

# **Growing Dads God's Way-20 The Most Powerful Tools in Godly Parenting: Prayer - 3 What happens when parents pray?**

One of my great heroes of the faith is a missionary who lived from 1824-1907. His name was John Paton, and he was born<sup>1</sup> in a "farm cottage not far from Dumfries, Scotland, May 24, 1824. He was the eldest of eleven children. After some snatches of elementary education, he set out to learn the trade of his father -- the manufacture of stockings. For fourteen hours a day he manipulated one of the six "stocking frames" in his father's workshop, using for study most of the two hours allotted each day for the eating of his meals".

To learn the secret of his life as a pioneer missionary is to learn of the power of his parent's prayers for him. Remember that prayer catapults us to the frontiers of what ever God is doing around the earth, and that is exactly what John Paton had been taught by example.

"It was New Year's Day, 1861, on the island of Tanna, in the New Hebrides. The missionaries had spent the day taking medicine, food, and water to the villagers, hundreds of whom were smitten down with a virulent type of measles. In the evening, the missionaries knelt in the mission house in a fervent prayer of consecration of their all to Christ and of petition for the salvation of the cannibals among whom they lived. They solemnly committed themselves to the protecting presence of their Lord, not knowing that even then the house was surrounded by fierce savages, armed with clubs, killing-stones and muskets, determined to slay and eat the foreigners whose God, they believed, had brought disease, hurricanes, and other troubles upon them.

After the worship, the younger missionary stepped out of the door to go to his own house close by. Instantly he was attacked and fell to the ground screaming, "Look out! They are trying to kill us!" Rushing to the door the older missionary shouted to the savages, "Yahweh God sees you and will punish you for trying to murder His servants." Two cannibals swung their

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<sup>1</sup> Sections quoted from THE APOSTLE OF CHRIST TO THE CANNIBALS OF THE NEW HEBRIDES by *Eugene Myers Harrison*

ponderous clubs and struck at him, but missed, whereupon the entire company fled into the bush.

The younger missionary was in such a state of excitement that for days he was unable to sleep. In fact, his nervous system was unhinged by the shock of the attack, his mind gave way under the apprehension of being killed and eaten by savages, and in three weeks he died. The older missionary had already survived many such attacks on his life and was destined to survive many more. John G. Paton -- for such was his name -- found in the presence of his Lord the antidote to fear and the assurance that his life was immortal until his work was accomplished. "During the crisis," he says in his Autobiography, "I felt calm and firm of soul, standing unafraid and with my whole weight on the promise, *'Lo, I am with you alway..'*"

What prepared John G. Paton for that kind of perseverance<sup>2</sup> — another fifty years of rugged, faithful missionary labor? His parent's prayers. Paton's father, James, was converted at seventeen and immediately convinced his mother and father that the family should have morning and evening prayer together. Paton writes about his father:

"And so began in his seventeenth year that blessed custom of Family Prayer, morning and evening which my father practiced probably without one single avoidable omission till he lay on his deathbed at seventy-seven years of age. None of us can remember that any day ever passed unhallowed thus; no hurry for market, no rush to business, no arrival of friends or guests, no trouble or sorrow, no joy or excitement, ever prevented at least our kneeling around the family altar, while the High Priest led our prayers to God, and offered himself and his children there."<sup>3</sup>

How could we ever see our children do anything of this magnitude? How can we penetrate the lives of our children with these truths? How can we see God unleashed in their lives? How can we every day be actively using God's Word and seeing it touch those children and grandchildren we love so much?

The answer is in the most powerful tool in the arsenal of weaponry to win spiritual battles that God has given us. The key to raising, nurturing, and launching children that please the Lord is learning how to pray for our children.

That is why Jesus prayed so much and His apostles commanded us to follow that example! To feel the heart of Jesus on prayer, please open with me to Luke 11 and follow along as I read the first 13 verses.

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<sup>2</sup> Piper, *A Godward Life*, pp.284-286.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

So we as parents have a biblical opportunity and obligation to PRAY FOR OUR CHILDREN.

- o 1 Samuel 12:23 "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way. (NKJV)
- o Ephesians 6:18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints -- (NKJV) And what are we watching for? God answering those prayers!

WE MUST PRAY FOR THEIR SPIRITUAL LIFE:

1. **TO SEE THEM GENUINELY SAVED.**
  - o 1 Timothy 2:4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (NIV)
  - o 2 Timothy 3:15
2. **TO SEE THEM LOVING GOD'S WORD.**
  - o Job 23:12
  - o Psalm 119:97, 165
  - o Jeremiah 15:16 Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts. (NKJV)
3. **TO SEE THEM LIVING IN VICTORY.**
  - o John 8:36
  - o John 17:15 "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. (NKJV)
4. **TO SEE THEM THINKING OF HEAVEN.**
  - o 2 Corinthians 4:16-17
  - o Colossians 3:1-2
  - o 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20
  - o 1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (NKJV) [Funerals, mansions, ancient sites, tuts treasures]
5. **TO SEE THEM FINDING SIN REPULSIVE.**
  - o Proverbs 20:17 .
  - o Luke 15:17-18
  - o Hebrews 11:25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, (NKJV)
6. **TO SEE THEM STAY TENDER TOWARD GOD.**
  - o Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart -- These, O God, You will not despise. (NKJV)

WE MUST PRAY FOR THEIR PERSONAL LIFE:

## 1. TO SEE THEM MAINTAINING A CLEAR CONSCIENCE.

What is conscience and how can we pray for our children's conscience? This week two [planes collided in mid air over Germany. The investigation found that the sensor that warns of a collision was switched off. That system is very similar to what God has designed as our conscience. It is an automatic warning system that tells us, "Pull up! Pull up!" before we crash and burn.

Our conscience is a part of our personhood as being made in God's image, and is an innate ability to sense right and wrong. Everyone, even the most uncivilized heathen, has a conscience (Rom. 2:14–15). Our conscience begs us to do what we believe is right and hinders us from doing what we believe is wrong. If we violate our conscience, it condemns us, triggering feelings of disgrace, torment, penitence, dismay, apprehension, dishonor, and even fear. When we follow our conscience, it praises us, bringing joy, tranquillity, self-confidence, security, and cheerfulness.

- o So in God's Word a tender heart (Josiah in 2 Chr. 34:27), refers to a responsive conscience.
- o The "upright in heart" (Ps. 7:10) are those with pure consciences.
- o And when David prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Ps. 51:10), he was seeking to have his life and his conscience cleansed.
- o A troubled conscience should spur us to seek the spiritual growth that would bring our conscience more in harmony with God's Word. Psalm 139:23-24
- o Our goal should be to "master biblical truth so that our conscience is completely informed and judges right because it is responding to God's Word. A regular diet of Scripture will strengthen a weak conscience or restrain an overactive one.
- o Conversely<sup>4</sup>, error, human wisdom, and wrong moral influences filling the mind will corrupt or cripple the conscience. Our conscience is like the nerve endings in our fingertips. Its sensitivity to external stimuli can be damaged by the buildup of callouses or even wounded so badly as to be virtually impervious to any feeling. Paul also wrote of the dangers of a calloused conscience (1 Cor. 8:10), a wounded conscience (v. 12), and a seared conscience (1 Tim. 4:2). The word *seared* means<sup>5</sup> "cauterized." Just as a person's flesh can be "branded" so that it becomes hard and without feeling, so a person's conscience can be deadened. Whenever we affirm

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<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Vanishing Conscience - Drawing the Line in a No-Fault, Guilt-Free World*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing) 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

with our lips something that we deny with our lives (whether people know it or not), we deaden our consciences just a little more.

Effective Christian warriors have a conscience bound with God's truth. "Charles Colson believes that our American society's constant, mindless engagement with the media, where trash is heaped upon trash and the bizarre is commonplace, has left us morally exhausted and without discernment.

"The inability to make moral distinctions is the AIDS of the intellectuals: an acquired immune deficiency syndrome ... moral blindness of this caliber requires practice. It has to be learned." In a culture infected with moral AIDS, words lose all meaning; or, they are manipulated to obscure meaning. Thus taxes become "revenue assessment enhancements"; perversion is "gay"; murder of unborn children is "freedom of choice"; Marxism in the church is called "liberation theology." These are all good words (in the Nazi era "the final solution" had a nice ring to it also). And everyone just nods unquestioningly. But when words lose their meaning, it is nearly impossible for the Word of God to be received. If sin and repentance mean nothing, then God's grace is irrelevant. Our preaching falls on deaf ears. This moral deafness leads to disaster. The Scriptures tell us it was when people accepted King Ahab's gross evils as "trivial" that fearsome judgment befell ancient Israel.

The tragic result is spiritual impotence. The opposite is true of those who walk in truth. When you are filled with God's truth and living it, you will have a good conscience, and having that you can face anything. A truthful life is never an accident.<sup>6</sup>

WE MUST PRAY FOR THEIR PERSONAL LIFE:

**1. TO SEE THEM MAINTAINING A CLEAR CONSCIENCE.**

- o So how do we pray this for our children? Start in Ephesians 6: 14 as Paul says, "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist" (v. 14a). When a soldier tightened his belt he was ready for combat, because in the process of tightening he drew up his tunic and cinched it so it could not impede him as he charged into battle. So also a man of integrity, with a clear conscience, can face the enemy without fear. Without cinching ourselves tightly with the truth of Scripture, the other weapons of our warfare will clatter in disarray. Those who have stood firm as great warriors for Christ have been men and women of the Word and so were filled with the eternal truth of Scripture. The belt also held the sword. Unless we

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<sup>6</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

- practice the truth, we cannot use the Word of truth. Once a lie gets into the life of a believer, everything begins to fall apart. For over a year, King David lied about his sin with Bathsheba, and nothing went right. Psalms 32 and 51 tell of the price he paid.<sup>7</sup>
- o Acts 24:16 "This [being] so, I myself **always strive** to have a **conscience without offense toward God and men**. (NKJV)
  - o 1 Timothy 1:5 Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, [from] **a good conscience**, and [from] sincere faith, (NKJV)
  - o 1 Timothy 1:19 having faith and a **good conscience**, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, (NKJV)

You can have a clear conscience if you want one, and the offer is for anyone. If you have not yet come to Christ, the offer stands, as it always has. If you are wondering how to come, perhaps the following story will help. Charles Simeon, one of the greatest preachers of the Church of England, explained his coming to Christ like this:

As I was reading Bishop Wilson on the Lord's supper, I met with an expression to this effect—"That the Jews knew what they did, when they transferred their sin to the head of their offering." The thought came into my mind, "What, may I transfer all my guilt to another? Has God provided an Offering for me, that I may lay my sins on His head? Then, God willing, I will not bear them on my own soul one moment longer." Accordingly I sought to lay my sins upon the sacred head of Jesus.

If you want access to Christ and forgiveness of your sins and a new conscience, prayerfully imagine Christ standing before you. Now extend your hands humbly and lay your sins on the head of Jesus.

*I lay my sins on Jesus  
 The spotless Lamb of God;  
 He bears them all, and frees us  
 From the accursed load:  
 I bring my guilt to Jesus.  
 To wash my crimson stains  
 White in His blood most precious,  
 Till not a stain remains.*

(Horatius Bonar, 1843)

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<sup>7</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

What glorious benefits come from the New Covenant. What more could we ask for than forgiveness of our sins and a clear conscience? And we have exactly that in Christ!<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Hebrews Vol 1&2—An Anchor for the Soul*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1993.