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HOPE AND A WHOLE LOTTA PRAYER

Daily Devotions for Parents of Teenagers

Barbara Canale



Liguori

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september 1

STEP OUT

But when he saw how strong the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:30–31).

When my husband and I offered to teach a confirmation class, we had no idea what was involved. We thought the hard part was agreeing to it. We hoped God would work through us, and he did. However, on one occasion we felt overwhelmed when we took twenty teenagers to a university campus ministry workshop. The kids were rowdy, and it was difficult to keep them together and focused on the topics they were supposed to be learning. In that situation, I, like Peter, felt my faith waver.

An accurate measure of someone's faith isn't the first step of their journey, but the subsequent steps that follow. Have you started something with enthusiasm but become consumed with self-doubt halfway through? Perhaps a family event is not going as planned as reality fails to live up to your high expectations. Something similar occurs when we believe Jesus wants us to do something. We begin enthusiastically, but then it doesn't start unfolding in the way we imagined; we begin to sink with quivering faith, and Jesus appears blurry. If God calls us to take a step toward him, he will provide a way for each step that follows.

REFLECT

Consider where Christ is asking you to walk in faith. Maybe you have been considering involvement in a youth program at church, volunteering more at your parish, or something altogether different. Maybe you have contemplated changing careers, which will impact the time you are able to spend with your kids. Pray on it. God is with you.



PRAY



Dear Heavenly Father,

Calm the rough waters in my life. I know you are there and won't let me drown. In the storm I cannot hear you or see you. Help me, Lord, through these times of torment. I need you, Lord. Don't abandon me. I ask this of you in Jesus' name. Amen.

september 2

BE VIGILANT

Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man
(Luke 21:36).

News outlets report school shootings, where innocent students are gunned down in their own classrooms. These are not isolated incidents and are becoming more common than many parents want to admit. While administrators try to keep students safe by implementing safety precautions, rogue shooters still manage to infiltrate security barriers and create havoc in schools. It's no wonder parents teach their kids to be vigilant when they leave home. We live in a scary world, and all we can do is trust in God's plan—whatever it is.

God's plan is for a community concerned about each other and providing help in a variety of forms. God's plan is centered on peace, love, and forgiveness. God's plan is to provide a safe place for us and our families to grow and learn. At the first sign of danger, call out to the Holy Spirit to empower you to escape the evils that surround you. Maybe it's not a gun you are worried about. Maybe it's your teen's exposure to drugs or alcohol. Maybe it's an apathetic attitude toward faith and religion. Whatever your fear, ask the Holy Spirit to help you handle it in a way that's best for your teen and builds up your family community.

REFLECT

Start with prayer in your home. Use holy water to make a Sign of the Cross on your teen's forehead each day before school. Ask God to keep your son safe and to be vigilant against the evil forces of the world. Remember that with God, anything is possible.



PRAY



Dear Heavenly Father,

*Keep (name) safe in school today. Don't let harm fall upon him.
Shine your love down upon us today as we strive to make
this world a better place. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

RELEASE

For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).

Most of us cannot know what it's like to be freed from slavery or prison. In watching Victor Hugo's 1862 novel-turned-movie *Les Misérables*, I sensed a sliver of the freedom Jean Valjean felt after being released from prison for stealing bread to feed his family. I could almost feel the weight of his ball and chain being removed.

Today's Bible passage is a declaration of our freedom—Christ has freed us! That freedom was given to us through Jesus' death and resurrection. Holy Scripture declares that the whole world has been a prisoner of "sin, that through faith in Jesus Christ the promise might be given to those who believe" (3:22). Freedom is a gift from the Lord, given and received by faith. But that kind of freedom comes with a price. We have to obey God. And obeying God means we sometimes don't get what we want.

Some teens do whatever they desire, believing it isn't fair to deny themselves anything. Think for a moment what your teenager might be in constant pursuit of: more money, better technology, fame. As parents, we sometimes have to say "no," and it's hard for our teen to see that "no" as a way to freedom. Remember: When you say "no," say it with love.

REFLECT

Focus on the freedom from oppression that comes from making your way to God; the freedom from sin, guilt, and condemnation. God beseeches us to take his strength and walk in that freedom and not be tangled again with a burden of bondage.



PRAY



Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for the gift of freedom and for clearing a path for me to you. Thank you for your guidance when I wander off.

Let me lean into your strength and love every day of my life. I truly love you, Lord. Amen.

september 4

ONE BODY

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12).

When my daughters played in the pit band for their high school musical, I was able to appreciate all the parts that made the show happen: actors, costume designers, backdrop builders, and stage crew. Without the parts coming together as one, the show can't happen. The Corinthians passage reminded me of the school performances. Each student brought a different skill or talent to the performance and, working as one, put on the show.

We all come from vast walks of life, are baptized, and celebrate the Lord's Supper without consideration to differences. Saint Paul implies that all body parts are essential and no one part is better than the other. He also states we honor "our less presentable parts" (1 Corinthians 12:23) by clothing them with greater care.

God constructed the body to give greater honor to the lowly members; there is no dissension in the body. All members are concerned for one another. When peer pressure is so thick you can cut it with a knife, it's challenging to teach our kids to embrace everyone, be kind, gentle, and loving, especially if classmates ostracize our kids. Sometimes it's difficult for teens to find their place in life when they don't fit the mold of their classmates or neighbors.

REFLECT

Whatever your teen's difference is, celebrate that uniqueness as a gift from God and encourage your child to embrace and celebrate the uniqueness in their peers.



PRAY



Dear Heavenly Father,

Bless my family with the ability to overlook faults and focus on the attributes that make them outstanding. Help me to look at the bigger picture and stop dwelling on (name)'s problems.

Enable me to find the gifts in my teenager so I can help her to be a caring and responsible adult. Amen.

FORGIVENESS RULES

All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ (Ephesians 4:31–32).

Whenever I feel angry, I take a walk. I begin with fast strides, having considerable energy to burn, but then I slow down as I listen to the birds singing in the trees. Sometimes I get lost looking at nature, the beauty of the changing foliage, the way the leaves rustle as a gentle breeze blows through them. Then I thank God for allowing me to step away and enjoy all he created. Before I know it, my anger has dissipated and I can think logically about what upset me. Sometimes I am unable to solve my dilemmas, but I trust in God's plan. I give my problems to God and continue living. It sounds lovely, doesn't it? But it isn't easy to do when you feel your blood boiling and you want to wring someone's neck. Forgiveness isn't easy, but Christ wants us to be compassionate and loving creatures. It's a choice: Hold on to anger or let it go. Holding on to rage gnaws at you, creating bitterness and resentment. It prevents you from learning, growing, and moving forward. Forgiveness doesn't mean you weren't hurt but that you care more about your relationship than "getting even" or being vindicated.

Has your teenager hurt you recently? What have you done about it?

Let go of your teen's problems without letting go of the kid. You can never stop loving your teen, no matter how deep the pain is.

REFLECT

The willingness to accept an offense and move on is liberating. Forgiveness keeps disappointments from clouding our view of life. It allows us to see someone's faults and help. It also warns us to avoid similar situations in the future. Forgiveness draws us closer to God because when we forgive we are living the life he intended for us.



PRAY



Dear Heavenly Father,

Touch my aching heart with your mercy and love. Fill me up with goodness so I can be more forgiving to (name). Let me rise above it, learn, and grow in the joy you put into my world. I love you. Amen.