



31

Daring Devotions  
for Entrusting  
Your Child—and  
Yourself—to God

# Upside-Down Prayers *for* Parents

Lisa T. Bergren

Best-Selling Author of *God Gave Us You*

Upside-Down  
Prayers *for* Parents

ALSO BY LISA T. BERGREN

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WATERBROOK  
P R E S S

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*For Liv, Emma, and Jack—*



*May you know in your hearts  
that the upside-down aspects of life  
can always be made right-side-up  
by the God who loves, loves, loves you,  
through it all. Come what may.*

*—Mama*



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# Nurturing a Faith That Endures, Come What May

Here in southern Colorado, we recently witnessed the most devastating wildfire in state history. Hundreds of homes and thousands of acres burned. Smoke billowed up in an eerily colored, apocalyptic swirl, then descended over our city in a thick, brown haze that made your lungs hurt when you took a deep breath. Ash rained down, covering rooftops and yards—the sorrowful, wispy remains of *other* people’s rooftops and yards. One elderly couple lost their lives. It was surreal, horrific to watch the flames march down the mountains like a dragon with a thousand tongues of fire, engulfing one house after another in fireballs. Over a thousand firefighters fought to keep it from taking other homes, yet it raced unabated across the forest floor, taking ridge after ridge.

In the aftermath, it broke our hearts to look upon the blackened remains of the once-verdant, beautifully green hills and valleys that border our town. But experts say that fire is actually *good* for the forest. (They’d prefer a manageable

surface fire to a full-scale canopy fire like this one, but sometimes the choice isn't theirs.) According to principles of forest management, what looks like devastation can actually be a gift, thinning out the dead material, opening up the tree canopy, and enriching the soil with nutrients that aid new life.

Individuals who so tragically lost their entire neighborhood to the fire also sought the good that comes through loss. They sifted through the remains of their homes—a foot deep in ash—but they consistently mused about the gifts of life, of community, of people coming to their aid. It was heartwarming to watch a spirit of unity unfold. Amid tragedy and crisis, people came together around a common focus: a desire to help others heal, survive, and rise again. And in our busy, separated, largely short-on-true-community lives, this was another gift we *all* counted among the ashes.

As Christians, we're called to take the lead when hard times hit. To stand and be counted among those who place their confidence in a God who is completely good, even when life feels bad. Yes, life is rough. At times, brutal. But it's also amazingly, achingly beautiful. Full of hope and potential and possibility. And if we want to raise children whose faith can thrive in difficult circumstances—children who live in a loving, wholly trusting relationship with their God, who are able to see the beauty even in the midst of the fire and smoke, who remain alert for signs of hope amid the rubble—we have to model that kind of relationship with our God. *Come what may.*

As parents, we want to equip our children to be strong and courageous disciples. But we can only teach them what

we already know for ourselves, right? So this devotional addresses both our personal relationship with God—to make sure we have his priorities clear in our heads and hearts—and our role as parents who seek to trust our loving God with our precious children, knowing he only seeks to be closer to them. *Come what may.*

We feel responsible to protect and shield our children from harm. So it seems odd to wish upon them anything but peace and prosperity. But if you're like me, the adults you admire—the people you'd like to befriend and emulate—are people who live life deeply, richly, and in a holy fashion, regardless of what life throws at 'em. They have the spiritual stamina to make it through the fires of difficulty and maintain a sense of optimism and hope. To press on through the darkness, which in turn somehow helps them better appreciate the light.

It's understandable and right to pray for our children's protection, health, and well-being. But too often, we slip into spiritual timidity. We like to stay in that safe zone—and we definitely prefer to see our children in that happy place, right? But if we wish to be warriors for Christ, resilient disciples of the Way, we're after more depth in discipleship, knowledge of the Holy, and a full-on trust of the One who loves our children best. And if we're to trust him, with everything in us, we have to lay our lives—past, present, and future—in his hands. Perhaps most challenging, we have to lay our children's lives there as well.

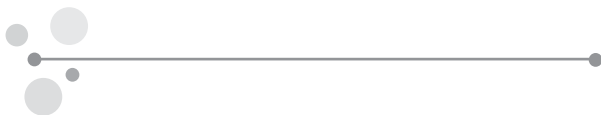
This is not a sweet and gentle devotional. It wrestles with

thirty-one issues that will most likely drive us to our knees, praying ourselves or our children through them. But I believe God redeems the time, the effort, the pain, every time. And when you fully absorb these truths and make them a part of your prayer life, I believe you will see a harvest in your own life and in your children's. Because this is rich, dark, moist, fertile soil, post-fire stuff. *Growth* stuff. The kind of stuff that initially leaves you grasping for words and gasping for air. But after the smoke clears, when you can rise and take a deep, unencumbered breath, you will feel stronger for the experience, knowing that you've witnessed yet again the faithfulness of the One who loves you most.

The topics we'll be exploring touch on truths we want our children to learn sooner rather than later, truths that offer the security of knowing they will always be loved and will never be alone. And that, ultimately, is what all parents really want for their children, right? To that end, I've included little "discussion starters" at the end of each devotional, to aid you in sharing these perspective-shaping truths with your children.

I am praying for you this day, as you hold this devotional in your hands, that our Lord will hold you and your precious children in *his* hands. Peace upon you, sister and brother. May you be strong and courageous. May you make your God and your children proud by daring to know him better, each and every day, and by trusting him, regardless of what comes, so that your relationship with the Holy deepens, and your life grows richer in the process. Amen!

—LTB




I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

—Ephesians 1:18–19



## Day 1

I pray you'll get caught doing  
things wrong—and find the  
good and true path.



Show me your ways, O LORD,  
teach me your paths;  
guide me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are God my Savior,  
and my hope is in you all day long.

—Psalm 25:4–5



When kids are little, it's not such a big deal when they're caught doing wrong. The minor infractions of a preschooler—snitching a cookie without asking, shoving a friend, bending the truth, making a wall a massive art canvas—can even make parents roll their eyes (or laugh, behind closed bedroom doors of course).

As children grow up, their “wrongs” have a bigger impact on them and those around them. The impulsive behaviors that were a little amusing in small children can become not-so-funny impulsive choices for teens. Things like shoplifting, physical fights, spreading false rumors, sleeping around, cheating.

And when they're adults? Left “uncaught,” with no opportunity to learn the importance of self-discipline or experience the pain of consequences, wrong choices become a way of life. One detour after another can, over the years, lead to a seriously darker path. Often the choices gradually move from impulsive to premeditated.

I don't know about you, but I hate it when I have to face my children's sin. My hands are full just wrestling with my own. And when they get caught doing something wrong, I feel as if I have somehow fallen short, failed as a parent—failed them, society, and God. But the reality is that we are *all* sinful creatures. And brave, honest parents recognize this, even as they gaze upon their beautiful, gifted children—just as God looks at us. He sent his Son to save us all—every one of us.

We *all* struggle. For position. Authority. Love. Power.

Money. Security. We get ensnared by the world's definitions of happiness and success rather than submitting to becoming "schooled in the Lord's ways," which lead us—every time—to a far more satisfactory and meaningful life. Isn't it better that we get stopped short, *called out*, before we wander so deep into the forest of sin that we can't find our way out?


One at a time, choices shape and define our lives. Looking back over the years, I can pinpoint choices that could have gotten me fired from a job I loved, endangered a marriage I celebrate, cost a friendship, compromised my integrity, or even risked my life. I face such decisions every day, whether I recognize them or not. But God calls us to recognize them. And when I don't, I pray that he will stop me cold, shake me, smack me upside the head, and shout, "What do you think you're doing? Stop! Don't you see? Not this way. *That way!*"

Okay. I don't actually want him to be so rough. That's exactly my point. I want to hear and respond to his *whisper* rather than wait for him to start shouting. That way, I can leave the path that subtly slopes down toward darkness and get back on the path that leads to light.

We can choose to respond to correction before God shouts, just as our children can respond to our first warnings. You know how it goes: "Max honey, please stop doing that." "Max, please stop right now." "Max! Stop it! Go to your room!"

It takes a toll on us parents to not only catch our kids in their missteps but also to follow through with consequences

and correction. Believe me, I know. It's hard work, this parenting gig. But for all of us, parents and kids alike, acknowledging the fact we've been on the wrong path—and seeking God's redirection—is the first step toward the path of peace and wholeness. So let's pray that we *all* may be caught, and *early*, when we set out on the wrong paths. And have the courage to quickly change direction.



*Father God, I want to follow you so closely that I cannot choose anything but what you want for me, yet I often get off track. And I'm supposed to be the role model for my child! Help me to pay better attention to you and notice you "catching me" as soon as I step on the wrong path. And please give me the courage and insight both to help catch my child and to guide him in the way you want us all to live. Redirect us, Lord. Amen.*

## MAKING IT PERSONAL

Have you recently made a bad choice, one that's taken you down a path you know is wrong? Have you hurt somebody, perhaps even yourself? Let's get after it—by going to the Savior who sees, and forgives, all. Pray for his direction and write

below what you think he's telling you to do to get back on track.

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### **MAKING IT RELEVANT**

*For younger children:* Do you ever notice people around you making wrong choices? What's an example? What do you think God thinks about that?

*For older children:* I'm trying to be a better listener when God speaks. He often prompts me to pause before a big decision, before it's too late—when I can make the best one. Have you ever felt him caution or encourage you, deep inside? What did that sound like or feel like?



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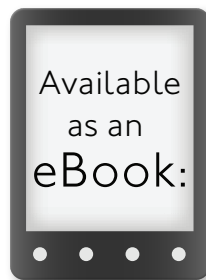
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