

“Praying for our Children”

Lamentations 2:19

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About fifteen years ago, I began a tradition at the beginning of the school year. I asked all the school age children to come to the platform so we could pray for them. As the years went by, I added other components. I recognized teachers and administrators and included them in the prayer. I enlisted the help of a photographer to take a group picture of our children. I asked children and youth workers to print the names of each child on slips of paper that our members could take with them and place in their Bibles. It would be the responsibility of the member to pray for this child throughout the school year.

I recall being influenced by Jeremiah’s challenge to his people recorded in Lamentations 2:19. “Lift up your hands to Him for the lives of your children.” What better time should this be done than the beginning of the school year? Thank you for your willingness to help us pray for each of our students.

Why do we need to pray for our children? For the same reason Jeremiah instructed his people to pray for their children. Times were hard and he realized parents and their children needed help.

It was a time of chaos, confusion and danger in the Holy Land. Jerusalem lay in ruins in 587BC because the Babylonians destroyed it. Many citizens were exiled to Babylon and those that remained in Jerusalem lived in fear and want.

Jeremiah knew the children were most vulnerable and needed protection from harm, provisions for their physical needs, peace in the midst of turmoil, strength in a time of adversity, guidance in a fog of confusion, confidence in the face of challenges and hope in the midst of despair.

These were overwhelming needs and could not be satisfied by even the most loving and responsible parents. They needed help, divine help and Jeremiah was aware of it. “Lift up your hands to Him for the lives of your children.” That was good advice for those adults. It is good advice for us.

For what do we need to pray? What do our children need in these unsettling times? While our situation is certainly different from Jeremiah’s, I suspect the needs of our children are similar. In many ways, our children are also growing up in a world too acquainted with chaos, confusion and danger. Terrorist attacks, sexual predators, drug dealers, drunk drivers, abusive parents and negative peer pressure are contributing to the risks. The pitfalls and challenges facing our children are bigger than they are and beyond our ability to manage for them, too. We all need God’s help to steer us safely through these turbulent waters.

Allow me to share with you some of the things for which we need to pray on behalf of our children. You will want to be more specific as the needs of the child for whom you pray this year become more evident.

Pray that our children will understand that they matter to God and all of us. Their lives are important and we take great delight in watching them grow and mature just as God does. Ask God to reveal this to them as He reminds us to communicate through words and deeds our love and appreciation for all our children.

Ask God to help our children to see their potential. I suspect one reason potential is not achieved is because talents are not recognized and cultivated. Pray that God will reveal the gifts He has invested in each of them and encourage them to develop and use them.

Ask God to give our children wisdom to make good decisions. Potential is also unfulfilled because bad decisions are made that have devastating consequences. As adults, we know that we can be our best friend or worst enemy. Children fail to realize this sometimes.

Ask God to help our children stay away from those things that would sabotage their future, especially in our permissive society. Ask Him to help them discern between good and bad and see the consequences of both. Only God can give them the desire and courage to resist temptation, saying no to things that are harmful and yes to things that are good. Ask Him to help them make healthy choices that will open doors of opportunity for years to come.

Ask God to bring positive influences into their lives, good teachers, role models and friends. Ask Him to help our children recognize whom they can trust and follow.

Several years ago a sociology professor had his class go into the Baltimore slums to get case histories on 200 children. They were asked to write an evaluation of each child's future. In almost every case, the students wrote, "This child doesn't have a chance. I see nothing but problems ahead."

Twenty-five years later, another professor sent students out of the classroom to find these individuals to see what happened to them. They located 180 of the 200 and were shocked. One hundred seventy-six had achieved phenomenal success and were outstanding citizens of their communities. Each was asked, "How do you account for your success?" In each case, the reply came with feeling, "I had a teacher that cared about me and made a difference in my life."

Ask God to help them recognize garbage and trash when they hear and see it, because the world is full of it. The Internet, radio, television and theaters have no shortage of moral pollution that can mislead and confuse our children. Ask God to help them recognize and turn away from it.

Ask God to give them discipline to be good students. Our children face so many distractions that would keep them from seeing the importance of their studies. We need God to help them stay focused.

Ask God to give them the confidence they need to accept and tackle challenges that will be placed before them. Many children struggle with inferiority and low self-esteem. It is natural for them to compare themselves to others that excel and feel inadequate. It is normal to be gripped with the paralyzing fear of failure and back away from challenges that would unleash hidden abilities. Ask God to give them the confidence they need to pursue excellence, take risks and go down uncharted paths. Ask Him to go with them even when we cannot.

Ask God to encourage them when disappointments come. A small child was having a bad week and said to her teacher, "Some days you need a Saturday on a Wednesday." Don't we all.

Every venture or relationship will not succeed, resulting in great disappointment. It is easy to give up when things don't work out as expected, especially if you did your best. Ask God to help our children cope with and learn from failure and disappointment. Ask Him to be gentle with them and heal their broken hearts.

Ask God to help our children have fun and enjoy these years. School days can be some of the best in a person's life as he or she develops lasting relationships and spends time with friends. Children need God to help them choose good friends and engage in healthy activities, though.

Ask God to help our children be positive role models and Christian witnesses in the classroom and at all school activities. Positive peer pressure is just as strong as negative. I grinned when I recently heard an interview with a young person that said, "I rebelled against bad behavior!" What a great way to talk about resisting negative peer pressure. Ask God to give our children this kind of courage.

Ask God to forgive them when they make mistakes and let them know they are still loved. Children need to be affirmed especially after they have done wrong. They need to know that nothing they do will make God love them less and that His grace is sufficient to rebuild their self-esteem and lives. Ask God to help us be a part of that healing and affirming process as we provide a safe place for them to fall.

Ask God to give our children peaceful homes that foster growth and learning. Ask Him to provide every child with parents that make their well-being a priority, even if the parents are divorced or have remarried.

Finally, pray that God will protect our children from evil and harm. Jesus included this in his model prayer when he said, “Deliver us from evil.” We all know that schools are not as safe as they once were and our children need divine protection.

Are you willing to pray for our children as they begin another school year? If so, take one of the slips of paper as you leave that has a child’s name on it. Keep it in your Bible or devotional material as a reminder to pray for this person. If you want to let this person know you are praying for him or her, see Ernie, Andy or Bethann about how to contact them. If they have special needs throughout the year, they can contact you, too.

“Lift up your hands to Him for the lives of your children.” Let’s do it again this year.