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—GAIL MACDONALD, pastor’s wife, author of *High Call, High Privilege*

PRAYER SATURATED KIDS

EQUIPPING AND EMPOWERING CHILDREN
IN PRAYER

CHERYL SACKS
ARLYN LAWRENCE



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*This book is lovingly and prayerfully dedicated
to our children:*

*Nicole and her husband, Marco;
Tyler, Heather, Hayley, Timothy, and Hillary*

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And most of all, we want to thank the Lord Jesus Christ for commissioning us and helping us write this book and for opening doors of opportunity to see it published. May it bring Him great pleasure and glory by inspiring a generation of prayer-saturated kids!

INTRODUCTION

Natalie was manning the cash register at a newsstand in the Colorado Springs airport when I walked up to buy a magazine.

“What are you doing in Colorado Springs?” she asked.

“I’ve been camped out at the World Prayer Center, working on a new book. It’s called *Prayer-Saturated Kids*,” I replied.

“That’s awesome! What’s it about?”

“It’s a book to help parents and spiritual leaders learn how to saturate the kids in their lives in prayer—then teach those kids how to pray for themselves. We want the next generation to be prepared to face everything that will come their way.”

“That’s just what we need,” Natalie said. “My generation is definitely looking for guidance. Many of us weren’t raised in Christian homes. We haven’t had anyone to show us what this looks like. Most of us just pray when we’re in trouble.”

She pointed to a rack of books by Christian authors. “Is your book going to be for sale in here?”

I nodded and told her I hoped so.

“I see kids come in here all the time. They pick up those Christian books, flip through the pages, read the back cover—sometimes they even buy a copy. I think they’re looking for something.”

Later as I reflected upon this chance meeting with Natalie, I realized that she and others just like her are the reason we wrote *Prayer-Saturated Kids*. This book is a response to the cry of a lost generation: “Bless us, pray healing for our brokenness, and believe

God with us for our future.”

I’ve discovered that even kids brought up in Christian homes and raised in the church lack the security of a community that builds a protective hedge around them in intercession. Somehow in the busyness of home, work, and church life, we adults miss out on opportunities to cover and train the next generation in prayer.

During the years my daughter, Nicole, was a teenager, I had the privilege of interacting with scores of Christian kids her age. They kept telling me, “We just want mothers and fathers in the faith to teach us what they know.”

You may be a mom, a dad, or a pastor. You may be a prayer leader or youth or children’s ministry worker. You may be a grandparent, a schoolteacher, or a coach. No matter what your role is with kids—in whatever capacity you interact with children and teenagers—you are in a strategic position to equip and intercede for the next generation.

We’ve written this book to help you pick up the mantle of prayer leader, mentor, and prayer warrior for the children in *your* life. It will inspire you with stories of praying parents, families, communities, and churches that are raising up young people strong in faith and powerful in prayer.

Originally, a chapter called “Prayer-Saturated Kids” was supposed to be included in my book *The Prayer-Saturated Church*. After reviewing the chapter, the NavPress editorial team felt the topic was so important that it should have a book of its own. I knew at some point I would be writing *Prayer-Saturated Kids* as a follow-up to the first book. In the meantime, Arlyn Lawrence had just completed *PrayKids! Teacher’s Guide: A Comprehensive Handbook for Developing Kids Who Pray* (NavPress). She was interested in writing an inspirational and instructional companion to the handbook. So Arlyn and I put our heads and hearts together and wrote the book that you now hold in your hands.

Each chapter offers inspiration, instruction, and insight on a

different aspect of how prayer can impact the child (or children) in your life. We've included study questions at the end of the book to make *Prayer-Saturated Kids* easily adaptable as a study course for individuals, couples, and small groups or as a curriculum supplement for homeschooling families. The Take It Out of the House section helps you apply concepts to your community. The prayer at the end of each section helps you apply in prayer what you've learned.

Key features of the book include the following:

- a child's original design—discovering and praying for God's unique plan in the life of a child
- the power of praying blessings
- healing prayers for hurting kids and families
- closing generational doors to the Enemy
- creative models and practical tools to help parents and church leaders raise up prayer-saturated children

What is a prayer-saturated kid? Quite simply, a child who is prayed for, prayed with, and taught to pray. Prayer-saturated kids are full of faith—equipped and released to pray in ways that change the world and the people around them.

I knew I was succeeding at raising a prayer-saturated kid when Nicole, at the age of thirteen, suggested to her classmates that they fast from lunch and form a prayer group to intercede for their unsaved friends. I knew the prayer power was spreading when even more prayer-saturated kids showed up at my house on Halloween night, not to trick-or-treat, but to pray for our city—all night!

Arlyn saw evidence that her elementary-age kids were prayer-saturated when their school bus driver told her she prayed over each child's assigned seat, by name, every single day before starting her route. Arlyn saw it when her teenaged son's youth pastor prayed with him and for him about deep heart concerns, an act

that transformed his countenance and revitalized his relationships with his parents and with the Lord. Another mother knew she had a prayer-saturated kid when she went into her daughter's room to tell her good-night and found her fervently praying over the faces of classmates in her yearbook, picture by picture.

Many in the church agree that our nation is currently in an escalating and unprecedented prayer movement. Yet there is a deep and growing concern that this fervency for prayer—and the biblical foundations for prayer—are not being effectively passed on to the next generation. The world in which our children are growing up is increasingly uncertain, unstable, and hostile. Kids today need our prayer covering as well as equipping if they are to overcome the spiritual and practical opposition they will surely encounter in their lives.

We as parents and the church have in front of us right now the opportunity to shape the lives and destinies of the next generation. The level and quality of investment we make, through prayer, in this emerging generation will determine how effectively they will be able to navigate and succeed in what may possibly be the most intense spiritual environment in history.

Who will pass on the power of prayer to the next generation?

Who will intercede for them?

Who will teach them to hear God's voice and train them for spiritual battle?

Is it you?

— Cheryl Sacks, 2007



SATURATE YOUR CHILD WITH PRAYER TODAY

Father, I accept Your assignment to pray for the children You have placed in my life. Teach me how to stand guard over my own children—to pray with and for them, to leave them a legacy of prayer to pass down to their children. At the same time, make me aware of other children who will pass through the doors of my home, work, church, and community. Show me how to pray for their needs and the unspoken cry of their hearts. As I read this book, please strengthen my own prayer life, because I know I cannot give to others what I do not have myself. Give me a Spirit-filled prayer life—one that will serve as a model to the children whose lives I touch. Father, today I commit to invest in the next generation through prayer—to plant seeds of truth, to train them, and to help pour the life of Your Spirit into them. Amen.

A CHILD'S ORIGINAL DESIGN

You saw me before I was born.

Every day of my life was recorded in your book.

Every moment was laid out

before a single day had passed.

(Psalm 139:16, NLT)

“Why did they put the streets that way, Mom?”

I was getting used to questions like that from our seven-year-old son. When Tyler was quite young—younger than one would usually expect a child to be observant of such things—my husband, Doug, and I (Arlyn) noticed he had a penchant for observing and critiquing how things were laid out—things like neighborhoods, city streets, and parks.

“I would have planned those streets another way,” he would say. “And why did they cut down all the trees when they built that neighborhood? I would have left a tree in every yard!”

One of the things we believe that God hardwired, so to speak, into Tyler’s temperament is the quality of being a *planner*. We have not only observed this but have also sensed it strongly as we have prayed for God to show us who He designed Tyler to be. It is one

of the qualities we have prayed would be developed and cultivated in Tyler's life and contribute to his living out God's unique destiny for him. We pray this way for all five of our kids. Through a combination of inquiring of the Lord, practical observation, and discernment, we have gleaned some insight into how God designed each of our children, so we can intercede—and parent—according to God's blueprint and not just our own.

Do you know how God has uniquely designed *your* child, or the children in your life? Have you looked for unique characteristics that give clues to what that design might be—personality traits, character qualities, talents, abilities, spiritual gifts, and life callings? Better yet, have you ever prayed and asked God to show you His design for your child?

You can start praying for a child's design and destiny at any age. It's never too early—or too late. Through prayer, you have the amazing opportunity and privilege to partner with God in seeing His original design for a child come to fruition as that child grows into adulthood. You can help your children become who God destined them to be. Your prayers can take the form of

- **Intercessory prayer**—praying *for* the accomplishment of God's design for a child's life, or
- **Spiritual warfare prayer**—praying *against* the schemes of the Enemy that seek to oppose, corrupt, and pervert God's original design.

Dr. Charles Boyd, in his book *Different Children, Different Needs*, says, "As parents, we need to discover our children's natural styles and help each one grow up according to his unique, inborn, God-given design." He tells a story that firmly impressed this important principle on his mind:

Some time ago I watched an episode of Beyond 2000 on television's Discovery Channel, and I learned about a new type of metal. This "shape memory alloy," as it was called, could be programmed to "remember" a certain shape. If that original shape was distorted in some way (by twisting and bending it with your hands, for example), it could easily be restored by simply passing it through hot water. Imagine car bodies made of a metal like that—if you had a fender bender you would simply take your automobile to a nearby car wash and it would be as good as new!¹

"Train up a child in the way he should go," says Proverbs 22:6 (KJV), "and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Raise him or her, that is, according to the child's "natural bent." The Hebrew meaning of the phrase "in the way he should go" is literally "according to his way." The Hebrew word for "way" is *derek*, which means "bent." It refers to a unique inner design or direction, similar to the "shape memory alloy" that Dr. Boyd described. When referring to our children's natural "bents," I like to use the term "original design."

Our daughter Heather is a worshiper—expressive, sensitive, dynamic, and musically gifted. Her sister Hayley has a mother's heart—capable, practical, and organized—and loves to plan and create fun times and beautiful spaces for family and friends. Timothy and Hillary each have their own unique bents—or original design—too. Every one of God's children arrives in this world with a divinely originated design and destiny, including all the children in *your* life. As Paul noted, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, *which God prepared in advance for us to do*" (Ephesians 2:10, emphasis added).

Dutch Sheets, in his book *Authority in Prayer*, says,

That God has authored a secure destiny for you can be seen in one of the New Testament words translated purpose (see

2 Timothy 1:9; Romans 8:28). It comes from the Greek word prothesis, which means to set forth the purpose of something in advance. "Exposition" is a good meaning for it, as is thesis (a word found in the original term). God wrote His plan — an exposition, a thesis — about you before you were even born.²

NOT MY WILL — BUT YOURS, LORD!

During Tyler's junior year in college he became quite anxious. It was time to declare a major, but the degree he had intended to pursue was not one he now felt comfortable with. He began to battle confusion, hopelessness, and depression.

On the home front, we felt that our primary responsibility was to pray, not to step in and fix the situation. It was hard, because we were really rather attached to his first choice of major. But we prayed that God's design and destiny would triumph in Tyler's life. We knew that God watches His Word to see that it is fulfilled (see Jeremiah 1:12). We tried to remind Ty of these truths, about what God thought of and said about him. We interceded for God's purposes to prevail.

Through a series of "coincidental" connections, Tyler received a call from the head of his university's advisory department to look at his transcripts and help him declare his major. Although discouraged by what he felt had been random choices of classes and fearful that he would consequently be in school longer than he had hoped, Ty agreed to the appointment.

When everything was laid out on the table, the adviser told him, "There's no cause for concern here. You could graduate next year with a geography degree — with a specialty in *planning*." This particular degree would let him, if he so chose, make a career in land use and development — something for which he had had an affinity since childhood but which neither he (nor his parents) had

consciously pursued! Yet it fit entirely with what we believed to be part of his original design. It was a huge confirmation from the Lord that this was the direction Tyler should pursue. Neither we nor Ty could have planned it better ourselves!

Although sometimes God does reveal His life plan for a child at an early age, we caution against making declarative statements (or prayers) that a child will be a doctor, a missionary, or a member of any other vocation. It is more helpful to recognize that a child has a heart for healing or a passion to share Christ with the world, even a heart for the nations. We can't presume exactly how God will use a child's gifts and character traits. But we can identify them and pray they be used strategically for God's purposes and according to His blueprint.

An important part of this process is releasing our own expectations and dreams of who we would like our children to be. It's all too easy to project our own hopes and desires onto them and miss entirely the plans God has for them. This can lead to conflict, disappointment, and even broken relationships between parents and children. Imagine what you will communicate to your child when you set out to discover his or her unique design and release your child to walk in it. What freedom! What a message of love, support, and encouragement! What trust in God that His will be done on earth (and in our children's lives) as it is in heaven (see Matthew 6:10)!

GOD'S DESIGN MAY SURPRISE YOU

Doug and I enrolled Tyler in soccer when he was five. For years we endured early Saturday morning games in the cold, drizzly Northwest weather. I can remember sitting there—shivering, hair dripping, my teeth chattering—watching him play and wondering why on earth I was putting myself (and him) through this.

But Doug had been somewhat of a soccer star and fan in his youth and wanted Tyler to have the same opportunity.

The year Tyler turned thirteen, his team made a move into a more demanding league and we needed to decide whether or not he would make the transition. Confident that he would want to move up with his teammates, we were shocked when, after we assured him that whatever he decided was fine with us, he declared without hesitation that he wanted nothing more to do with it! When we questioned him, he said, “I’ve never been crazy about soccer. You guys were always the ones who wanted me to play.”

All those Saturday mornings in the rain for nothing.

At that point, we realized we were probably doing the same thing in other areas of Tyler’s life. We prayerfully let him start making decisions (and changes) about other things. We also changed the way we determined what kinds of events and activities our other children should be involved in. When any of the kids came to us with a request to participate in an activity, we didn’t just check the schedule and the checkbook. We began to consult the Lord, as well, asking Him if this commitment fit in with His design and plan for that child.

Sometimes His answers surprised us. When Tyler was seventeen and Heather was fifteen, our church youth group went on a Youth With A Mission trip to Mexico. Heather was torn because cheer camp was the same week, and she had just made the varsity cheer squad at her high school. We asked both Tyler and Heather to pray on their own while Doug and I each prayed about it, too. Then we would come back together and share with each other what we sensed the Lord speaking to us.

We all got the same answer. Doug and I felt strongly that the Lord was saying Tyler should go. The purpose of the trip was to build a house for an impoverished family and to do some repair and remodeling at the mission compound. This was part of what God had shown us was Tyler’s individual design—industrious,

skilled with his hands, a wise builder. He would learn skills and develop qualities that God would use in Tyler's life calling, whatever that would prove to be.

On the other hand, we all received in prayer that Heather was not to go, that she was to attend cheer camp instead. Frankly, this decision caused some raised eyebrows among our friends and hers. But we felt that the Lord was saying that being a cheerleader was part of His design for and calling on Heather's life—as a leader, an encourager, and a light for Jesus in her school. The experience of cheer camp would accomplish in Heather's life something similar to what the mission trip would accomplish in Tyler's. Still a mission trip—just on a different field.

Later that summer, a girlfriend from Heather's cheerleading squad came along with us on a church youth group trip, during which she gave her life to Christ. That fall, three more girls from the squad accompanied Heather and her friend to a youth outreach event, and the first two had the privilege of leading the other three to Christ!

If we had made our previous decision based on natural or reasonable criteria, we most likely would have sent both kids on the mission trip, thinking that was the more “spiritual” choice. We're glad we sought the Lord for His design and plan first—even though it surprised us at the time. It was an important step in helping us move our children toward their God-given designs and destinies.

FINDING YOUR CHILD'S PRAYER STYLE

Nine-year-old Ian was crestfallen after Sunday school one morning.

“What's wrong?” his mother, Cynthia, asked.

“They wouldn't pray for my prayer request,” he said. “I wanted

to pray about the panda bears in China, but they said we should pray for personal things. Why couldn't we pray about the pandas, Mom?"

Cynthia's heart sank. Ian's Sunday school teacher wasn't trying to be insensitive; she just didn't understand how God had wired Ian. From early on, Ian had had a genuine concern for what was going on in the world. When he learned that the pandas' habitat was being threatened, he was troubled.

"You know what, Ian?" Cynthia said, with new insight. "I think God is calling you to something special. He made you to notice things that other people might not understand. It *is* important to pray for the pandas in China, and for the people who make hard decisions about how to solve their country's problems. Why don't we pray for that?"

From then on, whenever Ian showed concern over something he heard in the news, Cynthia would suggest he pray about it. She realized that God had wired Ian to be an "issues intercessor," and she wanted to help develop his calling.³

There are different styles of prayer. And there are different styles of kids. With that in mind, be prepared for the likelihood that each child will relate to God according to God's original design and bent. We might, in this context, understand Proverbs 22:6 to say, "Train a child (*to pray*) according to his natural bent, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

When we try to force children into a cookie-cutter prayer mold, they may become so discouraged that they abandon their faith altogether because they never learned how to connect with God in a personal way. They were always just copying someone else's prayer style. Trying to imitate another person's style of praying may very well end up being a Saul's armor!

In 1 Samuel 17, we find the account of David's encounter with the Philistine giant, Goliath. In this story, King Saul urged young David to don the royal armor when he challenged Goliath.

Imagine how awkward, uncomfortable, even silly David felt as he tried to maneuver around in the ungainly stuff. Young as he was, David had the wisdom and the boldness to throw it off, saying, "I cannot go in these. . . . I am not used to them" (verse 39).

Although this passage is not specifically about prayer, it is a good analogy of what we do to our children when we fail to train them and equip them according to their original design.

An introverted, idea-oriented child, for example, may feel more comfortable expressing thoughts to God in a journal rather than praying aloud in a group (even a family group). A highly kinesthetic child who is full of energy may respond well to prayer-walking or singing. A visually oriented child may like to illustrate prayers through drawings, sculpture, or other media.

After all, even people in the Bible prayed differently! In her book *When Children Pray*, Cheri Fuller notes:

With prayer, there is plenty of room for individual style. When we teach children to pray—or for that matter, when we pray—it's important not to confuse style with substance, or with spirituality. Based on prayers recorded in Scripture, God responds to stylistic variations from His pray-ers. The fact that we desire to communicate with Him matters more than how we talk to Him.

In the Bible people prayed in a variety of ways: with palms raised (Ps. 28:2), dropping to the knees (Lk. 22:41), kneeling with eyes lifted to heaven (1 Ki. 8:54), with clapping, dancing, and singing (Acts 16:25). There were shouted prayers (Josh. 6:16–20), and prayers without words (1 Sam. 22:2–3). The stylistic differences were both creative and indicative of each pray-er's personality, mood, and requests.⁴

Now, that's not to say that we don't teach our children a variety of expressions of prayer. But we do need to be sensitive to the

fact that some modes of communication with God may be more comfortable and effective for each child than others, according to how He has designed that child.

See how throughout Scripture God demonstrates His involvement in the blueprint for a child's life. Let these passages build your faith to pray for the original design God has for children in your life, whether they be your own or others that He puts in your path:

- God told Jeremiah (as an adult), “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).
- Rebekah specifically inquired of the Lord about the twin babies in her womb, and God answered her. The Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23).
- The angel of the Lord told Samson's mother even before she became pregnant, “You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines” (Judges 13:3-5).
- An angel appeared to Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, to give him insight into his son's destiny—before the child was even conceived! “He will be great in the sight of the Lord” (Luke 1:15).
- An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream to reveal God's

destiny for the child his fiancée was carrying: “What is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21).

- An angel gave similar insight about Jesus to Mary: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:32-33).

PRAYING FOR YOUR CHILD'S ORIGINAL DESIGN

In what ways has God designed your children differently from others—or from you? Original design shows up in a variety of ways. It can manifest itself in a child's

- **Temperament**—Is he or she fast-paced or slow-paced? People-oriented or task-oriented? Introverted or extroverted? Intense or easy going?
- **Talents and aptitudes**—Is he or she musical? Mechanical? Mathematical? Linguistic? Artistic?
- **Spiritual gifts**—If a believer, does he or she demonstrate gifts of mercy? Leadership? Encouragement? Exhortation? Prophecy? Wisdom? Discernment?
- **Calling**—Perhaps he or she is called to be a communicator, a shepherd, a teacher, a leader, a mother or father, a worshiper, a manager, or a warrior.
- **Capacity**—Has he been assigned a large sphere of influence, or a small one? Is she a multitasker, or single-focused? Can he handle large amounts of detail and input

at once, or does he need to receive instructions one or two at a time with time to process?

You will find clues to your children's original design in their behavior, their likes and dislikes, the kinds of friends they choose, the kinds of games they play, and so on. Become a student of your children. Find out what makes them tick.

Gary Smalley and John Trent in their book *The Blessing* note that "Children are filled with the potential to be all God intended them to be."⁵ They give some insightful questions you can ask to learn more about whom God designed your children to be and how He has uniquely wired them to accomplish His purposes for their lives:

1. What do they most often dream about?
2. When they think of their years as a young adult (twenty to thirty), what would they really enjoy doing?
3. Of all the people they have studied in the Bible, who is the person they would most like to be like, and why?
4. What do they believe God wants them to do for humankind?
5. [for older children] What type of boyfriend or girlfriend are they most interested in, and why?
6. What is the best part of their school day, and what is the worst?⁶

You can also listen to God's voice telling you how He made your children. The Holy Spirit may show you specific character qualities as you pray and listen for His voice. Or, long after you've actually prayed about it, He may give you a flash of divine insight when you least expect it. Listen, take note, and meditate on what the Lord reveals, even as Mary meditated on the things the angel revealed to her about Jesus: "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19).



TAKE IT OUT OF THE HOUSE

Church nursery ministers and children's leaders can pray to see God's design for the children in their ministries.

When you're rocking the babies, changing their diapers, or soothing their cries, pray words of life and destiny over them. Ask the Lord to show you whom He designed them to be.

I remember once trying to comfort ten-month-old Brooke in the nursery so her mother could lead a women's small group. The more I rocked, the louder she wailed! I asked the Lord to show me who this tough little cookie might grow up to be and then began to speak back to her what I sensed in my spirit. "Brookie, you are a strong woman. You will be a great leader for God's kingdom someday. You will be a bright light for Jesus. You will stand firm against the Enemy's schemes." Then I turned these statements into prayers on Brooke's behalf. Later, I shared them with her mom.

For older children, be observant and prayerful in your interactions with them. Listen to what they talk about. Observe their actions. Are they encouragers? Leaders? Ask the Lord to point out to you clues to their original design. During ministry times, speak those words of purpose and destiny into them. Remember to pray for these young people throughout the week. Pray that God's original design for them will be cultivated and advanced in their lives.

In my daughter Hillary's Sunday school class, the children's ministry team talked and prayed with the children about components of each child's original design. They noted qualities like "encourager," "prayer warrior," "gentle spirit," "leader," and "compassionate friend." They had kids write these words on construction paper, then glue photos on, too. The teachers hung these on the classroom wall as a constant reminder of how God sees those kids.



SATURATE YOUR CHILD WITH PRAYER TODAY

*Lord, I thank You that You knew _____
in the womb, and even sooner, and You designed and declared
a marvelous plan for this child's life. I want to be able to see
this child the way You do, Lord. Please point out to me the
unique characteristics You have woven into _____'s
temperament. Give me insight into _____'s calling
and destiny. Help me to encourage and pray for _____
according to the natural bent that You planned—close to You,
led by You, and fulfilling Your original design in every area
of this child's life. Amen.*