only you can follow.

#### Examples

*What do you need me to do now?*

*What is the next step?*

*What will make a difference?*

*How can I do what you want?*

*How can I help the most?*

*How can I stay calm or endure or be quiet or speak the truth in love?*

*How do you want me to pray for this?*

*How can I pray in cooperation with your will?*

**What transformational question do you need to be praying right now?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Contrary to what some think, we don't pray to change our children. We pray to change ourselves. Our changed attitudes and actions can influence changes in our children's responses and decisions. However, it isn't always immediate, nor does it always happen the way we want.

## **Why Pray?**

We know that the Bible tells us to pray. We know that prayer is the right thing to do. But do we know why? I've talked to parents who innocently ask, "If God knows everything that will happen, how can my prayer make a difference?" That's a circumstance-based question. The answer to why we pray isn't about circumstances. It's about transformation—our transformation first. That's why we need to review the following key principles.

### **1. Prayer connects me to the one who knows everything.**

As parents, we don't like to admit that we don't know everything. Some days it feels as if we know nothing. Since God knows everything, we need Him to tell us what we need to know or do. No one else sees the whole picture. No one else understands how our part fits into a bigger scheme. No one else sees the end from the beginning. It's an exercise in futility to pretend that our partial and completely limited information is enough to make a difference in our children's lives. We need God's all-knowing direction.

It's easier to depend on our human knowledge: what we think or feel or have experienced. However, when we do, we risk allowing something other than trust in God to control our actions and reactions. It could be fear, a desire to control, a need to be accepted, or a host of other insecurities that can influence our perceptions and our actions. That's why we need the connection to the only one who knows everything. That's why we pray.

God knows everything. He doesn't get any of His information from us or any other counselor. While we can't know everything God knows, He'll share wisdom with us. However, there's a stipulation. We must be obedient and discerning if we're to receive His wisdom. Remember James 1:6? We can't come to God ex-

**What do the following scriptures say that God knows?**Isa. 40:14 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_Rom. 11:33-36 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_Dan. 2:21-22 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

pecting to pick and choose what we like from what He tells us. We must always operate on a prior commitment to obey whatever He says.

It's not that we forget that God knows everything. We just don't act on that knowledge. We parent our children through school problems, dating problems, marriage problems, and job problems. Again and again, we realize that we don't know everything. That's what scares us. Out of fear we struggle to know just a little more than we do. Actually, the only information we need is a correct understanding of what's *really* happening. While we can collect facts about a situation or a person, we can't always verify motives. We continue to bump into what we don't know.

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*Praying for our boys has taught me  
a lot about trust and surrender.*

—Gary Sivewright

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Of course, we pray about it. We want God to add some specific knowledge to our information. We want to know if Susie is going to get Mrs. Dunn as her second-grade teacher. We want to know if John will get the promotion he needs. However, prayer is not simply a way to get new information. In fact, one of the first things we need to do when we pray is surrender our need to know the future. That very act of submission connects us to

everything God knows. Of course, that doesn't mean that God will tell us what we think we want to know. He promises to tell us what we can obey. That's all He has ever asked of us: to obey what we know. It should comfort us to realize that we don't have to know something more. We just have to obey. We rest in the knowledge that God knows, and because He knows, we don't have to. What He understands about your child is always correct. His perceptions are never off base.

Applying this understanding to prayer means that I ask myself, *Does God have enough knowledge to deal with this crisis or difficulty?* When I remind myself that He does, then I don't have to know any more than He reveals. When I pray to the one who knows everything, He provides me with discerning wisdom that helps me pray for the true need of my child. He protects me from praying just to remove the symptoms of a problem. He guides me to pray based on the realities that He sees even when they're different from the ones I see.

*Lord,*

*We're glad you're our Father. When we come to you with things we don't understand about our children, you understand. We thank you for your Word and the way it guides us in dealing with our children. You give us the wisdom we need just when we need it, and we rejoice. We're privileged to call you Father and to know that we can bring our concerns to you.*

*Grateful for your wisdom,  
A mother leaning on you,  
Ina Strait*

## **For Example**

What if I'm concerned that my son or daughter is getting involved in a relationship with the wrong person? First of all, as I remember that God knows everything, I must also acknowledge that He knows what made my child desperate for this companionship. Recognizing that He knows what I don't know motivates

me to ask Him for the wisdom to discern my child's true need. The true need may be insecurity, poor self-esteem, desire for acceptance. While I may not be able to meet that need, I can cooperate with God's ways for meeting that need. Furthermore, when I focus on a true need, I'll be less likely to respond in ways that push my child to embrace the wrong relationship more deeply.

### **The First Critical Prayer**

*Protect my mouth from speaking anything but  
your wisdom.*

*May my attitudes reflect that you know  
what I do not.*

*Protect me from responding out of fear  
about the situation.*

*Help me demonstrate my confidence in  
your all-knowledge.*

*Give me insight into the true needs  
of my child as you see them.*

*Help me develop the relationship that  
encourages my child to talk about needs.*

## **2. Prayer connects me to the only one who loves my child more than I do.**

Parental love is strong. It makes a grown man make crazy faces and play with bunny rabbits just to get a smile from his new baby. It makes mothers stay up all night and not complain about it. It produces superhuman strength when a child's life depends on it.

And where did parental love come from? Who was the first parent? God, of course. We can love our children only as deeply as we have learned that God loves us.

God's love is an everlasting love that draws us to Him. It's a lavish, undeserved love that makes us His children. It's not an assumed love—it's a demonstrated love. God gave us the best evidence of His love when He gave His Son to be a complete model and message of His deep love.

**Describe God's love with the following verses:**

Jer. 31:3 \_\_\_\_\_

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1 John 3:1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1 John 4:9 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Rom. 8:35-39 \_\_\_\_\_

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## **We Can Trust His Love**

I'll never forget the look of absolute horror on a mother's face when I talked about trusting my daughter completely to God. "I could never do that," she said as if I had just suggested abusive treatment. She really believed that no one else, including God, could defend, protect, explain, instruct, or nurture her child the way she could. After all, she was the mother. Isn't mother love strong enough to do it all?

I think most of us realize that parental love has its limits. But do we realize that God's love does not? Do we really believe that God's love is kind, lavish, relational, demonstrative, stable, powerful, and never fails? As we take our children to God in prayer, we take them to the one who loves them better and more deeply and more perfectly than we ever could. What a relief! If my child's spiritual growth and maturity depends on my love expressing itself perfectly all the time, we're in big trouble. And so are you.

The good news is that it doesn't. The one who demonstrates the nature, meaning, and ways of love, loves our children *with* us, *through* us, and sometimes *for* us. The question is *Can you trust that God's love is enough to make a difference in whatever your child faces?* We take our children to God through prayer to remind ourselves that we're not our children's last hope. God

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loves them so much more than we do. Prayer helps us find the way to cooperate with a love bigger than our own.

### **3. Prayer connects me to the one who has all resources to help.**

I'm always brainstorming. I feel that I need options when I face a difficult situation. That's a strength *and* a weakness. As a strength, it protects me from tunnel vision. But as a weakness, it tempts me to solve problems on my own, asking for God's blessing after I have decided what to do. Instead, I need to pray as a way of reviewing the resources God has at His disposal. I need to be conscious of those unlimited resources as I bring my child to God.

#### **Describe God's problem-solving abilities from the following verses:**

Jer. 32:27 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Ps. 33:6, 9 \_\_\_\_\_

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Mark 10:27 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Eph. 1:19-20 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

God is a problem-solving God. No problem is too hard for Him. His words were powerful enough to create a whole world. Whatever He does lasts. Impossibilities don't daunt Him. No help we get from anyone else can compare to the problem-solving power God has to share with us. It's the same power that raised Jesus to life. It's always life-giving power.

However, there's a catch. God can trust us with His power and resources only as long as we surrender *all* control. He can't

give His answers or power to someone who would misuse them. That means we have to give up our expectations about details, changed circumstances, and timing. It means we can't yield to any part of manipulation.

The question is not *Can God's resources make a difference?* The question is *How does God want to use His resources through me to make a difference?* How does God want to use creation power, resurrection power, and all-things-possible power to make a difference?

**Before you pray, ask yourself the following questions.**

1. Can I apply Jesus' name to what I'm asking? (Matt. 6:9)
2. Does what I ask connect directly to God's will as revealed in Scripture? (1 John 5:14)
3. Have I released all expectations and control so that God can use me as a channel for His power and resources? (Heb. 12:1)
4. Have I surrendered all time factors to God? (Ps. 31:15)
5. Am I demonstrating changes that God makes in my life so that my child will want to know more about God and His ways? (1 Cor. 11:1)
6. Am I harboring any unforgiveness toward my child or another person that can block God's ability to use me? (Mark 11:25)

## **Waiting Room Praying**

In our instant-gratification society, we want quick fixes and immediate results. Since God does not operate by our timing, His answers to our prayers often send us to waiting rooms. What seems like an emergency to us is not to Him.

Have you watched people pass time in hospital waiting rooms? I have. They sleep, read books, thumb through magazines, make conversation, or stare mindlessly into open space.

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They act as if all time and responsibilities have stopped even when some emergency and frenzied activity placed them there.

Waiting for answers to our prayers should not be like hospital waiting rooms. While waiting for God's answers, we don't pass the time doing nothing. Sometimes the lessons we learn during a waiting period are the biggest part of God's answer to our prayer. That means our waiting times should be productive and full. Find a new way to express your love to your child. Resist the temptation to do something in order to get a certain response. It could be as simple as a compliment or as tangible as participating in a child's favorite activity.

Look for your steps of obedience during a waiting time. Ask God to keep your mouth from sin (Ps. 39:1). Ask Him for ways to protect you from worrying or demonstrating any other lack of trust (Phil. 4:6-7). You can also seek out a friend with whom you can share your concern. Rather than talking about the problem, ask your friend for guidance about the way you're focusing your prayer. Talk more about God than about the problem.

Another very important part of a waiting period can be the prayers you pray for yourself. Whatever you're asking God to do in the life of your child, ask Him to meet a similar need in your own life. If you're asking God to help your child make right decisions, pray it for yourself as well. If you're asking God to protect your child from temptation, ask it for yourself as well.

### **What can I do while I wait for an answer to prayer?**

1. I can surround my child with love.
2. I can affirm my child's strengths.
3. I can look for my part of obedience.
4. I can seek counsel from another Christian about the focus of my prayer.
5. I can ask God to answer in my life whatever I'm praying for in the life of my child.

*The most important lesson I have learned  
about praying for my children is God's  
sense of timing and learning to wait.*

—Ina Strait

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Why pray? We pray to remind ourselves that God knows everything, loves more deeply than we can, and has more resources to make a difference than anything we can do alone. We pray to find what obedience God needs from us that will make the biggest difference in the lives of our children. We pray to make eternal deposits into their lives. We pray because nothing else we will ever do will last longer. We pray to give them a gift that will last.

### **Your Turn**

- Go back to “What do you do first?” What do you want your first response to be? How could you remind yourself to respond differently? (Examples: a note on the bathroom mirror or a symbol conspicuously placed.)
- Write down an example of a transformational prayer question you could be praying right now.
- As you pray for your children this week, pray through these questions first:
  1. Do I believe that God’s knowledge is more accurate than mine? Where have I acted as if my knowledge was enough?
  2. Can I trust that God’s love can make a difference? How can I cooperate more specifically with the way He loves my child?
  3. Am I giving God a pure heart so that He can release His power and resources through me?
- Write a prayer for yourself based on the three principles about God’s all-knowledge, all-love, and all-resources. Pray it every day.

*My Prayer*



*With this in mind, we constantly pray for you . . .  
that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose  
of yours and every act prompted by your faith.*

—2 Thess. 1:11