

FOREWORD BY JIM DALY

JODIE BERNDT

PRAYING
the SCRIPTURES
for Your
Adult Children

Trusting God with the Ones You Love





ZONDERVAN

Praying the Scriptures for Your Adult Children

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Contents

<i>Foreword by Jim Daly</i>	11
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PART 1: PRAYING for Your ADULT CHILD

1. The Battle Begins	14
2. Blessing and Releasing Your Adult Child	27
3. Praying for Your Child's Transition to Adulthood	40
4. A Year of Prayer	54

PART 2: PRAYING for Your ADULT CHILD'S RELATIONSHIPS

5. Praying for Good Friends and Fellowship	70
6. Praying for a Future Spouse	85
7. Praying for a Young Marriage	100
8. Praying through a Troubled Marriage or a Divorce ...	117

PART 3: PRAYING through the MILESTONES in Your ADULT CHILD'S LIFE

9. Praying for a Good Place to Live	134
10. Praying for a Job	150
11. Praying When Your Children Have Children	167

**PART 4: PRAYING for Your ADULT CHILD'S
HEALTH, SAFETY, and WELL-BEING**

- 12. Praying through a Health Crisis 184
- 13. Praying for Mental and Emotional Health. 198
- 14. Praying for Protection from Harm. 214
- 15. Praying through a Job Loss or Financial Difficulty . . . 227
- 16. Praying through the Struggles of Infertility. 239

**PART 5: PRAYING for Your ADULT CHILD'S
VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION**

- 17. Praying for Strength to Resist a Party Culture 256
- 18. Praying for Protection from Sexual Sin. 268
- 19. Praying for Recovery from an Addiction 284
- 20. Praying for Your Prodigal 298

Epilogue: Is Jesus Enough? 312

Acknowledgments. 317

PART 1

PRAYING
for Your
ADULT CHILD

CHAPTER 1

The Battle Begins

*Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome,
and fight for your families, your sons and
your daughters, your wives and your homes.*

NEHEMIAH 4:14

My husband, Robbie, and I take a long weekend every year to get away with four other couples. We all live in different parts of the country and it's not uncommon for us to go for months without seeing or even talking to one another, but we're united by at least three common bonds: we're all empty nesters; we've known each other since our kids were very young; and we believe in the power of prayer.

And there's one other thing. If someone were to write a how-to book on Christian parenting (the kind that listed all the things you are supposed to do to get your kids to turn out "right"), all of us would probably be in it. Take your kids to church? Check. Send them to Christian camps in the summertime? Done. Give your time and your money to ministries like Focus on the

Family, Young Life, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, or Passion Conferences? We were all over stuff like that.

And more. We had family devotions at breakfast. Bedtime prayers at night. Scripture memory cards on the fridge, right next to the chore chart. Hey, Robbie and I even dressed our son up as Bibleman for Halloween. It was a real costume that came with a cape and a big plastic sword, and we wrote verses on little slips of paper so he could give them to people when he took their Kit Kats.

You don't get much more Christian than that.

You would think, given all of this Really Good Parenting, that the five of us couples would have some golden children. And, thanks to God's grace, we do, particularly when we remember verses like Philippians 1:6, which remind us to leave room for God to finish writing their stories. But as the ten of us sat around the dinner table during one of our autumn getaways, sharing the joys and heartaches of our lives, it became clear that nobody was out of the woods. All of us were praying about something (or a bunch of things) in our kids' lives. All of us were counting on God's mercy and his love.

One adult child was living with his girlfriend. Another struggled with a crippling addiction. Several of our kids needed jobs. A couple of them were doing the boomerang thing, bringing their lives and their laundry back home. We were concerned about things like infertility, alcohol abuse, iffy dating relationships, emotional and mental health, money troubles, spiritual

uncertainty, and more than one case of what our grandparents might have simply called “wild living.”

Goodness, I longed for the days when I got called into the principal’s office because little Robbie had tied his shoelaces together in the library and made the other kids laugh, or because Virginia had been caught throwing tennis balls at the football team during practice.

The good news is that the same God who watched over my kids’ lives back then—back when their issues didn’t seem quite so complex or life-shaping—is still looking out for them today. I may get tired, discouraged, or confused in the spiritual whack-a-mole exercise that is parenting adult children, but God doesn’t. “He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.”¹

Prayer Principle

The things you give to God in prayer—your worries, concerns, and needs—are the ties that bind your heart to his. Our struggles are his entry points.

And the *really* good news is that these very struggles—the money troubles, the rocky relationships, the substance abuse, the spiritual doubt, and all of the other things that keep us up

1. Isaiah 40:28.

at night and make us wonder what lies in store for our child's future—are the ties that forever bind our heart to God's. Our struggles are his entry points. And, as my friend Lisa's mom likes to remind her kids as they parent *their* kids, "Children improve your prayer life."

I still love what Jack Hayford said about prayer (I quoted him in the first few pages of *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children*). Prayer, he said, is a "partnership of the redeemed child of God working hand in hand with God toward the realization of his redemptive purposes on earth."² What a privilege it is for us, as parents, to be able to slip our hand into the hand of our heavenly Father and join him in the continuing work that he is doing in our adult children's lives. And what a joy, as we allow the words of Scripture to shape our perspective and transform our prayers, to be given a window into God's heart.

If you've read *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children* or *Praying the Scriptures for Your Teens*, you know why I like to use the Bible as the basis for my prayers. I love the intentional, purpose-driven nature of verses like Isaiah 55:11, which promise that God's Word will not return empty, but will accomplish what he desires and achieve his purposes. I love the strength and power of Hebrews 4:12, which likens Scripture to a sword, one that is "alive and active" as it goes to work on our thoughts and our attitudes. And I think that advice about prayer doesn't

2. Jack Hayford, *Prayer Is Invading the Impossible* (South Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1977), 92.

get much more straightforward than John 15:7, where Jesus says that if we remain in him and his words remain in us, we can ask for whatever we wish and it will be done for us. This isn't some sort of "name it, claim it" trick; rather, it just makes sense that the more we press into Christ and allow the Bible to shape our thoughts and desires, the more our requests will line up with what God wants to do—with the goal being that we bring glory to God and live our lives according to his design (John 15:8).

Prayer Principle

The more we allow the Bible to shape our prayers, the more our requests will line up with God's plans.

But here's the thing about praying for our adult children. It's hard. It's not just the whack-a-mole nature of parenting that makes it tough. As seasoned moms and dads, we are used to fighting simultaneous battles on many fronts. Praying for our adult children is hard for at least two other reasons.

First (and obviously), the *issues* are harder. When my friend Sally learned that her first-grade son had been swiping crayons from the Sunday school closet, she was concerned; when he grew up and got mixed up with a gang in a faraway city, she was devastated. The problems and challenges that color our adult children's lives and relationships are serious and often have long-term consequences. No longer can we as parents sit on the

prayer bench and watch the JV squad play. Like it or not, we've got a starting spot on the varsity team.

But that's not all. The other (less obvious) thing that makes praying for our adult children tough is that, as empty nesters whose kids are often scattered all over the country (or even the world), most of us don't have a parenting community. We can't sit in the park and ask another mom for advice while our children play on the monkey bars. We no longer find ourselves forging bonds with other parents at the middle school fund-raiser or on the sidelines of the high school football game. Without even realizing there was a shift, we may find ourselves missing those easy, organic relationships built around the simple fact that we are in a common season, relationships that can open the door to mutual encouragement, laughter, and hope. We are, perhaps for the first time in twenty or thirty years, kind of alone.

Which is where this book comes in.

All of the characters in this book are real people. I've changed names and minor details to protect their privacy (except where I talk about my own family members, who are generally good sports with thick skin), but their stories are all true. I don't share them so that you can compare yourself (I have a friend who watches *Hoarders* just to make herself feel better about her own storage problems); rather, I've interviewed people and recorded God's faithfulness in their lives because I want you to know at least three things:

First, *you are not alone*. There is no "perfect" family. Everyone—

even that beautiful woman who sits across the aisle from you at church, the one with the daughter who just got engaged and the son who just got promoted—has issues. And nobody has done it “right.” When it comes to raising our children and pursuing God’s best for their lives, we all need huge buckets of his grace, and we are all in this together.

Prayer Principle

It’s never too late to start praying
God’s best for your children.

Second, *it’s not too late*. When *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children* came out, I can’t tell you how many people told me they’d wished they’d had the book when their kids were younger. Well, guess what? Most of the people who shared their stories for this book didn’t have that resource either, and for a lot of them, using the Bible to animate their prayer life is a fairly new and unfamiliar strategy. But they’re doing it—and so can you. It’s never too late. And as you’ll see in some of the stories ahead, God is all about making up for lost time and dishing up some retroactive blessings.³

And finally, *you really can have peace*, even in life’s messiest moments. Jesus told us we’d have trouble, but he tucked those words inside two of the most beautiful promises in the Bible.

3. Joel 2:25.

Here's how John 16:33 reads (and I've added italics, so you can see the tuck): "I have told you these things, so that *in me you may have peace*. In this world you will have trouble. *But take heart! I have overcome the world.*"

As we pray and parent together, let's stretch across the trouble in our lives, using one hand to grab hold of God's peace and the other to grasp on to his victory—even if we don't see the answer just yet.

In the pages ahead, I will share joyful stories of answered prayer—lives changed, relationships healed, troubles resolved. But I will also recount the struggles of parents who are still in the thick of it, moms and dads who are choosing to put their trust in God, even when the outcome is uncertain. My prayer is that both types of stories will serve to build your faith, give you hope, and (as you trust God with your own adult children) improve your prayer life.

You are welcome to skip right to the chapter that best reflects your particular need, but I also encourage you to read this book in its entirety, since every issue brings up spiritual truths and principles you can apply to a variety of situations. And yes, the circumstances our children face may be harder than when they were young, but we can hold on to this truth: God has not changed. He is still (and always will be) the Father who loves us enough, and is powerful enough, to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine.⁴

4. Ephesians 3:20.

Poised for Prayer

Being a Virginia Beach girl, I love the picture on the cover of this book. I like the *sand*, which makes me think of children, since it reminds me of God's promise to Abraham about his descendants; the *ocean*, because in the Bible, water is often a symbol for God's Word; and the *hint of sunshine* in the sky, which seems to beckon us into the light of God's love.

Most of all, though, I like the gate.

Back when Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem, he stationed people to guard the exposed places, "posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows."⁵ And when the enemy showed up and threatened to attack, Nehemiah told the Israelites not to be afraid. Instead, he said, "Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."⁶

We must do the same thing today. We must fight for our families, guarding the gates of our homes. We may not have swords and spears, but our weapons are even more powerful. We fight with God's Word and with prayer.

Like the chapters in *Praying the Scriptures for Your Children* and *Praying the Scriptures for Your Teens*, each chapter in this book ends with about a dozen Bible verses you can turn into personalized prayers for your children. But in talking with the

5. Nehemiah 4:13.

6. Nehemiah 4:14.

moms and dads who shared their stories with me, I realized that our kids aren't the only ones who need prayer. We do too. And even the most faith-filled believer will find himself or herself growing weary or even discouraged at times. It doesn't matter how old your children are. You never stop being a parent. You never stop caring.

And so, in addition to the Scripture prayers listed for our children, I've included a few verses at the end of each chapter that we can use to pray for ourselves. Let these words point you toward God's faithfulness, knowing that no word from God will ever fail.⁷

Prayer is a battle, and every warrior gets tired. Remember, though: You are not alone. And if you have an answered prayer or a verse that might help others (or even a prayer request that you don't mind putting out there for others to carry), I hope you'll join me at www.jodieberndt.com, where you'll find weekly prayer prompts and an opportunity to encourage others by posting your own comments. Together, we can do what Aaron and Hur did for Moses when the lives of God's children were at stake.⁸ We can come alongside one another in prayer, lifting up each other's hands as we tap into the words first breathed by the Father—words that speak his love and his promises into our lives.

7. Luke 1:37.

8. When the Amalekites attacked the Israelites, Moses watched the battle from the top of a hill. As long as he held up his hands, the Israelites were winning. But when Moses grew tired, the battle turned. That's when Aaron and Hur stepped in to hold up Moses's arms, Aaron on one side and Hur on the other. "His hands remained steady till sunset," and the Israelites won (Exodus 17:8–13).

Prayers You Can Use

Most of the prayers in this book are for your children. But as we close this chapter—as we prepare to guard the gates—I want to share some of the promises I have prayed for myself over the years. And I have prayed these verses for you as I've worked on this book. I have asked God to equip you for the battle, to give you strength when the night feels dark and long, and to let you know how immeasurably much you are loved.

Heavenly Father . . .

You are the God of hope. Fill my heart with joy and peace as I trust in you, so that I may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 15:13

Remind me, when I am weary and burdened, that I can come to you and find rest.

MATTHEW 11:28

Make me worthy of your calling, and by your power bring to fruition every desire I have for goodness and every deed that is prompted by faith.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:11

Thank you for interceding for my children and for me. Help me remember that nothing can separate us from your love.

ROMANS 8:34–39

Equip me to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.

ROMANS 12:12

Teach me to approach your throne of grace with confidence so that I may receive mercy and find grace to help me in my time of need.

HEBREWS 4:16

Help me not to worry about anything, but to pray about everything and to thank you for all you have done. May your peace, which exceeds understanding, guard my heart and my mind.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7 NLT

When I feel discouraged or when the answer seems to be a long time in coming, strengthen me so that I will always pray and not give up.

LUKE 18:1

Enable me to stand firm so that nothing will move me. Help me give myself fully to the work of prayer, knowing that this labor is not in vain.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

When I come before you, Lord, let it be with thanksgiving and praise because you are good, your love endures forever, and your faithfulness continues to all generations.

PSALM 100:4-5

Show me how to wrestle in prayer for my children, that they may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

COLOSSIANS 4:12

Lord, teach me to pray.

LUKE 11:1

CHAPTER 2

Blessing and Releasing Your Adult Child

*“The LORD bless you
and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.”*

NUMBERS 6:24–26

One of the best things about being a parent is getting to watch your child grow up.

That’s also one of the hardest things, particularly when the paths our kids choose don’t line up with our vision for what their “happiness” is supposed to look like or when we aren’t really sure what God’s best plan is for their lives. We want our children to become the people God meant for them to be (“God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which

God prepared in advance”¹), but the shape of this God-sketched design can take a lot of different forms. And as our grown-up children make decisions that will impact their future, our prayers for their well-being will be as varied and diverse as they are.

There is one prayer, though, that every one of our kids can use. It’s the prayer of blessing, and as we release our adult children into the grown-up world of colleges and careers and families of their own, this prayer represents a surefire way we can influence their lives and partner with God as he works to accomplish his good purposes.

Prayer Principle

Our adult children have different needs, but all of them can use the prayer of blessing.

In their book *The Love Dare for Parents*, brothers Stephen and Alex Kendrick say that to bless someone means to “speak well” of that person. In family life, they write, it’s “a parent using their God-given authority to verbally affirm their children for who they are, while also encouraging and inspiring them toward future success.”² There is no age limit on this kind of affirmation, and as I interviewed moms and dads for this chapter, I got a

1. Ephesians 2:10.

2. Stephen and Alex Kendrick, *The Love Dare for Parents* (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 161.

front-row seat into the way the prayer of blessing can lay the groundwork for God to move, even when our own hearts are heavy or we don't see evidence of God's provision.

One mom told me how sad she was that her thirty-four-year-old daughter was still single. "I want her to enjoy the gift of marriage," she said, "and I know she wants that too. So I am asking God to provide a husband for her, but I am also thanking him for the good things he has already poured into her life: her leadership skills, her honesty, her compassion, and even the fact that she is as comfortable working in a soup kitchen as she is attending a fund-raising gala in an evening gown!"

Recognizing the weight that words can carry ("The tongue has the power of life and death," reads Proverbs 18:21), this wise mother looks for opportunities to highlight the ways she sees God using her daughter's gifts and talents. As a result of this affirmation, the young woman doesn't see herself as overlooked or somehow inferior to her married peers. Instead, she exudes joy and confidence, along with a healthy self-esteem that comes from knowing she is loved, and that her life has value and purpose.

Another mom shared her devastation when her college-aged son told her he was gay. "I searched the Bible to find anything that might convince me that homosexuality was not the sin I'd been taught it was," she said, "but I couldn't find any passages to support that view. I knew God loved my son as much as I did, but I didn't know what I was supposed to say or do."

Love him. That's what this dear mama felt God whisper to

her spirit. *You can't control your son's choices or his lifestyle; leave that to me. You just love him.*

Emboldened by that God-given freedom to exchange her worry for trust, she took a straightforward approach to blessing her son. “I told him the same thing I would tell a heterosexual child: he should honor God with his body, not engaging in any sexual relationships outside of marriage. But I didn’t make my love conditional on whether he followed that advice. Instead, I let him know how grateful I was for things like his sense of humor and his intellect and for how I saw God using those gifts in his life.

“I imagine that plenty of kids his age are experimenting with who they are, what they believe, or where they get their sense of identity,” she went on. “I’m praying that my son will find his identity in Christ, and that God will shape him into the man he wants him to be.”

Here again, a mother’s words—and her prayers—created a climate in which love and faith could flourish and relationships could grow.

If it seems awkward to bless an adult child who is not walking with the Lord or who has made a choice that we believe runs counter to God’s commands, consider this: a blessing is not the same thing as an endorsement. Rather, when we bless our children, we do the same thing that God does when he blesses us: He forecasts his favor and guides us toward the abundant life he wants us to enjoy. The prayer of blessing is an acknowledgment that we are not trying to control our children’s future; rather, we are handing

that over to God and trusting him to give them a vision for using their talents and abilities, as well as a sense of purpose in life.

Prayer Principle

A blessing is not the same thing as an endorsement.
It's a way of handing our children's future over to God.

It's never too early to start blessing your children; consider Hannah's words when she brought her young son Samuel to the temple: "For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD."³ Likewise—and perhaps more importantly—*it's never too late*. Scripture is brimming with accounts of blessings given to adults: Isaac blessing Esau and Jacob, Moses teaching the high priests how to bless the people of Israel, and even God blessing Jesus on the day he was baptized: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."⁴

For Christ, this blessing marked the start of his adult ministry, the time when he would begin to attract the attention of both followers and foes. For our own children too, the prayer of *blessing* often involves a corresponding prayer of *release* into a world where they might face opposition, uncertainty, or any number of new and unfamiliar challenges.

One West Coast mom, Lisa, told me how hard it was when

3. 1 Samuel 1:28.

4. Genesis 27; Numbers 6:22–27; Mark 1:11.

her daughter took a new job in Boston. What if she got lonely? Or sick? What if she wandered away from her faith? The three-thousand-mile separation meant they would not see each other often; would their family remain close?

Lisa is a self-described “natural worrier.” She could have easily given in to fear. Instead, she chose to release her daughter into God’s protective arms and affirm what she saw him doing. He had opened the door to a job that combined her daughter’s educational training with her artistic passion. Lisa knew she’d miss her girl, but even as she asked God to comfort her own heart, she prayed that he would cover her daughter with favor, establishing the creative work of her hands and making her efforts successful.⁵ And if her daughter were to fall in some way—whether spiritually or in her career, her friendships, or something else—Lisa relied on the promise that God made to his people in Deuteronomy 33:27, where he said he would be their dwelling place and that his everlasting arms would be underneath them. Lisa loved that image. She prayed that if her daughter fell, God’s strong arms would be right there to catch her.



Sometimes this “blessing and releasing” process means letting go of our own hopes and dreams for our child’s future.

Warren is the president and founder of an international

5. Psalm 90:17.

ministry that brings health care, education, job training, and the gospel message to some of the most spiritually and physically inaccessible parts of the world. He has two sons, both of whom grew up participating in short-term mission trips. As the boys reached adulthood, Warren hoped that one (or both) of them might want to join him, professionally, in ministry. But he knew better than to push for that outcome.

“I’ve seen too many of my friends—people in business and in ministry—put the burden of succession on their children, regardless of the son’s or daughter’s intellectual ability, educational training, or even interest in what their parents are doing,” he said. “Of course I’ve been tempted to pray that my sons would join me in my work, but I know that’s just my own selfish itch. So instead, I have prayed that they would join God in his business—whatever that is—even if it means I have to push them or release them away from me to find their own journey.”

Prayer Principle

As you pray God’s blessing on your children,
release your plans and trust God to accomplish his.

Part of that pushing, Warren says, is helping his sons identify their strengths. “One of my boys has a strong entrepreneurial streak, and the other is really gifted at numbers and analysis,” he says. “I’ve told them I’m praying 1 Peter 4:10 over their lives

and careers, that God will equip them to use the gifts they have received to serve others and administer his grace. My sons might not wind up in full-time ministry, but that doesn't mean God can't use them to promote his kingdom."

Poised for Prayer

One of the Bible's best-known blessings is when God tells Abraham to leave his own country and go to a new land. "I will make you into a great nation," God promises, "and I will bless you; I will make your name great . . . All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."⁶

The ultimate fulfillment of this blessing, of course, is found in Jesus, Abraham's descendant and the Word who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us."⁷ One of the things this Word-made-flesh promise says to me is that when we speak God's Word over our children—taking the Scriptures and using them as prayers of blessing—we are literally covering them with the presence of Christ.

When our children were little, Robbie and I would tuck them into bed with a lullaby. Some were songs we had learned at church; others were just Bible verses we put to tunes we made up (using enthusiasm, or even volume, to bridge the gaps in our musical talent). Their runaway favorite was an excerpt from

6. Genesis 12:1–3.

7. John 1:14.

Psalm 139. The song didn't have a formal title; the kids just called it "Presence."

Here are the lyrics:

*Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to heaven, you're there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.*

Robbie and I didn't know it then (and honestly, we were just trying to get the kids to fall asleep), but we were imprinting God's richest blessing on their hearts and minds: *the gift of his presence*.

In the chapters to come, you'll meet parents who've prayed their adult children through some of life's hardest seasons, from broken relationships and financial setbacks to mental health challenges and addictions. The ability to sense God's nearness, to be able to come into his presence and approach his throne of grace with confidence—in the good times, as well as in life's long, strength-sapping battles—is what gave these parents hope. It's what strengthened them. It's what gave them joy, even when they could see no earthly reason to rejoice.

And that's my prayer for all of us as we continue to love and

pray for our children: *that we would know the presence, and the grace, of God.* It doesn't matter whether you feel like you have done everything "right" (and now find yourself wondering why things didn't turn out the way you thought they would) or whether you are all too aware of your failings (and now find yourself wondering if things will *ever* get better); all of us need God's grace in our lives. All of us need his presence.

Pray God's blessing—his presence—over your children. And as you do, "May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. May the Lord be with you."⁸

8. 2 Thessalonians 3:16.

Prayers You Can Use

For Yourself

Heavenly Father . . .

Let my words be helpful for building my children up according to their needs, so that what I say will be a benefit to them.

EPHESIANS 4:29

Give me a wise heart, so that my words will be gracious like a honeycomb, bringing sweetness and health to my family.

PROVERBS 16:23–24

Let your presence go with me, and give me rest.

EXODUS 33:14

For Your Children

Heavenly Father . . .

*Bless _____ and keep him; may your face shine on him.
Turn your face toward _____ and give him peace.*

NUMBERS 6:24–26

Fulfill your purpose in _____. Give her a rich and satisfying life.

JOHN 10:10 NLT

May your Spirit be with _____ wherever he goes. Guide him and hold him fast.

PSALM 139:7-10

Be with _____. Save her and take great delight in her. Quiet _____ by your love, and rejoice over her with singing.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17 NIV, ESV

Pour out your Spirit on _____ and your blessing on his descendants.

ISAIAH 44:3

Fill _____ with all joy and peace as she trusts in you so that she may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ROMANS 15:13

Let grace and peace be _____'s in abundance. Give him everything he needs for a godly life, and may he know that he has been called by you.

2 PETER 1:2-3

May _____ and her descendants be known among the nations, and may all who see them acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.

ISAIAH 61:9

Give _____ a singleness of heart and action, so that she will always fear you and that all will then go well for her and for her children.

JEREMIAH 32:39

May _____ be blessed as one who does not walk in step with the wicked, but delights in your law. May he be like a tree planted by streams of water, yielding fruit and prospering in whatever he does.

PSALM 1:1-3

Wherever _____ goes, be her secure dwelling place. Place your everlasting arms around and underneath her.

DEUTERONOMY 33:27 ESV

May loyalty and kindness be written on _____'s heart so that he will find favor and high regard in the sight of God and man.

PROVERBS 3:3-4 CSB