

PRAYERS OF A PARENT: MYTHS, PURPOSE, OUTCOME

Host Callie Grant in conversation with Jodie Berndt

- Callie: Welcome. You're listening to the Newborn Promise Podcast for building up new families in Christian faith. Hey, Jodie. Thank you so much for being with us today.
- Jodie: Oh, Callie. Thank you. It's a treat to get to talk to you today.
- Callie: Oh my goodness. You've been part of my parenting life for the last 15 years-
- Jodie: Oh, wow.
- Callie: ... because your first book has been such a vital resource to me, honestly. It's filled with so much great Scripture and application of it. And that first book, *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children*, was published in 2001 when-
- Jodie: Yes, long time ago.
- Callie: A long time ago. I know. I look at your pictures then and your pictures now, and then your four children were still young and since then you've written *Praying the Scriptures for Your Teens* and *Praying the Scriptures for Your Adult Children*. So y'all have lived through a lot of ages and stages.
- Jodie: Yes, we have and each age and stage lets me know that I'm not finished praying. We say you never stop being a parent, and you never stop praying.
- Callie: I like that motto. Well, you have an amazing vantage point to offer our listeners, because you're a survivor. You are surviving.
- Jodie: Surviving.
- Callie: There you go, yeah. It's process, not a destination. Well, tell us how prayer has impacted your faith over all these years.
- Jodie: Oh, gosh, what a great kickoff question. I love that. Well, you know, I've always been somebody who has loved the Lord and wanted to see his work done in the lives of our family and our children. But I would say my understanding of how prayer works has sort of evolved and grown and stretched. I feel like every time I get a handle on it, God shows me something new. But it has really impacted my faith, and this wouldn't come as a surprised to you or any of your listeners, in some really positive ways, in that it has provided freedom from fear and worry. I think as parents so often our sort of default position, our immediate go-to when we get some bad news, or something is scary, or there's a diagnosis of an illness, or just whatever, is to worry, to be frightened, to be angry sometimes if our children have done something. And God is really showing me that my ready response, my default position needs to be one of prayer. That he is

cluding me in, letting me see what's going on in my children's lives, specifically because he wants me to pray. I'm just more and more convinced the older I get that the most important work we do as a parent is prayer.

Callie: Wow, that's a great perspective. What were some of the answers to prayers for your children that along the way completely surprised you?

Jodie: I would ... that's a good question too, and I would probably say every answer to prayer has surprised me, because we know the Lord will always do ... Ephesians 3, I think 20 and 21, says that you will "do immeasurably more than we all we ask for or imagine."

Callie: So true.

Jodie: And I would say that rare is the time that prayer has worked for me like a vending machine, where I put my request in and the answer that I expected comes tumbling out. It's much more like I talk to him about something and he either takes longer than I thought or does something above and beyond what I thought. One example might be my daughter Hillary ... and I tell this story in the Adult Children book. Because she graduated from the University of Virginia with an engineering degree, and she wanted to work in the space industry. Her dream job would be NASA. Well, I mostly just wanted her to get a job, you know? I wasn't all in for holding out for the dream. And it took a lot longer. I was praying for her to get a job, and I tell this story in the book. It does not make me look particularly faithful or good, because I really struggled with how she was going about her job hunt.

She didn't do it maybe the way I would have done it. And again, she was holding out for that job. And the punchline is she did get a job with NASA, and she loves it. But God had to use that whole experience to teach me to surrender, to trust him when I don't see the needle moving, or when I don't see how he's working. And really, I think that's what he wants for us as his children. Just like we want our kids to learn things like perseverance, I think he wants us to learn that too. He wants our prayer muscles to get strong. So sometimes those answers don't come right away. It's because he's doing more than what we're asking for. He's teaching us in the process, and he sure has taught me as I've prayed for these different things.

Callie: Wow. That is fascinating. Maybe you've answered this next question, but this has struck me recently. Why does God want us to pray? He's been teaching me, but it's much more than what we think it is.

Jodie: Yeah, yeah. Well, over and over again in Scripture, he says that we need to pray. When we're sick, we should pray. When we're afraid, we should pray. Just over and over, it's a command. I think, I used to wonder, "Golly, God. Why can't you just make things happen the way you want?"-

Callie: Totally.

Jodie: ... "If you want an obedient child, why can't you just zap them and they obey?" I think God is really after relationship with us, and prayer ... I think Jack Hayford actually said it really beautifully. He said prayer is a partnership of the redeemed child of God and is slipping their

hand into their heavenly father's. I think that God invented prayer. It's not something we thought up. He invented it as a way of his provision, of a way where we can come and ask him for things, and he will provide, because he really does want that relationship with us. He doesn't want to be just sitting off on a throne handing things out on his timetable. He wants us to come to him to ask, just like we would want our children. We wouldn't just want to zap them and provide things. We want to dialog with them and hear their hearts' desires and delight in fulfilling them and have that relationship grow. So I really think that's you he wants us to pray.

Callie: That's a great perspective. What do you see as the most common misperception among Christians about prayer?

Jodie: Oh, gosh. Don't we all have plenty of them. Prayer is a mystery. It's so simple. It's just talking with God, but it's also a mystery and I speak on prayer kind of all around the country, and I have people come up to me and they say things like, "Jodie, I don't want to be clogging the lines with my little request for my child's spelling test," or even something that seems big to us, like, maybe our spouse's job, when there are starving people in Africa and when there are threats of terrorism and when there ... all these major things people feel they should be praying about. We're never clogging the lines. We're never bugging God. We're just coming to him and doing the very thing that he's asked us to do. But I think that's a misconception that maybe God doesn't have the bandwidth for everything. But we know in Scripture that he knows the number of hairs on our head. He cares about the tiny things and he wants to hear that. So that's one that maybe God's too busy, or we'll be bugging him, or he doesn't have the bandwidth.

And maybe another is that we have to do it right. We have to sound holy, or we have to get our act together before we can come before holy God. There again, I look at our own children, and they don't have to have their act together before they come to us. We love them because they are ours. I think God loves us because we're his, and he just says, "Come to me. You don't have to sound perfect. You don't have to convince me and use persuasive language. Just come and let's talk." I think those are two ... the idea that we have to do it right, and the idea that maybe God's too busy for us. Neither of those is true.

Callie: Oh, that's great. Wow, that's very helpful. How could husbands and wives get off to a solid start as praying parents while they are still expecting?

Jodie: Oh, wow, while they're still expecting. That's a good one, and I love that. I really do love that, because I think so often we pray in response to something-

Callie: Exactly.

Jodie: ... rather than proactively, and yet we see throughout Scripture ... I think it's Jeremiah, the very first chapter. God looks at Jeremiah, and he says, "Before you were in the womb, I formed you. I knew you, and I knew the plans I had for you." And then in Psalm 139, we know that too. He knows us completely before we are born. If he knows us and he knows our children before they're born, what an invitation to begin our parenting journey even before they're born. While they're expecting to be able to be asking God for provision, for wisdom for us as parents, for health, for protection.

I have friends who have prayed for their child's marriage partner even before the child was born, praying for their own child and then praying for the eventual union and the families to come. It's just a really neat thing when you realize how God stands outside of time and we can pray these things before we know. Pray them proactively, not reactively. I love that idea of praying while you're still expecting.

Callie: Oh, great. Well, it does set up a good habit for the rest of the ... because there will be reactive prayer for sure, but it does establish-

Jodie: And while they're still in utero, they're easy to pray for. They're really being obedient and wonderful in general. They're eating what they're supposed to eat.

Callie: Exactly. I don't know. I had one daughter kick me a lot, so I maybe should have prayed for her to be a little less active.

Jodie: Oh, that's funny.

Callie: But anyway. Well, speaking of kids, prayer is one of those spiritual practices that we assume they can naturally acquire. But what factors do you think are important to intentionally teach them about prayer?

Jodie: Oh, I love that word, intentionally teach. That's great. You know, Jesus didn't teach his disciples to preach. He didn't teach them to evangelize, per se. What he taught them was about prayer, so really, I think prayer is something that is taught. It's not something we just maybe naturally ... it just doesn't always happen, even if we have a sense of who God is and we can say, "Lord, help." Or whatever. I think probably the best way that parents can teach a child about prayer is by praying. That the old saying "more is caught than taught," and I think that's really true.

And when our kids see us praying, whether we're praying about something that concerns us, whether we're praying as praise and thanksgiving over a provision that God has provided, just keeping the Lord in the dialog of our family life, I think is a really beautiful teaching tool to just show kids this is how it's done. It's not scary or complicated, and you don't have to be a professional minister or Billy Graham or somebody to do it. You can just talk to our God, your heavenly father, and he's always listening.

Callie: That's awesome. Well, young children do see a lot these days. Death, disease, divorce, and more, before the age of five, even. If parents are being faithful and praying with their children, how do we explain to them unanswered prayers, or prayers that don't bring the hope for answers? At such a young age.

Jodie: Yeah, such a young age, or at somebody who's 50.

Callie: True.

Jodie: That's a question we all grapple with. How do we explain these hard, hard things that happen and prayers that go unanswered or don't turn out like we had hoped or desired. I think that one thing I would say is that we need to point our kids completely toward God's love, that he's a

redeemer. That's what he's all about. I think we can look at bible stories where God brings good out of bad. You look at Joseph who's thrown down the well and all the stuff he went through, and you know that's not what he expected. You know that is a hard life, and one born out of real viciousness with his brothers. And yet, God brought good out of that. We read Genesis 50, where it says ... Joseph says, "God used this bad. What you intended to harm me, God used for good for the saving of many lives."

And so I think maybe somebody younger than five isn't quite old enough to grasp the idea that we live in a fallen world and that there are going to be consequences of that, and there's going to be icky stuff that's just because of our world. But I think they can, as they grow and as we expose them to how God works in Scripture and in our lives as we surrender those painful things to him ... God wants to comfort us, too. He's never said it would all be happy. Jesus says, "In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world."

And God had to really show me that in an interesting way, where I was disappointed about some things, answers to prayer that weren't happening like I wanted. I felt badly that I didn't have more faith and more joy and more trust. I felt like the Lord said to me, "You know, that's okay. You can feel sad. Why don't you come and let me comfort you and just let me love you." And I think for our children to know how loving God is and how his comfort is available to us, is a great starting place. Because he really does ... and he comforts us so that then we can comfort others, and a child who's known the comfort of the Lord or the comfort of a parent in a trying time can then be equipped to go out into the world and show that same compassion and that comfort to others. So there definitely is a purpose in that.

Callie: Oh, that's beautiful. Yeah, what a great way to look at it. I'm going to have to relisten to this podcast several times to absorb all this.

Jodie: Well, you have great questions, oh my gosh. But they're tricky ones. Making me think.

Callie: Well, we're going to have to do part two. That's all there is to it.

Jodie: There you go.

Callie: Well, we do see many women of faith pray powerfully in Scripture, and God faithfully answers them. Moms in particular seem to have a strong calling to pray. Tell us about Moms in Prayer International, and how participating in that affected your prayer life.

Jodie: Wow, yeah. Moms in Prayer, and their website momsinprayer.org, that's a group that I got involved with when my eldest was maybe in first grade. As I said earlier, I'd been a praying mom. I prayed for God to help my children at school, or to help their fever go away if they were sick, and bless them, and those kind of prayers which are great prayers. But then I got involved with Moms in Prayer and really learned to use Scripture to help shape my prayers.

I'll tell you, I was a little uncertain about it at first, because Moms in Prayer is very structured. They meet once a week. It's groups of moms that get together, just for an hour, and it's not a chatting time. It's not a catch-up time. It's really a prayer time. They have four clear steps that you go through that ... and they're biblically based. We see these prayers outlined in Scripture

over and over again, where you have adoration and praising the Lord, and then you have a little time of silent confession. And then you thank the Lord for answers to prayer for things he's done. Then you spend the bulk of your time interceding, praying, lifting up your children, their teachers, their friends, their schools.

I'll tell you, when I first saw that, I thought, "Wow, that's very confining. That's very formulaic." But what I discovered really in the first few months of praying that way, was it was a beautiful way to keep me accountable in prayer, to keep track of answers, to make sure that we were doing more praying than talking, and to really use Scripture. That's really the most powerful thing that Moms in Prayer showed me how to do was take the words first breathed by God and then turning them into prayers back to him. Really, I can't think of a more powerful way to pray than to do that. That was the basis of my books, the Praying the Scriptures.

Callie: Totally.

Jodie: I mean, Jesus says, John 15, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." And he's not saying that's some formula or some guarantee that just because you wrap a prayer up in a bible verse, that God has to do it. I think what he's saying is the more we use Scripture, the more we read it, let it shape our perspective, let it shape our desires, then the more our prayers line up with what God already wants to do. So I-

Callie: That's great.

Jodie: ... really think that using Scripture in our lives to animate our prayers is exciting.

Callie: That's fantastic. Well, I'll say reading your book over and over again, as I have in praying it over my daughter, and she's in her teens ... I still got the first book and it's still pretty applicable, but-

Jodie: And I did the same thing. I will tell you. I mean, my children would laugh, because they would think I was reading my own book, and they would be mortified. I would say, "No, no, no. I'm just going back to find the prayers."

Callie: Well, it is kind of your prayer journal, isn't it?

Jodie: A little bit, yeah, yeah.

Callie: Well, in doing that, I've actually typed up prayers from your book. Because you rephrase them so you can put the child's name in it, and I've printed those out and carried them with me and memorized them, on my walks and things. Yeah, so it's really planted God's word in my heart. You're so right, what you just said about it aligning you more and more. That's awesome.

Jodie: It really brings a peace. As I said earlier, the banishing the worry and fear and embracing just the peace and the sense that God has you and he has your children. They're never out of his reach, even though they may feel like they're out of yours. Just that using those promises and principles in his word really bind our heart together with the Lord's and provides that peace as parents.

Callie: That's beautiful, and it's so true. You know, I've been blindsided by events and seasons over the years that threw me off target in praying for my now teenage daughter. Yeah, and I feel like I took my eye off the ball, and I could've done better for her. I have regrets about that. What would you say to me and others in my shoes?

Jodie: Yeah. Oh, golly. That's maybe my favorite question. So, so good. Because really, I think every parent has walked in those shoes. We all have regrets. We all have things we wish we could do over, you know, words or actions we wish we could take back. Whole seasons sometimes we wish we could redo. And I've been there. Recently I've been there. What I would say, if a parent is listening and feeling that way, like, "Oh, gosh. I didn't learn to pray over my children when they were younger," or, "I've lost my temper. I've blown it. I've done or said this or that," is this. I would say that our ability to ruin our children is nothing compared to God's ability and his eagerness to redeem them.

And just like we saw in that Joseph example earlier, he doesn't just kind of cover over our mistakes so that we can't see them. He can use those things, the very things that we can point to and say, "Oh, that was so bad," he can use those things. And in his grace, use them to bring about good in our life and in our children's lives.

So, yeah, we all make mistakes. We all have regrets. And yet the beautiful thing is, God's so much bigger than those. So I would say to any parent, "Just tell them what you're sorry about." And if it's a time where you need to ask your child's forgiveness, I think that's a beautiful thing too, to be able to teach a child, "Mom, you know, I'm sorry. And can you forgive me?" And that sets up that whole pattern for them as they grow to know how to go to someone that maybe they've wronged and make things right.

Callie: Oh, that's great.

Jodie: I think there's a lot we can learn, a lot we can pull out of our mistakes and our sad places.

Callie: Wow, that's great. Well, now that you have married children, right?

Jodie: Yes.

Callie: Oh my goodness.

Jodie: Two of our daughters are married. We have two single, two married. They're all grown ups now.

Callie: Wow. You must be eagerly awaiting grandchildren. Is there a Praying the-

Jodie: I am, but I hope my daughters aren't listening. But I am, yes.

Callie: There must be ... you must have already started the Praying the Scriptures for Your Grandchildren.

Jodie: Well, I get asked that an awful lot.

Callie: I know you do.

Jodie: I really do. But I'll tell you-

Callie: And I know they do too.

Jodie: Well, no, I get asked about the book, and what I would say is, I think that Praying the Scriptures for Your Children works wonderfully for grandchildren. Our grandchildren are going to need the same things as our children.

Callie: That's so true.

Jodie: They need wisdom and compassion and kindness in their lives and self-discipline. They need good friendships, good relationships with their siblings. They need a love for God's word. All those things that we're praying when they're our own children are things we can pray for our grandchildren. I was privileged in the Adult Children book to interview a gal. Her name is Susan Yates. She's actually an author of several wonderful parenting books. She has 21 grandchildren. And I said, "Oh my goodness. Tell me about that." And so there's a chapter in that book called Praying When Your Children Have Children, and Susan's wisdom is just so beautiful as she talks about how grandparents can sometimes have an entree into the children's world that the parents don't have. The kids can roll their eyes and think you're old-fashioned, but it somehow works if you're the grandmom, not the mom.

She shares just the different ways she prays for her grandchildren. Sometimes even something as simple as sending them a text message to let them know that she's praying for them, is just a beautiful thing. It gives the kids such a sense of security, that somebody who's grown up and wise is lifting you up. It's just a great thing. So, yeah, I don't think I'm going to write Praying the Scriptures for Your Grandchildren. I think I'm just going to go back to my old dog-eared book and start praying those things all over again with different children's names in the blanks.

Callie: Well, I'll tell you. My prayer life is really hyper-focused right now, but when I read that book for the Adult Children, that's going to mean a lot to me, because ... yeah. I gave the book to a friend of mine, and she's on her knees every day. She's got girls in their early 20s, and they're doing great, but it's just tough out there.

Jodie: It is tough. You know the ... people sometimes say to me when I speak, or just on different shows, they say, "Is it true, little people, little problems. Big people, big problems?" And I say, "You know, yeah, it kind of is," in that the little people, little problems, those things are legitimate. A mom who's toddler won't sleep through the night, or who's hitting kids in the preschool. Those are concerns. I don't mean to belittle those. But as you know, when they're in their 20s and 30s, sometimes the choices that they're making can have more life-shaping, longer term consequences. So in that sense, some of those problems do feel bigger.

Callie: Yeah. Well, Jodie, this has been very encouraging to me, and I'm sure it is to those listening as well. As we wrap up, it seems especially appropriate to close our time together with a prayer. Would you please say a prayer for expecting and new parents?

Jodie: Yes. Oh my gosh. I would love to do that. What a treat. Thank you. Let's go before the Lord.

Heavenly father, I just thank you for everyone who is listening today. I thank you for Callie and for the beautiful example she is as a mom turning to you and trusting you. And for her heart for equipping other parents, men and women, who are expecting or who are raising young ones. Lord, I just think of how much you love us and how you lead us and how we just read throughout Scripture how you bend down and feed us, and you teach us to walk. You know what it's like to be a parent. And so I pray that you would equip up as parents to lead well, to teach well, to love well.

Father, where children are doing things, whether they are 3 years old or 30 years old, that maybe we don't understand or agree with, I pray that we would be equipped to bless and to love. Just pointing those children constantly to you, as the source of their strength and their life. In Jesus' name we ask these things. Amen.

Callie: Amen. Well, thank you so much for being with us today, Jodie. Very best to you in all your work.

Jodie: Oh, Callie. Thank you, and thank you. Lord bless what you're doing. Your podcast is just wonderful, and I know that it is equipping and encouraging so, so many. So, Lord bless you.

Callie: Thank you for listening to the Newborn Promise Podcast. Learn more at grahamblanchard.com.