



Parenting by Prayer

by JENNIFER KENNEDY DEAN

“All your sons will be taught by the Lord,
and great will be your children’s peace” (Isa. 54:13).

THE MOST IMPORTANT PARENTING SKILL we can hone is prayer. Through prayer, we can reach into the lives of our children, our grandchildren, and all of our descendants, touching their lives at the deepest places.

Have you noticed that you cannot parent character into your children? You can teach it and you can model it, but you cannot put it inside your children. For example, how can you parent with such skill that you teach a child to be honest? You can correct and punish him when you catch him lying; you can teach him honesty by example; you can show him videos and read him stories that teach honesty; you can lead him to memorize Scriptures about honesty. By doing these things, you will certainly lay the groundwork and give him the tools to live honestly, but you cannot make him honest. Why? Because truth has to reside in his innermost being, and you cannot put truth into his innermost being. That’s something God has to do.

But what you can’t parent into them, you can pray into them. “Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place” (Ps. 51:6). Only God can put truth and wisdom inside your child. So it is with every character trait. If you want those traits to be who your children are, not just how they act, then it will take prayer.

Pray in the Spirit

In praying for our children, our grandchildren, and our descendants, we must learn to pray in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Our mother-flesh and our





father-flesh is protective and possessive. The love we have for our children, in its flesh form, would like to control their lives and keep them from any pain, disappointment, or discouragement. Our flesh wants to rescue them and shield them and run interference for them. Our flesh will pray, “Don’t let anything bad happen.” To which the Lord will say, “I need to allow disappointment, pain, and failure so that I can give him the treasures of darkness and the riches stored in secret places.” If we pray for our children from our flesh, then we may think that God is not listening when our children do have difficulties.

As we pray for our children, we must die to our flesh connection with them and remain alive to the spiritual promise in them. Consider the story of Abraham, when God called on him to place Isaac on the altar.

On the Altar

To see this principle, we need to look at the account in the book of Genesis and the commentary on the story in the book of Hebrews.

The story begins, “God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’ ‘Here I am,’ he replied. Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.’ Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey” (Genesis 22:1-3).

God tested Abraham. The word “test” is better translated “proved.” When God tests, He is not trying to discover what is inside us. He knows what is inside us. He is proving what is inside us. He is bringing what is inside to the outside. Don’t think of this as a “trick” on God’s part. He is not trying to trip Abraham up; He is proving to Abraham what God knows is in him. In the book of Hebrews, we have an explanation of God’s dealing with Abraham. “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even





though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.” —Hebrews 11:17–19

You remember the story. Just as Abraham was about to plunge the knife into Isaac, an angel of the Lord stopped him. Yet the writer of Hebrews says, “Abraham offered Isaac.” He uses a verb tense that indicates a completed action. In the Amplified Bible it is translated like this: “Abraham completed the offering of Isaac.” Didn’t Abraham stop short of completing the offering? But the Bible says that he offered Isaac, completing the sacrifice. When did Abraham complete the offering of Isaac?

Go back to the account in Genesis. In the abbreviated version, God called Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, and the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey for the trip. But between God’s call and Abraham’s obedience lay a long, dark night of struggle. You and I are left to imagine how intense that struggle must have been. We can guess at the agony through which Abraham passed. Our hearts hear Abraham crying out something like this: “If You would, let this cup pass from me!” And before the morning broke, we hear him just as clearly say, “Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours be done.” It was in that dark night that Abraham completed the offering of Isaac. It was there that God received what He was asking for. How do I know that?

One of the layers of meaning in this account is that it is a picture of the crucifixion. Follow the timeline with me. Abraham got up, saddled his donkey, and set out for the place God would show Him (Genesis 22:2). He traveled for three days (Genesis 22:4), then took Isaac to the top of the mountain and prepared to sacrifice him on the altar. Instead of killing Isaac, God stopped him and Abraham received Isaac back in a resurrection: “and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death” (Hebrews 11:19). If Abraham traveled for three days and on the third day received Isaac back in





a type of resurrection, then when did Isaac die? The sacrifice was completed on the long, agonizing night that brought about Abraham's yielded obedience. Three days later, Abraham received Isaac back in a resurrection.

Abraham's Sacrifice

God considered the sacrifice to be completed. God got what He was after. What was God wanting from Abraham? What was the sacrifice?

Abraham was connected to Isaac in two ways: First, Isaac was the son of his flesh. He was to Abraham "your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love" (Genesis 22:2). You can imagine how very strong that connection was. After having waited and yearned for this son until all rational hope was gone and his and Sarah's bodies were long past childbearing years, at last Isaac was born. As his son, in the days of Abraham, Isaac was his property. He had the right to do with him as he chose. You know that every choice Abraham made concerning Isaac was made out of an overflow of love.

Abraham was connected to Isaac in another way. Isaac was also the child of promise, born by the power of the Spirit (Galatians 4:28-29). It was through Isaac that all of the promise of God—that which had defined Abraham's entire adult life—was to be realized. "He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned' (Hebrews 11:17-19, emphasis added). Abraham was connected to Isaac spiritually. Isaac was to Abraham both the child of his flesh and the child of the promise.

On the night that Abraham completed the offering, Isaac did not die to Abraham, but Abraham died to his flesh connection with Isaac. He let his father-flesh die. He relinquished ownership. That was the night he laid Isaac on the altar.

In requiring Abraham to die to his flesh connection, God did not require Abraham to die to the spiritual promise. Abraham, I believe, was more alive





than ever to the promise in Isaac. As he reached the place of the sacrifice, “he said to his servants, ‘Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you’ (Genesis 22:5, emphases added). The writer of Hebrews says, “Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death” (Hebrews 11:19). By the time he had become fully yielded to the voice of God, by the time he had dealt the death-blow to his own flesh, he had reached a new level of faith in God. He was absolutely certain that, no matter what path the promise took, the promise of God would not fail.

Abraham had already seen God bring life out of death. “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be. Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised” (Romans 4:18–21). From his dead loins and Sarah’s dead womb, Isaac was born. Isaac was a resurrection.

Your Altar

God is calling you with the same call Abraham heard. “Take your son, your daughter, your grandson, your granddaughter, and place him or her on My altar. Relinquish ownership. Die to your flesh connection, but remain alive to My promise. Your third day will come. You will look at this one and say, ‘Here is a resurrection.’”



PRAYINGLIFEFOUNDATION

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