

THE BATTLE OF THE RIGHTEOUS SEED

“FROM THE LIPS OF CHILDREN AND INFANTS THE LORD HATH ORDAINED PRAISE BECAUSE OF YOUR ENEMIES, TO SILENCE THE FOE AND THE AVENGER.” (PS 8:2; LUKE 18:16.)

Dorothy Torbert paced the floor of her Sunday school classroom as she waited for the church families to arrive. “What will be the fate of this space which has been set aside for the children?” she wondered. Several months previously, the church voting body had designated this room for use as a sacred space for children, to be called a children’s worship atrium. But before work on the atrium could be completed, another group in the church along with the new pastor decided the room could best be used for something else.

Today the children’s ministry team was meeting in the room to settle the issue. As the group began to file in, Dorothy recognized the parents of many of the children who would be using the worship atrium. A number of them had brought their children along. Soon the meeting began.

While the presentation for all the other uses of the room was going on, several of the children quietly slipped from their seats and moved to the prayer table - the only part of the worship atrium that had been developed. Gathering around the table, the children knelt in silent prayer, petitioning their Heavenly Father for this special space to be granted to them.

Soon the attention of the adults was drawn away from the speaker as their eyes fell upon the praying children. Only moments later, many with tears streaking down their faces, the

ministry team voted unanimously. When the meeting ended, the children had won their sacred space – along with a new place of respect in the heart of their church.

The church world typically has not taken the spiritual capacity of children and youth seriously. We have failed to recognize that God has endowed children with profound spiritual insight and an inherent desire to pray.

I first became convinced of the power of children's prayers through Esther Ilnisky. Esther is a pastor's wife and has founded the Children's Global Prayer Movement, to mobilize a global "army" of praying children. Hundreds of thousands of children around the world have already enlisted in this prayer effort. Although I had met Esther previously, I got to know her better in May 1995 at the Global Consultation on World Evangelization in Seoul, Korea.

Hal and I felt privileged to have been invited as delegates to this historic conference, and we were even more excited that our daughter Nicole, almost 14 at the time, was among the 40 children selected to participate in the children's prayer track. This was perhaps the first time in history that children had been invited as official delegates to an otherwise all adult conference. Their mission? To pray for the salvation of the children of the world.

Little did I know that Esther was about to become my daughter's prayer mentor and that this conference would change our family forever. Even more surprising was that our lives would be changed not so much by our interaction with the 4,000 adult delegates from around the world, but in a basement filled with children.

"Have you heard what's happened to the children?"

The woman who stood before me was highly excited and the tone of her voice told me there was a sense of urgency attached to her question. My mind began to race. Was my daughter okay?

8/20/09

What about the other children who had come to this far away land on a special mission from God? Were the children lost? Were they hurt? Had there been a bus accident?

“No, what?” I managed to respond.

“You’d better come downstairs to the basement and see for yourself,” she said.

I grabbed my husband and we hurriedly made our way through the crowd to the stairwell that led to the bottom floor of the World Torch Center. I had been so excited about Nicole joining us on this trip. But now I wasn’t so sure. Perhaps it had not been such a good idea to bring her to a foreign country...to be transported by bus drivers we didn’t know...to venues that seemed to change every time we were issued a new schedule.

As we rounded the corner to the basement opening, my anxiety mounted. What *had* happened to the children? Only a few more steps and then I would know!

As we entered the room I could not believe what I was seeing. There, lying prostrate on the floor in a large circle were 40 praying children - their arms wrapped around each other as they wept over the lost souls of the children of the world.

Leading this special group of children was Esther Inisky. Because of the short attention span of this age group (ages 5 to 15), Esther had brought plenty of games and activities to keep the children occupied at times when they were not praying. This was the first of several prayer sessions Esther had planned throughout the day, each scheduled to last about 15 minutes.

But the prayer session had not gone as planned. The children did not stop praying after 15 minutes, and they did not stop praying after 50 minutes. In fact, the praying and weeping continued for four hours and twenty minutes!

The adults who were attending workshops in the conference upstairs heard about what was going on with the children and began to filter into the basement to ask for prayer. To see

these national and international leaders lined up to be prayed for by the children was a sight to behold!

At one point a man who came for prayer sat in the middle of the children, his face in his hands, as he wept uncontrollably. Later the man told us that he had been so locked up emotionally that he had been unable to weep since he was a boy of five years old.

When the prayer time was over, I asked one of the younger children, “How did you manage to pray for four hours and twenty minutes?”

“Oh, we didn’t realize we had been praying for such a long time,” she said. “We thought we’d been praying for only about twenty minutes.”

I was reminded, in the history of revivals, that whenever children begin to pray, revival is hastened.

AS THE DAYS CONTINUED

Without any prompting from Esther, the lengthy prayer sessions of the children continued each day throughout the conference. On the third day three children on separate sides of the room saw a vision of the children in Zaire, Africa where the Ebola virus had just broken out. This deadly disease which had no cure caused people to die a very painful death in just a matter of days. All three children described to their leaders the same scene without any variation.

“We must pray for the children of Zaire!” they exclaimed. And then the praying children of GCOWE went into battle. “God, stop the Ebola virus,” they cried. “Stop the Ebola virus!” This was no “mamsy-pamsy” prayer meeting. The children beseeched their heavenly Father on behalf of the souls of the children of Zaire. They commanded the Devil, in Jesus’ name, to take his hands off these precious African children. And they would not let go of God until His power was released to strike His final blow upon the deadly Ebola virus.

8/20/09

Seven days later, on the day after the conference ended, the World Health Organization front-page headlines of newspapers around the world declared, “Ebola is coming under control.” Following is the lead paragraph of the article published in the New York Times: With only six new cases of Ebola infection reported in Zaire over the past week (since the day the children prayed) the World Health Organization said Friday that the epidemic of the deadly viral disease in the African country was “coming under control.” (Parenthesis mine)¹

As the children returned to their homes and heard the reports, the faxes began to fly! “Have you heard?” they cried from one country to another. “God has answered our prayers! The Ebola virus is under control! Y-E-S!!!”

In the weeks that followed GCOWE, the children’s desire for fervent prayer did not die out. In fact, when we received our telephone bill the month following GCOWE, there were 53 calls to Colorado Springs, Co (Five of the children’s prayer track delegates were from Colorado Springs, and the children were continuing their prayer meetings long distance. Hal and I didn’t know whether to praise God for our daughter’s new prayer hunger or ground her for running up our phone bill!

In recent years I’ve watched the acceleration of this children’s and youth prayer movement. Listen to these amazing reports! In Seattle, WA some 900 young people are meeting in

8/20/09

Wednesday evening services to pray and worship God.² In a church in Mesa, Ariz., 1,000 youth are gathering every Sunday evening in prayer and renewal services.³

Last summer Nicole attended a national youth conference in Colorado Springs, Co. called Prayer Storm. Sponsored by Rock the Nations, this strategic gathering convened some 2,000 youth in a five-day conference to pray and fast for their generation. Who would have thought you could get teenagers to fast one meal, much less five days?

At a previous Prayer Storm conference I heard a girl from Alma, Ark., tell about prayer meetings she and her friend were holding at their public high school. For months the prayer meetings consisted of only two to five people. But this girl would not give up until God showed up at her school. Her testimony is that in a one-week period, the prayer meetings grew from five to 90 students.

Pray! Magazine devoted an entire issue recently to the topic of praying teenagers. One article reported that high school students in Modesto, Calif., are doing Jericho-style prayerwalks around every school in the city. In Littleton, Co., students are on their way to establishing a prayer group on every school campus in their community. It went on to say that “Young people from Portland, Ore., to Buffalo, N.Y., are engaging in protracted times of united prayer, literally crying out to God for their peers, schools, and communities.”⁴

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⁴ Mike Higgs, “Lead Us, Join Us, or Get Out of the Way!” *Pray!*, p. 18, Sept/Oct 1998.

“What’s going on?” the author of the article asks. “There seems to be an unprecedented, unplanned, unusual, and unstoppable explosion of prayer among youth!” he says. “It’s unprecedented, at least in modern times, because of the sheer number of participants. It’s unplanned because it’s not the result of some new youth ministry program or activity. It appears to be a quite spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit, and nobody is trying to control it (good luck if you attempt to do so!) It’s unusual because such passion for prayer is not what’s expected from a postmodern, relativistic, diversity-embracing culture. And it’s unstoppable because it can’t be legislated out of the schools—you can take prayer out of schools, but you can’t take *praying students* out!”⁵

A recent issue of *Time* magazine, with its four-page spread (including color photos), highlighted the youth prayer movement across America. The article cited that one out of four public high schools now have “prayer clubs”. *Time* notes that “the prospects for the growth of such clubs seems unlimited.”⁶

In addition to *Pray!* and *Time*, the *Washington Post*, and CNN have brought national attention to this student-led prayer movement. But it doesn’t take the media for me to see what is happening. Even as I am writing this book, my home is serving as a hub for the youth prayer movement in our city. Last summer after returning from Prayer Storm, Nicole and her friend Stephanie started a youth prayer ministry called Sacred Edge Tour ’97. Students across the Valley meet for prayer the first Friday night of the month, each time in a different church location. They are coming together across denominational and ethnic barriers to cry out to God

⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

for the healing of their generation and for revival in their schools, city, and nation. To facilitate this prayer movement, our spare bedroom has been turned into a Sacred Edge office, and we've had to get her a ministry voice mail box. A leadership team of teenagers serve as administrator, secretary, data entry volunteer, registrars, etc.

Last August the week before school started the students took prayer vans (vans filled with praying teenagers) to intercede on location at 40 high schools. They beseeched God for His revival fire to hit the high school campuses this year. Already students are reporting that God is showing up in extraordinary ways with public repentance of sin and miraculous salvations.

One morning several of these same students felt an urgency to drive to the A to Z Abortion Clinic and pray for God to expose Satan's works of darkness there. Within hours an incident occurred in the clinic that the media quickly caught wind of. Two weeks later the clinic was closed.

Truly God is raising up a new generation of young intercessors who carry a holy dissatisfaction for the status quo. In the words of Esther Inisky:

“A new breed of children—righteous seed—who are destined to fulfill God's eternal plans and purposes, is emerging on the world scene for the new millennium! They are being birthed and entrusted to God-fearing parents to be nurtured and equipped for this hour. Empowered with

⁶ David Van Biema, “Spiriting School Prayer into School,” *Time*, p. 28, April 27, 1998.

the Holy Spirit, they will rise up as a mighty prayer force to petition God on behalf of their generation and, in the mighty name of Jesus, conquer Satan's demonic forces."⁷

Make Room for the Children

The prayer life of children and youth is one of the most untapped resources of the church today. We often do not take the prayers of children seriously and relegate children to another room during times of corporate prayer. More often than not adults feel children will interfere with corporate prayer meetings where the "real" praying takes place. Jesus, however, had a different view of children. When the disciples attempted to keep the children from "bothering" the Master, "Jesus called the children to Him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" Luke 18:16.

"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones," Jesus said. "For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:10).

And when the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to stand among them. And He said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whosoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me" (Matthew 18: 1-5).

⁷ Esther Ilnisky, *What About the Children?* p.2.

Jesus made it plain that children are important to God. When He was on earth He held children on his lap. He talked to them, he listened to them, and He blessed them. He even pointed to children as a model of how to enter into the kingdom, with simplicity and honesty. So when we think about mobilizing our church to pray, let's not leave out the children. To do so would be a loss both to them and to us.

Children and youth are key to God accomplishing His purposes upon the earth. Many Christian leaders today believe that we are on the verge of the greatest revival in the history of our nation. And students are absolutely essential to the breakthrough for which we pray. Numbers of churches are waking up to this fact.

Peter J. Hohmann, pastor of missions and Christian education at Mechanicsville Christian Center, Mechanicsville, VA, relates this story:

A girl in our church was burdened to pray for Mongolia when she was only nine years old. She began interceding after she read an article in a missions magazine about how few Christians there are in Mongolia. She prayed, "Lord, please help the people in Mongolia and replace those Buddha altars in their felt tents with Bibles."

After two years of intercession here eyes caught the words, "Hope for Mongolia," on the cover of a current issue of the same missions magazine.

The article described a weeklong crusade where 500 people accepted the Lord. She knew that the title of the article was God's way of telling her that he had answered her prayer. You see, this girl's name is Hope. During the following year these 500 Mongolian believers grew to 1,000 and have started a church, Hope Assembly.⁸

In Psalm 110:3 we find these words spoken to King Jesus, "Your troops will be willing in the day of battle. From the womb of the dawn, your youth will come to you." This is truly a day when Christ is going to extend His mighty scepter into the midst of His enemies (verse 2). And note that it is the youth who are pictured as leading the way at the head of Christ's army.

Historically we can see how God has used youth to birth and to lead revivals over a span of the last 300 years. In the early 1720's a 16-year-old by the name of Nicolas Zinzendorf formed a prayer group with five other teenagers at his school in Germany. They were called "The Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed." This name was most appropriate as the group became a seedbed of revival that spread all throughout Germany and even beyond.⁹

In America, student led prayer groups in 1806 and 1886 were responsible for starting major revival movements that resulted in a great expansion of world missions. One revival movement called "The Student Volunteer Movement" is a fulfillment of the vision just mentioned in Psalm 110 as nearly 20,000 praying young people went into missionary service over a 30-year-period.¹⁰

⁸ Peter J. Hohmann, "Children Can Make a Diference," Prayer Track News.

8/20/09

Let's not forget the 16-year-old girl in Andrew Murray's church in Wellington, South Africa who led a revival prayer movement among her peers in 1860. It is reported that although he later repented of his opposition, Murray was at first "totally threatened" by this teenage girl and her student prayer movement. As a result Murray went on to write over 120 books, the last of which was a call to pastors worldwide to unite in prayer for revival as the only hope for their generation. Thus we see how one student helped change the course of history in the body of Christ worldwide.¹¹

Today we are once again seeing children and youth praying for their lost friends with a passion. Doug Tegner, national coordinator for the Challenge 2000 Alliance, reports that teenagers "are getting involved in the prayer triplet movement—three teens getting together to pray for three teens each. They are praying 'locker to locker'—for those whose lockers touch theirs. In some areas, students and adults have pioneered 'yearbook praying,' in which they pray over the names and faces of students in the annual yearbook. Prayerwalking around schools is another aggressive strategy used by youth and youth workers."¹²

You may have heard about the revival taking place at Brownsville Assembly of God just outside Pensacola, Fla. At the writing of this book 130,000 people have made decisions for Christ since Fathers' Day 1995. Perhaps you have not heard about the simultaneous children's and youth revival in the church. While the Spirit of God is moving powerfully in the adult service, the children are having their own service in another part of the main building. This is

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¹² Doug Tegner, "Revival Stream in a Cultural Desert," *Pray* magazine, p. 15, Sept/Oct 1998.

8/20/09

not a typical children's Sunday school staffed with adult teachers. The children themselves conduct the majority of this service. Children serve as greeters and ushers. They have children's pre-service intercessory prayer, a children's ministry team and children who lead worship. And the Holy Spirit shows up just as powerfully in the children's meeting as He does in the main sanctuary.

The church's prayer coordinator Lila Terhune told me the following story: One night in the children's service, the spirit of intercession came powerfully upon the children. Someone sent word to the leaders in the adult service that the children were on their faces crying out to God in behalf of those without Christ. The leaders responded by asking that the prayers of the children be piped into the main sanctuary. As the anointed prayers of the children streamed into the auditorium, several hundred unbelieving and backslidden adults jumped out of their seats and ran to the altar to surrender their lives to Jesus Christ.

Why is it that children and youth have such an impact in times of emerging revival? David Bryant, president of Concerts of Prayer, International, says, "First, youth hold fewer presuppositions and prejudices against the notion that God can work in extraordinary ways. They place far fewer boundaries on what they expect God to do. At the same time, they are much more aware of their own brokenness than many adults, and much more willing to admit how they need a new work from God."¹³

¹³ David Bryant, "Is This the Generation?" *Pray!* Magazine, p.11, Sept/Oct 1998.

Another reason Bryant gives for the impact students have in times of emerging revival is that our youth are the future leaders of the Christian enterprise, and adults know it. Older Christians are inherently predisposed to follow young people as they begin to manifest a passion and proactiveness toward the things of God. As Isaiah says, “A little child shall lead them.”¹⁴

Mentoring the Next Generation in Prayer

God has not given children a junior Holy Spirit. When a child invites Jesus Christ into his life, the Spirit of Christ comes to dwell in him. This is the same powerful Holy Spirit that lives in mature believers. Although children do not carry the same natural and spiritual responsibilities as adults, they do possess the same power available through the Holy Spirit.

What an awesome responsibility and privilege has been given to the Church – to teach, train, and mentor the next generation. This is obviously one of the most important roles of the Church, for God constantly admonished Israel to teach His ways to their offspring, to instruct them in His statutes, and to pass down the stories of His faithfulness.

In Deuteronomy 11: 19-20, the Lord instructs the Israelites to teach their children about Him when they sit in their house, walk along the road, go to bed at night, and wake up in the morning. In other words, they were to be in an instruction mode at all times. I don't believe the Lord is telling us to lecture our children from sun rise to sun set; instead, I feel he is admonishing us to use the everyday experiences of life to teach, train, and mentor our children.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The teaching process includes both instruction and training. The Apostle Paul mentions both when he instructs Fathers in how to raise their children: “Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). Children need to be given verbal instruction and a biblical foundation in how to pray. They need to have their questions answered. They also need hands on training and assistance in learning to pray.

But perhaps the best way to help children learn to pray is for them to see us do it. No amount of verbal instruction, training, or even scripture will be enough if children do not see their parents, pastors, and Sunday school teachers pray. Our children are always watching us. Our actions have a much more profound effect upon their lives even than the words we speak.

When the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Lord teach us to pray,” Jesus gave them the model of the Lord’s prayer. But His instruction in prayer did not stop here. Jesus also modeled a life of prayer. In Mark 1:35 we are told that “very early in the morning while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed.’ ...

When we as parents and church leaders allow the busyness of life, our job, counseling appointments, or church activities to crowd out our prayer life, we are giving our children the message that prayer is not the priority we say it is. However, when children see our love and excitement about spending time with our heavenly Father, they may like the disciples, say, “I want to know more about prayer.”

In his book, *Teaching Your Child to Pray*, Rick Osborne gives three practical ways we can mentor our children. We can (1) mentor a life of prayer (2) mentor a right attitude toward prayer, and (3) mentor reliance on prayer.¹⁵ So how can the local church assist in this mentoring process?

I mentioned in Chapter 5 the importance of including prayer in the church's Christian education program. This is critical when it comes to mentoring children and youth in prayer. The first thing, of course, is to find teachers who love to pray. It is also important for a church to offer in-service training for teachers and to invest in prayer curriculum and prayer resources. Holding seminars to help parents learn to pray for their children and to teach their children to pray will strengthen the process. If our children and youth are to learn to pray, they need teachers and parents who are able to teach on prayer, model prayer, and make exciting opportunities for prayer.

Teaching Children to Pray

Dear God,

What do you do with families that don't have much faith? There's a family on the next block like that. I don't want to get them in trouble. I don't want to say who.

¹⁵ Rick Osborne, *Teaching Your Child to Pray*, p. 110.

See you in church.

Alexis (age 9)¹⁶

We are often amused when we hear children's prayers like these, but we also are deeply touched by their insight, honesty, and simplicity.

Kid's love to pray! Full of faith, pure in heart, empty of distractions, they are amazingly focused and targeted in prayer. Children everywhere, even as young as two and three, are becoming mighty prayer warriors as they petition God for issues such as abortion, child abuse, poverty, and drugs. Their prayers accompanied by humility and brokenness often bring tremendous conviction to the hearts of adults.

So how do we nurture in our children their innate desire to pray? In this section we will answer that question as we look at the role of the church in teaching, training, and mentoring children and youth in prayer.

But before we do that, it is important to be reminded about some things pertaining to children and prayer. Al VanderGrind in *The Praying Church Sourcebook* states, "Children's prayers are 'real' prayers – not just practice or learning for later. When children pray aloud, adults are not to think of themselves as monitors, supervisors, or instructors. They must realize that the child is leading everyone present in prayer."¹⁷

¹⁶ David Heller, *Dear God*, Doubleday, 1987).

Vander Griend goes on to say that adults therefore should not ask children to repeat stilted formal prayers, full of cliches and spoken in solemn tones. Rather, he suggests that we “encourage children to keep doing what they do naturally: retain a simple, conversational approach to prayer.”¹⁸

What to Teach Children about Prayer

Stress that prayer helps us develop a relationship with God. Every child needs a friend. Teach children that God is their friend because Jesus calls us friends. Help children learn that prayer is a way to experience the love of a kind and forgiving Heavenly Father. Like any relationship this one will grow through praise, thanks, confession, giving, and receiving.

When Nicole was a little girl I taught her The Lord’s Prayer. This was not so much a matter of her memorizing the prayer, as it was her learning to use it as a guide for prayer. Our time would go something like this: “Our Father which art in heaven”...Nicole, God loves you so much. He is like your earthly Daddy who wants to take care of you and give you the things you need. But he is even better than your earthly Daddy because his love is perfect and He never makes mistakes. When we pray to God, we are praying to our heavenly Daddy.

¹⁷ Al Vander Griend, *The Praying Church Sourcebook* (Grand Rapids, MI, Church Development Resources 1990) p. 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Teach the attributes of God. It is not nearly so important to teach children the mechanics of prayer as it is to help them get to know the person to whom they are praying. What we believe about who God is has everything to do with how we approach Him. In her seminars on *Teaching Children to Pray*, Sarah Townsen says, “Don’t make God into a mechanical and religious ritual where our purpose is to appease Him or tell Him a story. Teach that God is our Father, who knows what we are going to ask even before we ask it, who loves unconditionally, and wants us to talk with Him in prayer because He is our best friend.”¹⁹

One of the ways I taught Nicole the attributes of God was once again through the model of The Lord’s Prayer. The second phrase of the prayer is, “Hallowed be thy name.” At this point we began to discuss the names of God and their meaning. She learned that Jehovah- shalom is her peace, that Jehovah–rapha is her healer and Jehovah-Jireh, her provider.

Teach children to pray the word of God. There is no better way to help children get to know their heavenly Father than to teach them to pray God’s word. Praying scripture also helps children develop their prayer vocabulary. Children need to be taught that praying God’s word is praying God’s will; that God says His word will not return unto Him void, that praying God’s word is a weapon against the enemy.

¹⁹ Sara Townsen, “Teaching Children to Pray,” Prayer Watch International Syllabus, p. 5.

8/20/09

I had been diligently teaching Nicole to pray God's word for months. She was almost five at the time, but I was unsure whether or not she was really grasping the concept in a personal way until the following incident occurred: One Sunday following the service I noticed that Nicole had cornered our pastor and was having what seemed like a very serious conversation. I later learned that she had been asking him if she could sing a solo in church some Sunday morning. I was horrified and began telling her that children never sang solos in Sunday morning services and that it was impolite to ask. However the pastor approached us later that week to say that he would, in fact, like for Nicole to sing a solo and that he would ask her to sing when he called all the children forward to dismiss them to children's church.

As she sat next to me the next Sunday morning waiting to be called up to the stage, I felt sure that I was the only one with butterflies in my stomach. After all Nicole was the one who had so boldly asked for this opportunity. But a few moments later, I felt a little hand grab mine. "Mommy, will you pray with me?" she asked. "Of course, honey!" I responded. "Just agree me while I pray," she said. Then she began to quote a Scripture verse...one that I had never even taught her. "When I am afraid I will trust in thee..." I'll be alright now," she said. Moments later, with 50 kids gathered around her and the eyes of 500 adults set upon her, Nicole stood on the platform, poised and confident, singing, "Lord, Make Me a Servant." It was as much a testimony to me as it was to Nicole that praying God's word releases tremendous power.

4. **Teach children not only to talk to God but to listen when they pray.** I recently asked Nicole who she considered to be her mentor in prayer. She mentioned Cindy Jacobs and myself but said Esther Ilnisky was probably the first one to teach her about sustained intercession.

“How did she teach you to pray?” I asked. “She didn’t so much teach us about prayer,” she responded. “She mainly taught us to listen to the Holy Spirit and pray what we hear.” That was a profound and insightful statement. We should teach children to listen to the still small voice within them.

3. Teach children that God responds not to our begging or long or repetitious prayers, but to simple faith. One of the best ways to do this is to tell children our faith stories. Also invite them to be a part of corporate church prayer meetings and family prayer times so that they can be a part of offering the requests to God and then seeing the answer come.

Our daughter has grown up hearing the stories of how God has faithfully met our needs while we were living on a shoe string budget working in full-time ministry. She has heard our stories of answered prayer regarding provision for groceries, house payments, Christian school tuition, automobiles, and airline tickets. Through this she has learned to trust God for her many personal needs including Easter dresses, money for missions trips, and the healing of stomach problems as well as broken hearts. Hal and I taught her what the Bible says about the connection between faith and answered prayer. She knows by heart verses such as, “This is the confidence that we have in Him that if we ask anything according to his will, we know that he hears us, and if he hears us, then we know we have the petitions we desire of Him.” And “Whatsoever things you desire when you pray, believe you receive them and you shall have them.” This faith principle is much easier for children to grasp than for adults. In fact, in more than one instance Nicole was the one teaching us about child-like faith rather than vice versus.

I remember vividly how Nicole began to beg me to let her take piano lessons when she was quite young. At the time we did not own a piano and did not even have the money for her to take piano lessons. Finally, after several months I called a piano teacher and set up her first lesson. God miraculously provided for the first week's payment, and Nicole went to a neighbor's house to practice her lesson for the next week. This senenio continued for about four weeks until one day Nicole approached me. "I thought God wanted me to take piano lessons," she said. "But he hasn't given me a piano." "I know, honey," I responded. "Well, what do you think about praying like this?" she asked. "God, if you want me to take piano lessons, then I need for you to give me a piano. If you don't bring me a piano then I will take that to mean you don't want me to take lessons." "That's really putting God on the spot and I've never prayed that way, but it sounds okay," I said.

She prayed and by the end of the week we had received a call from our friends Herb and Helen Selby asking if we could take a piano off their hands. The piano was about 100 years, had a cracked soundboard, but was perfect for a beginning piano student. Two years later Nicole was bemoaning the fact that some of the keys on her piano didn't work and if she was to continue lessons she would have to have a better piano. "You'll have to get a new piano the same way you got the last one," I told her. She prayed again, and six weeks later her Aunt Freddi shipped her an almost new piano which she had decided she was never going to learn to play.

A couple of years later Nicole came home from school and announced that her Brownie camp was scheduled to be held the same week as her piano recital. Would it be possible for her to miss her piano recital, she asked. Like any responsible parent, I replied, “NO WAY!” “Well, would you pray with me that the date of the piano recital will be changed?” she cried. “NO WAY!” I yelled. “God is not going to change the date of your piano recital! The recital is only one week away, and you know how difficult is for your teacher to find a date that works for the schedules of 15 different families. You are simply going to have to miss Brownie camp.” The next morning as she was getting dressed for school, Nicole let me know in no uncertain terms that my words of unbelief had “dashed her faith.” However she felt she could muster up enough faith to pray without me and perhaps she could get her dad to agree with her in prayer on the way to school. It was all I could do to keep from laughing. I was still laughing when the phone rang at 9:30 a.m. It was Debbie, Nicole’s piano teacher. “I’m terribly sorry,” she said, “but I’m going to have to reschedule the piano recital this weekend!” That day Nicole taught me something about child-like faith. And I learned that God would move heaven and earth if necessary in response to the faith-filled prayers of a little child.

- 4. Teach children to handle disappointments in prayer.** This may seem contrary to my previous point, but sometimes God doesn’t respond to our prayers in the time or way we feel He should. It is important for children to develop a relationship with God that goes beyond getting everything we ask for in prayer. There are reasons that God doesn’t answer our prayers in the way we’ve asked Him. Some of these reasons are that the request is not in God’s will. (It’s important to teach children to discern the will of God.) Sometimes we ask

with wrong motives or there is some other sin in our lives. Other times we waiver in our faith. I believe that other times our prayers are not answered because the body of Christ is divided and divisive instead of our holding up one another in united agreeing prayer.

Children ask questions, and whenever possible, we need to give them answers. Sometimes there just don't seem to be any answers.

When our 16-year-old friend Matthew Buckley drowned in the Salt River a few years ago, we prayed for a miracle, but the miracle we were trusting God for didn't come. Our family and Nicole's whole school attended the funeral. We wept a lot, and we all asked God a lot of questions. The bottom line is this: no matter what happens, we keep trusting God, because He is faithful. This is where our actions as adults speak louder than words. In times of crisis and disappointment, children watch to see if we really believe what we teach.

How to Teach Children to Pray

1. **Invite children into your prayer life.** Keith Wooden in his book, *Teaching Children to Pray* says, "A 'prayer closet' that is open to the intrusive chatter of children may be the best opportunity you have to demonstrate your reverence and love for God. Invite them into your Holy of Holies to savor the presence of the Lord with you." We must let children see and hear us pray. Children need to have a sense that God lives in their home and that He is available to them.²⁰

²⁰ Keith Wooden, *Teaching Children to Pray* (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan 1992) p. 27.

During the years Nicole was a preschooler my life was extremely busy. With our growing ministry headquartered in our home, I felt my personal and family life was being encroached upon. Our fax machine and Xerox copier were stationed in our master bedroom and the kitchen table served as my desk. Serving as a personal assistant to my husband along with my own teaching ministry, on top of keeping up our home and running after a three-year-old consumed my time.

It seemed the only time I had to spend alone with the Lord was very early in the morning. I would often awaken about 4 a.m., slip out of bed, tip-toe down the hall past Nicole's room, to the living couch where I would peer out the picture window into the quiet night sky and pray. However, no matter how carefully I crept past Nicole's door, it was usually only a matter of minutes until I would hear the pitter-patter of little feet and she would suddenly appear in the doorway, with pillow and blanket dragging behind.

"What are you doing, Mommy?" she would ask.

"I'm praying, honey! This is Mommy's time to talk to God." At first I tried to coerce her to go back to bed. (At this stage in my life I didn't recognize I was about to miss a wonderful opportunity to mentor my daughter in prayer.) After I realized that all of my prayer time was going to be used up in a battle of getting her back to bed, I invited Nicole to sit quietly with me during my prayer time. Wrapped in a warm blanket, she would snuggle up to me and listen as I whispered my prayers to God. Sometimes she would fall asleep but more often

than not, the first glimmer of morning sun would find us sitting together in the presence of the Lord.

Hal, on the other hand, would usually go for a prayer walk in the evenings. Nicole still talks about how she enjoyed riding on her daddy's shoulders as he walked our neighborhood and poured out his heart to God. We need to let our children see our prayer life. We may pray all the time, but if our children never see us pray, it hinders the learning process.

2. **Get children involved in prayer gatherings.** We may tell children that their prayers are important, but if all we ask them to do during prayer times is sit still, they will get the message that prayer is only for adults. Whether it's a family prayer time or a corporate prayer meeting in the church, children need to be included. In recent years there has been a trend toward holding cross- denominational and multi-cultural citywide and nation-wide prayer meetings. Now we are beginning to see a move of God toward transgenerational prayer.

The Lord gives this word of instruction regarding corporate prayer in Joel 2:16: "Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breast..."

Sue Curran pastor of Shekinah Church says, "Our children from speaking age (two to three) know that their prayers are welcomed in the corporate meetings. It is not at all unusual for one or more of them to pray for me and other leaders before we preach or minister in worship

8/20/09

services. A capacity to give themselves in prayer was developed in prayer meetings. We ‘suffered the little children,’ not forbidding them to come to Jesus, and as we took their prayer seriously, they became prayers.’²¹

My friend Leonard Griffin, the pastor of Covenant of Grace, discovered the importance of including children in corporate prayer one Wednesday evening when he invited the children and youth to be a part of a special time of prayer. At one point in the service, Leonard asked the children if they would pray for him. One after another, the children prayed insightful prayers right from the heart of God. One such prayer was that of a boy who looked to be about nine years old. “Lord, please help Pastor Leonard learn to speak Spanish so that one day he will be able to preach your word in Mexico and Latin America.” His eyes filled with tears, Leonard shared with the congregation how he had told no one but the Lord of his burning desire to preach the Gospel in the Spanish language.

3. **Make prayer a “hands-on” experience.** Children learn by involvement - tasting, touching, seeing, and hearing. I recommend that parents and Sunday school teachers purchase the “prayer tools” developed by the Esther Network to help children learn to pray. One prayer tool is a “global”, a soft globe of the world with the 10/40 window clearly marked. This can be used in a number of ways, one of which is to ask children to gather in a circle and take turns tossing the ball to one another. The child who tosses the balls calls out, “Catch the vision. Get global!” The child who catches it, hugs the ball while praying for the children in

²¹ Sue Curran, *The Praying Church*, Blountville, Tenn.: Shekinah Publishing Company, 1987), p. 85-86.

8/20/09

some part of the world.²² Having something to hold while praying publicly seems to give children confidence, and the globe helps children focus on different countries of the world. A similar idea is the “prayer bear” which can be purchased from Focus on the Family.

Another prayer tool that can be purchased from The Esther Network is a large prayer spinner. To use this tool, the child spins the arrow and then prays over the prayer item on which the spinner falls. Some of the categories for prayer are: hurting and abused children, children who need to know Christ, kids like “me” (for example all the children in the world with the name Joey or all the boys who are five years old.)²³ It is amazing to see the Holy Spirit inspire deep intercession among the children when this approach is used. In one such prayer session I observed children began to fall to their knees and weep, calling out to God with gut wrenching prayers such as, “God make the mothers and fathers to stop fighting. Tell them it is hurting their kids.” And “Jesus, cause our mothers and fathers to stop killing our brothers and sisters through abortion.”

Also included in the Esther Network prayer tools is a cassette tape carrying several songs by and for children. One entitled “I Am A House of Prayer” is itself a prayer regarding the child’s prayer life and comes complete with hand motions. Another tool is a felt board showing a map focusing on the 10/40 Window. One of the ways I have seen this tool used is in corporate church settings with children leading the prayer. With the lights turned out, the children gather around the felt board and shine flashlights upon the 10/40 window as they

²² Esther Ilnisky, Esther Network International, 854 Conniston Rd., West Palm Beach, FL 33405.

²³ Ibid.

sing “Shine Jesus Shine.”²⁴ This is a song of intercession over the nations of the earth. Overall, the use of songs, the words of which are actual prayers, is an excellent way to teach children to pray and to get them involved in prayer.

Another suggestion is teaching children to remember what to pray for by using the fingers on their hand.

Finger one—“Your thumb is close to you so it will represent those who are close to you. It reminds you to pray for your family members, relatives, and friends.”

Finger two—“Next comes your point finger. This finger reminds you to pray for people you want to point to Jesus. (It is surprising how perceptive a child is about those who know Jesus in their hearts and those who do not. Let them name those for whom they’re praying.)”

Finger three—“Your third finger represents those who are in authority. It is the biggest finger and the strongest one. It stands for leaders, pastors, missionaries, teachers, parents and “big” people for whom we pray.”

Finger four—“The fourth finger is your weakest finger. It reminds you of people who are weak, sick, or going through difficult times.”

²⁴ Ibid.

8/20/09

Finger five—“the smallest finger reminds you to pray for yourself. (It helps children place their own needs in perspective.)”²⁵

Consider holding a Saturday morning prayer seminar for children to teach them to pray and give them an opportunity to pray. A portion of the time could be used to help each child put together a prayer book. This is also a great activity for parents to do with their children. When my seven-year-old niece Brooke came to visit me last summer, I wanted to do something special to help her grow in her prayer life. We decided to spend an afternoon making a prayer book together. I encouraged Brooke to be creative in using photographs, drawings, and scriptures to prepare sections for thanksgiving, praise, God’s promises, and requests. When the afternoon was over, Brooke had received an in-depth lesson on prayer while we had fun making a special memory together.

4. **Prayerwalking is fun for children.** You can take children for a prayerwalk in the neighborhood around your home or church. Parents and Sunday school teachers might also consider building a set of a neighborhood with schools, churches, houses, etc. and simulate a prayerwalk right in their own home or classroom. The Church on Brady in Los Angeles, Calif. has done an excellent job of teaching children about prayerwalking. They teach children that whenever they pass by a house and see the roof, to pray, “Lord please help the father of this house to be the spiritual covering for this family.” Whenever they pass a church to pray, “God, please help the people in this church to experience you in fresh new ways.” And when they see a stop sign to do spiritual warfare with this declaration, “Satan,

²⁵ Wooden, p. 37.

8/20/09

stop your work in this city, in Jesus name!” Fawn and Joey Parish have produced an excellent 7-minute video entitled *Prayerwalking for Kids*.²⁶ This is an exciting way to introduce prayerwalking to children in your home or Sunday school class.

5. **Encourage children to develop a special place for prayer.** Some Sunday school rooms have a corner with a prayer table, Bible, candle, and sometimes a basket with scripture verses to help children pray. Classrooms can even be arranged so that prayer stations can be set up on the perimeter of the room. One station might be for praying for the salvation of those who need Christ. This station, for example, might include a bulletin board bearing pictures of unsaved friends and family members. Another station might be prayer for the schools. If you decide to do this, allow the children to actually set up and decorate the stations themselves. Make sure that each station contains scripture verses to help the children pray over the specific prayer agenda for that station.

In some churches the youth groups have been given their own prayer room. In such instances the youth have been allowed to decorate the room with brightly colored paint, pictures of their schools, classmates, and posters of rock stars and sports figures they are praying for to be born again. Creative ideas also can be developed for the child’s bedroom. Nicole who is now seventeen, has designated one of the walls in her room as a promise wall. Here she has posted all the promises God has given her as she has read her Bible. When she looks at the wall each day it reminds her of God’s faithfulness and helps her remember to pray the Word of God which He has made so personal to her.

²⁶ Joey and Fawn Parish, *Prayerwalking for Kids*, 6673 Sora Street, Ventura CA 93003.

THE BATTLE FOR THE RIGHTEOUS SEED

“...and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was delivered” Revelation 12:4. This graphic Scripture paints a picture of what Satan’s intent has been ever since the beginning of time...to devour the righteous seed. He sought to destroy Joseph, Moses, and Jesus. And he is still seeking to destroy our precious youth.

Today’s children and teens are under constant assault from many sources including satanic attack. They are extremely vulnerable to all kinds of evil influences at one of the most difficult times of their lives – physically and emotionally. While many adults are “writing them off” as irrational, uncontrollable, moody, and unpredictable, God desires to do a powerful work in the lives of our youth.

As a church leader and the mother of a teenager, I am in a unique position to see the mighty prayer warriors God is raising up in this generation. Just as we are seeing those youth who have been captured by the enemy becoming militant, rebellious and sometimes even violent, God is raising up a generation of bold courageous Joshua’s...mighty prayer warriors whose hearts will not fail for fear. I believe that we as parents and as a church will be remiss if we do not affirm their calling and do battle for them in prayer. It is important, therefore that we not only train

8/20/09

children and youth to be mighty prayer warriors but that we come along side them to do battle in the heavenlies in their behalf.

I often encourage youth pastors and church prayer coordinators to set aside one weekend service a year to emphasize the urgent need for the church body to stand in the gap in prayer for Generation X. A good time to do this is in August when families are focusing on the beginning of a new school year. Kurt Cotter, the youth pastor at Living Streams Christian Church, tells how he planned what turned out to be an effective and dynamic service:

In response to the prompting to the Holy Spirit, I took our regularly scheduled Youth Sunday to preach to our congregation about the principles of intercessory prayer and the need for our church family to raise up a prayer covering for our youth.

The young people in our youth department conducted every part of the service, except for my sermon. They served as ushers, received the offering, led praise and worship. Others shared their testimonies or gave short exhortations from the Scriptures.

At the close of the service, the youth were called to the front of the church. The adult members of the congregation were challenged to consider adopting a youth in prayer for a year. I exhorted them, “Will you ask God to protect the youth for whom you are praying? To draw him/her away from ungodly influences? To give him/her a heart to follow after the things of God and to fulfill his/her destiny in Christ?”

8/20/09

In preparation for this special service, we had taken photos of everyone involved in our youth group. We also compiled a 3X5 card of basic biographical information on each student to help an intercessor pray more effectively. The students passed out the photos and biographical information to each adult who agreed to adopt a youth in prayer.

Our youth helped us compile a list of prayer targets for use by the entire congregation. This was developed into a bulletin insert so everyone in the congregation could take home a reminder to pray for the youth of our church.

Our enemy would like nothing better than to destroy our righteous seed. But the members of Living Streams have made a commitment to build a prayer hedge around our youth. We are not going to let Satan draw them into or keep them bound by illicit sex, gangs, and rebellion. I believe God is calling us as church leaders to mobilize our congregations to stand in the gap for Generation X...that it may be said of them as it was of King David (Acts 13:36) that “he served the purpose of God in his generation.”

If your church is unable to devote an entire service to this cause, try working in the context of 15 to 20 minutes in a Sunday morning or evening service. The senior pastor might call the youth to the front of the sanctuary, giving them some affirmations such as, “We realize how many pressures and temptations you as young people have today. And as a church body we want to affirm you, encourage you, and pray for you rather than criticize.” The pastor might then pray over the group, asking the congregation to join in agreement with his prayers or even invite adults to come to the platform and pray additional prayers. In some cases it may be

8/20/09

appropriate for the pastor to lead the congregation in a prayer of repentance for spending more time criticizing rather than interceding for the youth.²⁷

In addition to encouraging and inspiring your church body to pray for their youth, it is important to provide resources and tools on how to pray. Kurt Cotter's idea of asking youth to prepare their own prayer agenda is a good one. I also recommend an excellent pamphlet entitled "Rescue Our Teens through Prayer" by Dr. Will Bruce of Overseas Missionary Fellowship. In it Bruce says, "...there is a critical need for adult believers to be encouraged and equipped to pray for our youth. With so few godly role models or people willing to be godly mentors, teenagers desperately need prayer if they are to grow and mature in Christ."²⁸

Dr. Bruce wrote this pamphlet on how to pray for teenagers after consultation with national youth leaders. The pamphlet helps parents and adult intercessors better understand teens, list specific issues that youth struggle with daily, and lays out a seven-day plan to cover youth in prayer. These can be ordered in bulk very inexpensively and are an effective tool to put in the hands of every parent of a pre-teen or teenager in your church.

Some churches are holding training sessions to teach parents and intercessors to pray for children and youth. One children's education worker I know decided to hold a two-hour seminar to help parents learn to pray for their toddlers. When parents came to pick up their children after church one Sunday, she handed each one a brightly colored flier. It read: Have You Prayed for Your Children Today? If not, know that someone has prayed for them. If you would like to

²⁷ The *BridgeBuilder*, Phoenix, Az. August 1998.

8/20/09

learn more about how to pray for your children come to room C102 Wednesday, evening from 7 – 9 p.m. We're holding a special seminar just for you!

This same church also held a six-week training course using as a text, *The Parent Warrior*, by Karen Scalf Linamen. This four-part interactive book teaches parents how to pray for their children and includes a 21-day prayer journal to help adults put more prayer into their parenting.²⁹

If your church does not have a venue for teaching a course of this length, try tapping into the couples' Christian education classes or other small groups to bring in special speakers on the subject of "How to Pray More Effectively for Your Children."

Whatever methods and resources you use, it is important to make certain that the youth and children of your church are covered in prayer. A wonderful goal is for every child and youth in the church to be adopted in prayer by a mature Christian intercessor. Because of their inexperience, vulnerability, physical limitations, temptations, and spiritual warfare, it is important that someone is praying for the children and youth of your church daily.

I personally believe that as we enter into the twenty-first century, that God is up to something much bigger than we have previously imagined, and from my vantagepoint, the children and youth are center stage.

²⁸ Dr. Will Bruce, "Rescue Our Teens Through Prayer," Overseas Missionary Fellowship International, 1996.

²⁹