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Praying for Your Kids

Guest: Nancy Guthrie
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Bob: Nancy Guthrie believes that as parents we should be regularly praying for our children—no matter what age they are. She also believes we need to be praying for them at a deeper level.

Nancy: We tend to allow our prayers to be so circumstance driven. Whatever circumstance is going on in our child's life—we're just praying; and then, of course, we figure out what the best outcome is, as if we know. Sometimes, we even give God a timeline; you know? "I need You to do this, and I need You to do it by then so that this happens." So, the scriptures are what help us to pray, I think, into the deeper things—that they would become the kind of people God wants them to be.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I'm Bob Lepine. We're going to talk today with Nancy Guthrie about what it would look like, as parents, if our prayers for our kids were guided by scripture—how that would take us deeper. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. So, we have—I think we had a little time of confession already this week on *FamilyLife Today*. We've all confessed how bad we are at prayer—right?—how we need help in this area. I guess we confessed it to one another. I don't know if we confessed it to God. Maybe, we need to do that as well; but we are talking about, not only teaching our kids how to pray, but we also want to talk this week about praying for our kids.

Is that something that you just—you naturally and instinctively as a mom; or is that something that you have to think about? Does it just happen spontaneously, or are you intentional with it?

Ann: I think I've become disciplined in it as they come to my mind. It used to be that I would worry and fret; but now, I take those thoughts captive, and I take them before God. I kind of surrender them to God; but that has been a practice of discipline for me.

Bob: What about for you, Dave?

Dave: It's a plea of desperation. I think as a dad when you just—you have nowhere turn; and you're like—"God, You know better. You are with them. I lift them up." It

became a daily—I mean when they were first born, of course; but then, boy-oh-boy, you hit the teenage years—and even now as they’re adults.

Ann: As adults.

Bob: Well, “the even now”—when they are home as teenagers, you can kind of say, “Well, I don’t need to pray. I can work. I can make something happen here.”

Ann: You’re right.

Bob: When they become adults, it’s kind of like—“I don’t have as much influence as I used to have.”

Dave: Right.

Bob: “God, help”; right?

Ann: Yes; that’s the desperate plea.

Bob: We’ve got Nancy Guthrie joining us this week. Welcome back to *FamilyLife Today*.

Nancy: Thank you. So glad to be with you.

Bob: Nancy has written a book to help parents teach their kids about prayer called *What Every Child Should Know About Prayer*, but she also wrote a book—this is a one-year book, *Praying Through the Bible for Your Kids*. You were telling us earlier, this is a book that you went to the publisher and said, “Please let me write this book.”

Nancy: Absolutely. You know, I was in a place in my parenting—we were going through some difficult things, and I realized a number of things. First of all, just as you all have said, I realized I was doing a whole lot more worrying than praying.

Ann: Yes.

Nancy: But I also realized something else about myself which is that, if I operated on solely just going to prayer / pouring out what I wanted and what I thought was best—here is the thing: My desires for my child are shaped by many things, and not all of them are good.

I mean I think most of us as parents would admit—especially in this social media age—I mean you get on social media, and you see what’s happening in other families lives. You think, “Oh, boy, I wish that was happening in my child’s life”; right? Or you just watch—I mean it’s so easy to be competitive, even about this thing—right—or to fall into comparison.

So, I realized, “You know, my desires for my child aren’t necessarily shaped by what God’s desires are for my child.” So, I need the Bible to be shaping what I am praying for my child, not just my own desires. I need those to get shaped by the word of God.

So, what I did was I went to Tyndale. I said, “What I’d like to figure out—if I can do—would be to work my way through a one-year Bible reading plan and find something in every day’s reading that would not only provide a challenge to parents or some insight about parenting; but then would create the basis for a prayer in which I could blanks so that they could pray that passage of scripture for their child.” You see, what that does—it makes the scripture’s priorities for our kids our priority rather than our own.

So, that’s what I began to do. I began working my way through this one-year Bible reading plan looking for something every day. You know, sometimes, it’s about your parenting; and sometimes, it’s about you as the parent—and then creating these prayers to then be able to insert their child’s name so that we’re praying for the things to happen in our child’s life that God wants to happen in His children’s lives.

Ann: Let me give you an example of this. One of the things that you pointed out this day was in Acts 2:36-39. At the end, you have a prayer which reads: “Spirit, speak to ____” —so you would insert your child’s name—“through the preaching of Your word and through my own speaking of Your word. Breakthrough the familiarity, the resistance, and the hardness and pierce ____’s heart in such a way that ____ will be willing to repent and be joyful about identifying with You.” That is a heartfelt prayer that is scripture based pleading with God.

Nancy: I’m probably not going to come up with that prayer just on my own; but if you are in that passage of Scripture that day and then you want to apply that to your kids, then it does. You think, “Yes; this is what I want to have happen in my child’s life.” That’s a good example of one thing I discovered as I worked my way through this.

So often, the prayers are asking God to give my child a love for His word because the thing is—there is no lasting change in a child’s life. There might be a little behavior modification, but there is no lasting change / there is no genuine, lasting spiritual fruit if my child does not come to love and know God’s word.

Bob: Right.

Nancy: Honestly, I mean, that might not be the first thing I would pray about—especially, we tend to—we tend to allow our prayers to be so circumstance driven. Whatever circumstance is going on in our child’s life, we’re just praying. Then, of course, we figure out what the best outcome is, as if we know. [Laughter] So, the scriptures are what help us to pray, I think, into the deeper things to create the more organic, life-giving, long-lasting transformation in our child’s life.

Dave: Have you found, as people read this book, that they apply it to more than their kids. Because as Ann was reading that prayer, I'm like—"She's prayed that for me a lot of times—that God would speak to me." But it does sound like—"Man, it'll be applicable to anybody."

Nancy: Well, I certainly hope so. As you worked your way through the book, you would also discover that I'm constantly speaking to parents because we, as parents, I think sometimes—maybe, it begins right when we get pregnant. I don't know if you remember this, Ann. Do you remember when you go pregnant and somehow the word gets out to all of the diaper companies—

Ann: Yes.

Nancy: —and—

Ann: Formula.

Nancy: —formula companies; right. You start getting magazines and coupons in the mail. They, like, know; right?

Ann: Right.

Nancy: So, immediately, you start getting all these magazines; and it's all "Five Steps to...."

Ann: Oh, yes.

Nancy: "Here's how you going to get your child to eat right and"—

Ann: Sleep right.

Nancy: —"sleep right. Give them good self-esteem"—all of these things. Somehow, I think that makes us think as parents—nobody ever tells us this outrightly—but we get the idea: "If I do this right, then my child's going to turn out 'right.'"

Bob: There's a formula.

Nancy: There's a formula.

Bob: If we just follow the formula, it'll work.

Nancy: It's up to you. So, if your kids are struggling, what does that do to us as parents? We become convinced, "I didn't do it right."

Ann: Right.

Nancy: There is an overwhelming sense of failure that comes upon us as parents when our kids are struggling. So, you know, another message throughout the book is the message of the grace of God for imperfect parents because you know what? There is only ever been one perfect parent. If you think about it, He had rebellious children.

Bob: Yes; that's right.

Nancy: Adam and Eve, the nation of Israel—there is good news in this for us as parents who are so hard on ourselves wanting to be good parents—but even wanting to be perfect parents.

So, we need to see God the Father. He has had rebellious children. Then we need to see Jesus the Son—this one who took upon Himself the punishment that we deserve for all of our failures, including our failures as parents, because all of us have those. Then we did fellowship with the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is the one who is working in us; and the Holy Spirit is the one we want to be working in our children's lives.

See, you mentioned earlier, Ann. We think we can control these things.

I think one of the things that drove me to write this book and to want to pray more is at a point—I think when your kids are still in your house, you can convince yourself that if you do start doing the right things / if you figure it out, that you've still got control. It's not until your kids move out of your house—and as you mentioned, they move into young adulthood—all of the sudden, you realize, "I don't have control." I mean we were kidding ourselves to think we did earlier when they were in our house; but it is, as they become young adults, we really realize it.

I think the other thing we realize—certainly, I did was—the things I need to happen in my child's life are actually things that only God can do.

Bob: Right.

Nancy: So, that means all of my strategizing and all of my worrying isn't going to accomplish what needs to happen in my child's life. God must do it. I don't want to presume upon Him to do it. Instead, I want to pray and ask Him to do it. He's honored by that.

Bob: Nancy, I'm thinking about the prayer that Ann read from your book from Acts, Chapter 2, and I'm thinking, "Okay, if a mom is pregnant or has a newborn, this idea that God's word would do this or that they would—the sermons they'd hear or me speaking." I'm going—"They're not—they're a year old." Do you have to wait until your kids are five to start working through a book like this; and at what age, do you quit using a book like this?"

Nancy: Well, I think different days are going to hit you at a different place with your kids; but from the day you know you're pregnant, the central prayer of our heart is: "God, would You work through Your word / by Your spirit and make this child, who is going to be born spiritually dead"—

Bob: Yes.

Nancy: Our greatest need is that God would work to make that child spiritually alive. Boy, that's something to begin praying from the very beginning; and we pray it throughout their lives. We praise God when we see fruit of that. I mean, somehow—here is something else I missed. I think, somehow, I thought this parenting gig was, maybe, like 18 years long.

Bob: Right.

Ann: Why didn't they tell us?

Nancy: Nobody told us—

Ann: Right.

Nancy: —did they; right?

Ann: Exactly.

Nancy: They didn't tell us—especially, I mean, I think—when I think about our son, I think in some ways, he's needed us more as parents in his young adult years than he even did as a kid.

I mean parenting—I'm just finding—it doesn't end. As I see even parents who have children even older than I do / as I see other parents who have kids who get married and then, maybe, the marriage is a struggle and they have grandchildren and they are watching how their kids parent those grandchildren—I'm just realizing, "Parenting never ends." Our kids never come to the end of their need to be prayed for by their parents.

Ann: I've gone through a one-year Bible—probably four—maybe, ten years. So, I'll read through the Bible every year; but I like having this because it's not long. It's just a page that you're kind of going back over some key scripture. It would be easy to do. Have you seen couples do this—read it through together?

Nancy: I have. It's such a beautiful thing to me. I got an email last week from a Christian leader your listeners would probably have heard of. He said, "You know my wife"—"I just wanted to write you. My wife and I were reading it." He told me the date on which they were reading it. He said, "I just need you to know this is exactly what we

needed today, and my wife said, ‘This just keeps blowing me away every day.’” That made me genuinely happy.

I can think of another couple that, because of his work in the government, they are—they don’t wake up together in the same house every day; and she wrote me and told me that they read it together over the phone, every day, to pray for their kids. Those kinds of things just make me really happy. I think that reflects the fact that these parents realize, “Okay, we want to pray together. We want to pray. We want to be in God’s word, and we want to pray for our kids.”

Ann: Yes.

Nancy: So, I think what they find is that this book brings some of those things together.

Dave: I just read today’s date, and man, your insight—here’s what I read. The story that many of us know, Stephen getting stoned in the book of Acts, and your prayer ended up somewhere I never expected it to go—so, great insight. It was like—well, there is Saul watching this, and her prayer for your child is: “God, through Your Holy Spirit, would You speak and convict, my son / my daughter, get truth into me like Saul?” Saul is watching this man get martyred for his faith, and something happened. The Holy Spirit moved in such a way that later Saul becomes Paul and writes life-changing things.

So, I thought, “Wow. What an insight! That’s not where I would have, typically, gone with that story. Yet, when you think about that and praying for your children—wow—and that could be a prayer for anybody.” You’re really good.

Ann: I like the idea, too, of—I could see you and I doing it, but I could also see doing this with my friends—of calling each other and saying, “Hey, this is—let’s pray over this for our kids today.” I have three friends, and we’ve been fasting and praying one day a week for our kids for probably 12 years. So, we text each other our prayer requests for the day, and we each take a turn each week. Like this week, it will be my friend Michelle’s turn. So, we’ll pray for her all day; but I like the idea of having this prayer based on the scripture that we’ve read that day. It’s a great idea.

Bob: Did you spend a year writing this? Did you—

Nancy: Almost.

Bob: —each day, take a passage, pray through it?

Nancy: No.

Bob: How did you do it?

Nancy: I mean I probably spent nine months—I mean honestly it came with a lot of tears because I was—

Ann: It's like birthing a baby.

Bob: That's what I was going to say, "Nine months is the appropriate time to write a book on praying for your kids."

Nancy: And I did this because I needed it. I mean you might read those prayers and think they are really helpful for your kids, and I really hope they are; but I've got to tell you. You know, as I wrote, each one was for our child. You know, I won't go deeply into it; but I just have to say to you. I remember, maybe, a year after this book came out—you remember I told you about how one thing I saw was, over and over again, that the prayer would be that God would give my child a love for His word.

Can I just admit that a lot of these prayers that were all prayed—first of all, for my own child—a lot of times, I didn't have the faith to believe that God would answer them? I'd like to say I did. I should know by now, but they just seemed too big. Some of them just seemed too big.

I'll never forget. About a year and a half after this book came out, my son came down. He works for my husband—works in our house every day. He handed me a piece of paper on which he had printed the text of Philippians 1. He said, "Hey, Mom, would you help me memorize Philippians 1?" We're memorizing it together in the Bible study that I'm in. I just had to step into the pantry and kind of gather myself.

Bob: You're getting a little choked up now even thinking about it.

Nancy: Oh my goodness! I just—I just thought about all those prayers like that that I had written that I honestly didn't have the faith to believe that God would answer; yes. In that day, those things came together for me—that sense of, here God has done this. You know what? I've just got to tell you. That wasn't about the example of his mom and dad or our—this is something God did; and He did it in His timing through the people that He intended. It wasn't anything I manipulated. I couldn't manipulate to make that happen.

Dave: Right.

Nancy: God had to do that, but I do believe, for some reason, God works through our prayers.

Bob: Yes.

Nancy: I can't explain it. It wouldn't be the way I would do it, but that's the way God has chosen to do it. So, it's one of many prayers in there that I am seeing answered.

Dave: I would say, just hearing that story, for a listener out there just going—“I’ve given up”—

Nancy: Yes.

Dave: —don’t give up. I’ve felt that. We’ve all felt that as parents. It’s like—“Keep asking, keep going to your knees, keep believing.” You don’t know when or how or what. You don’t have any idea, but you know the God who can do it, and you just keep asking.

Ann: A few weeks ago, I found this box that I had forgotten about. It was a box where I would take strips of paper. I’d write my prayer requests down, and I throw them in this little—it was like this little wooden box. I came across it, and it had all these prayers. I realized, like—“Oh, I forgot.” My kids knew about the box, and they would put prayer requests in too because they saw that I was praying.

I pulled them out, and I wept of how many of those prayers have been answered over the years that, at the time, I really didn’t have the faith to believe either that God would answer them. Yet, there were so many that I saw God’s faithfulness, not only to us, but to our kids. He’s faithful, and it’s what we talked about earlier. God hears our prayers.

Bob: I remember reading an essay, years ago, where—something C.S. Lewis had written, and he was asking the question: “If God is all knowing and all loving, why pray? If He’s going to do what He’s going to do, why pray?” Lewis’s answer was: “Why breathe?” He said, “If God wants air in your lungs, why do you breathe?” He said, “You breathe because you were designed to breathe. You breathe because that’s what humans do. It’s a part of God’s design that you breathe. Why pray? It’s because you were designed to pray.” It’s what children of God do. They pray.

So, trying to figure out how or why it all works together, that will just cause you to sit over in the corner and, maybe, go crazy over time; right? But you pray because it’s what you do. It’s what you were made to do.

I think to have a guide like this that walks you day by day through and helps prompt you to pray and helps you think biblically about what you’re going to pray, I think that just helps you be the person God’s created you to be.

Nancy, thanks for taking time to help us think about how we can teach our kids to pray and how we can do a better job of praying for them.

Nancy: My joy to do that.

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