

**SAMPLE**

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# Introduction

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As I was tracking down source information for one of the quotes in this booklet, I noticed the preface in a book I was citing. I smiled when I read it because I appreciate C. H. Spurgeon's sense of humor, and especially because I could identify with what he was saying:

*I have no idea of what I am expected to say in a preface, and I am of the opinion that a book is better without an appendage usually so unmeaning. I will, however, make one or two faithful declarations which may, perhaps, shield me from the reader's wrath, should he find my work of less value than he expected. Never was there a book written amid more incessant toil... Writing is to me the work of a slave. It is a delight, a joy, a rapture to talk out one's thoughts in words that flash upon the mind at the instant when they are required; but it is pure drudgery to sit still and groan for thoughts and words without succeeding in obtaining them.<sup>1</sup>*

For me, it has only taken a few days of “groaning” and “rapture,” “drudgery” and “delight” to put words to thoughts that have been forming and simmering for more than a year. By the summer of 2017, it seemed as though the organization that is the tangible expression of my heart and vision for the faith of the next generation had reached its lowest point since 1998 when Children Desiring God was founded. In the midst of all the planning and preparation for the transition to our new name, some of us were wondering if there would ever be a Truth78.

I will offer a few more details later in this booklet, but here I would like to make one “faithful declaration,” perhaps to “shield me from the reader's wrath,” but mainly to help the reader understand what this small booklet represents for Truth78. By the end of 2017, sorrow melted away, hope revived, fresh vision came, and an all-time low was transformed into one of the most exciting times to be part of this ministry.

This transformation coincided with a change of emphasis in our prayers. We had been focusing our prayers on our need for increased

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<sup>1</sup> C. H. Spurgeon. *The Saint and His Savior: or, The Progress of the Soul in the Knowledge of Jesus*. (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, and Company, 1857), v.

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sales and the development of our donor base. It is not that we were wrong to ask for our sales to increase and our fundraising efforts to succeed, but that the declining sales and need for funds seemed more urgent to me than our mission—to faithfully declare as far and as wide as we can to the next generations “the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.”<sup>2</sup> For more than two decades we had been committed to doing this through the God-ordained institutions that He has established, namely the church and the home.

But here I was, feeling more desperate about the circumstances that were prompting desperate prayers, rather than the massively more significant concerns for the faith of the next generation.

The change came when we shifted our attention and our desperation toward the greater concerns and focused less on the immediate financial challenges we were facing. When we changed the way we prayed, our hope revived, our faith increased, and we fretted less about finances.

I want to be careful to emphasize that this is not a playbook for successful fundraising. The fact that our financial situation improved and fresh excitement for the future came is owing to nothing other than the grace and undeserved kindness of God. Please don't interpret this as, “If you pray big, bold, biblical prayers, your plans will succeed.” Instead, know that if we pray big, bold, biblical prayers for the next generation, what can happen is that the greater cause will matter more to us than the lesser.

We will understand that the lesser causes, like the success of Truth78, are there to serve the greater. If, in the wisdom of God, the greater cause could flourish without Truth78, then we rest in the wisdom that is infinitely greater than ours.

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2 Psalm 78:4

# The Prayers of this Generation Matter to the Next

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Over the years of our ministry, my wife Sally and I have taught various classes and seminars that offer vision and practical strategies for Christian parents who are committed to faithfully raising their children in the “instruction of the Lord.”<sup>3</sup> There is a tension we often feel when teaching on the subject of faith and children. The tension is between the responsibility Christian parents have to give their children what matters most and the reality that, apart from Christ, parents have no power to ensure that their children embrace what ultimately matters most to them and to us. There is no way parents can escape responsibility for nurturing the faith of their children, and there is no way to escape the reality that their children will only be saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> The most biblical vision, the best parenting strategies, and the most comprehensive Deuteronomy 6:7-9 instruction in the Christian faith does not guarantee that children will be born again and that parents will experience the joy of seeing them walk in the Truth. Saving faith for any child “is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one [no parent, no pastor, no grandparent, no Sunday school teacher] may boast.”<sup>5</sup>

We have encouraged parents to heed their biblical responsibility, and we have offered tools and support to raise their children in the faith. We have also encouraged parents with the hope-giving assurance that God rules over the hearts of their children<sup>6</sup> and can transform the most stubborn and spiritually resistant heart into a soul that pants for Christ “as a deer pants for flowing streams.”<sup>7</sup>

We challenge parents to work out the salvation of their children “with fear and trembling”<sup>8</sup> and, at the same time, to hold fast to the assur-

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3 Ephesians 6:4

4 Ephesians 2:8-9

5 Ibid.

6 Proverbs 21:1

7 Psalm 42:1

8 Philippians 2:12

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ance that God is at work in them and in their children “both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”<sup>9</sup>

God’s unstoppable purposes for our children and our inescapable responsibility to raise them in the faith come together in prayer. The Apostle Paul stuns us at the beginning of Ephesians by assuring us that every true child of God was chosen in Christ to be “holy and blameless,” and this was “before the foundation of the world...predestined...for adoption...according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace.”<sup>10</sup> And yet, having just affirmed this reality for every believer, Paul still prayed that their hearts would be enlightened,<sup>11</sup> and he bowed his knees so that (among other reasons) “Christ may dwell in [their] hearts through faith.”<sup>12</sup>

Even more stunning are Jesus’ words to Peter the night before He was crucified: “Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.”<sup>13</sup> Isn’t that amazing? Jesus, the Son of God, who sustains the universe by the word of His power, felt compelled to pray that Peter’s faith would not fail after He had declared with absolute authority that this same man was the rock on which “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”<sup>14</sup>

In 2003, George Barna published the results of an extensive study that I have found useful for inspiring prayer for the next generation. In this book,<sup>15</sup> Barna helps us assess the spiritual influence we are having on the next generations and makes an interesting observation. He notes that *churches with the most effective and fruitful ministries to children were also churches that were the most serious about prayer.*

He found the most productive children’s ministries have five areas of prayer focus. In summary, they are:

1. Teachers praying for each of their students on a regular basis.
2. Teachers praying as a team, usually on a weekly basis, along with other staff and church leaders in the children’s ministry.

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9 Philippians 2:13

10 Ephesians 1:4-6

11 Ephesians 1:18

12 Ephesians 3:17

13 Luke 22:31-32

14 Matthew 16:18

15 George Barna. *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church’s #1 Priority.* (Raleigh, N.C.: Regal Books, a division of Gospel Light, 2003), 102-104.

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3. Intercessors volunteering to faithfully pray for the teachers and students.
4. The entire congregation frequently praying for children's ministry.
5. Parents praying during prayer times organized by the church and in connection with prayer partners.

Barna says, "These churches are unusually effective, I believe, because they constantly beg God to bless the work related to the moral and spiritual maturation of their congregation's young people... Prayer works in these churches because the body of believers shares God's heartbeat about the importance of children and believes that prayer makes a difference in people's lives. The result is obvious..."<sup>16</sup>

Another source for prayer inspiration comes from Reverend William Scribner, an American pastor who published in 1873, *An Appeal to Parents to Pray Continually for the Welfare and Salvation of Their Children*.<sup>17</sup> The book is divided into two parts that offer practical and biblical reasons why we should pray for our children's salvation and for their welfare. Just reviewing the headings for each of Scribner's sections provides us with substantial encouragement to pray for the next generation:

**Prayer works in these churches because the body of believers shares God's heartbeat about the importance of children and believes that prayer makes a difference in people's lives. The result is obvious...**

—George Barna

## Praying for Your Children's Salvation

1. *Their salvation is so great a prize that it is worth all the pains which your prayer to secure it for them may cost you.*
2. *Few will pray for them if you do not.*
3. *No one else can pray for them as you do.*

<sup>16</sup> George Barna. *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions: Why Children Should Be Your Church's #1 Priority*. (Raleigh, N.C.: Regal Books, a Division of Gospel Light of Ventura California, 2003), 102-104.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. William Scribner. *Pray for Your Children, or An Appeal to Parents to Pray Continually for the Welfare and Salvation of Their Children*. (Philadelphia, Penn.: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1873), <https://archive.org/details/prayforyourchild00scri/page/n0> (accessed 10/11/18).

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4. *Your omitting to do so will be perilous to them and to you.*
5. *You will then find it easier to perform other parental duties, which God has ordained as a means to their salvation.*
6. *Prayer alone can call into exercise that divine power on their behalf, which is absolutely necessary in order that the prayers which you may employ for their salvation may not be used in vain.*
7. *By their salvation, granted in answer to your prayers, your Savior will be glorified.*

## Praying for Your Children's Welfare

1. *You may then expect, as a result of your prayers, that the power of God will counteract in some measure the evil you have done them.*
2. *There will be critical periods in their lives when, without your incessant prayers, they may be left to act most unwisely, if not disastrously.*
3. *It will lead you to a better understanding of them.*
4. *It will increase your holy desires for them.*
5. *No other means will be so effectual in enabling you to overcome the difficulty you experience in talking with them on religious subjects.*
6. *You will thereby secure for them God's aid in the efforts they may make to yield to you in obedience.*
7. *Other parents, seeing your example, may be led to imitate you.*
8. *They will often, should they continue in the world, have their times of need when the power of God alone can avail to help them.*

The bottom line—prayer matters! It matters to us. It matters to our children. It matters to every generation until Jesus comes. It matters because God is pleased to accomplish His unstoppable purposes through the prayers of His people.