

## My prodigal child: What God taught me about prayer

By an anonymous mom

*My son was in high school when I began to wonder where he was with God. He started going against our authority. He pulled away from people at the church where my husband was pastor. I had a sinking feeling that his heart wasn't where it should be. I didn't realize, however, how far it would go.*



*In college, he began to hang out with the wrong people. We began to notice he was hiding things. He was choosing behavior in opposition to how we had raised him. Alcohol and drugs became a part of his life. We became concerned about how he was treating his girlfriend.*

*Of course, Satan wants us to feel it's all our fault. I felt betrayed by my son. I felt fear about where he was going and angry toward God for not preventing him from going there. I was deeply disappointed that the kid I had always wanted to be a minister for God was the farthest thing from that.*

*When he would come home, I would just cry. I knew if I talked with him about the problems it would alienate him farther. There was a chasm where we could no longer talk to each other. My heart was breaking. He seemed to just think I was being hormonal.*

***I learned to acknowledge the pain** I was feeling. I would cry before God. More and more, I found myself just pouring out my heart. The fear. The anger. The disappointment. The betrayal, by both God and my son. I struggled with depression and feelings of hopelessness. I didn't see how God could possibly reach him.*

I remember pounding the steering wheel and shouting to God, "You don't love him or you wouldn't allow this!" Slowly, I began to realize that God knew my pain and was accepting me there. This realization helped me reach a point where I had the courage to share my pain with some praying friends. As I look back, I recognize the power of having others accompany us in these times.

**I learned to relinquish it all** to an almighty God. I had to. I was weary of the burden. If I didn't trust God, I wouldn't be able to continue with my life. My time in God's Word became very rich. It was no longer a duty—it was a lifeline.

In His amazing grace, God provided me with a passage that would become a benchmark in my journey with my prodigal:

Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

**I learned to wait on God.** I could not do anything to convince my son. I couldn't talk to him. Silence was hard for me. This passage called me to humility. It reminded me that I cannot command God to bring him back. I could only ask that God would bring him to his senses. As I waited, I learned that waiting strengthens our heart. I began to realize that I was benefitting from the waiting, too. I had spiritual needs that God needed to address.

**I learned to go deeper in prayer as warfare.** Through the 2 Timothy passage, I became acutely aware that my son had fallen into the enemy's trap. This was a case of spiritual warfare, and it called for some serious battling in prayer. As I asked the Holy Spirit for help in knowing how to pray for my son, God showed me some things that were going on in his thinking that needed to change.

Our son was across the sea on a ship by that time, and we committed to investing in prevailing prayer. God says to keep praying, to not give up. My husband and I would go to the beach and stand praying across the water for our son. More and more, I found God showing me specific ways to pray, even though I did not know what was actually going on with my son.

The enemy is always putting "what ifs" in your mind. Eventually, I reached a point where I was tired of fighting and just totally dependent on prayer. It was a forced peace from God.

**I learned total surrender.** I knew I had given it all over to God when I found I was able to praise Him for His total sufficiency, whether my son changed or not. God was enough for me, even if nothing else in my life went the way I wanted. I accepted that God doesn't owe me the answer I long for.

**I learned to let God bring assurance.** It was not the assurance that my son would change. It was the assurance that God was in control, and that He was good. I increasingly had times of confidence that God knew what He was doing, and that He loved my son deeply.

Twelve years after this journey of prayer for my prodigal began, I was home alone one evening when the phone rang. The voice on the other end was hard to recognize. My son was weeping. He faintly said, "Mom, God's hand is so heavy on me I can barely breathe. I need to find him, but I don't know whether to go left or right. What do I do now?"

The Lord directed me to Psalm 139 as I frantically prayed for guidance. It was getting too dark in the room for me to read, and when he tried to read he could only cry. He was so astonished that God loved him so deeply after all he'd done. It felt amazing to be able to feed

God's Word to him after all these years of rejection. He later informed me that two days earlier he had been on the verge of giving up on faith altogether. He ended up crying most of the rest of the week, but they were tears of joy as God forgave and accepted him back.

**Just because God answers doesn't mean you're done praying.** Yes, that was the beginning of a turn-around for my son, but it isn't the end of the call to pray. Our children need our prayers as they face a world and an enemy that wants to turn them away from God. I am still amazed that I actually got to see an answer to my prayers. I know many people who have prayed much longer and harder and still haven't seen the miracle they so desire. This is not just the story of my miracle. It's the story of how God taught me to pray!

*Note: a new Women's Leadership Studies class, Essentials of Prayer, will be offered for the first time March 16-17 in Winona Lake, Indiana. Some of the principles of this article will be explored further in the class. For more information go to <http://wgusa.org/leadership-studies>.*