

saint mary's press

Send Your Spirit

PRAYING
FOR
OUR
TEENS

CARL KOCH

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*Praying for
Our Teens*

Carl Koch



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*For my godchildren—
Sam, Simon, Kevin, and Ryan—
and their parents*

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Introduction

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.
(Luke 18:1)

Persevere in prayer. (Romans 12:12)

Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication. (Ephesians 6:18)

This sound advice from the Scriptures applies particularly to youth ministers, teachers, parents of teenagers, indeed, anyone who cares for teens. Sometimes prayer is the best and only help that we can offer teens. God always listens, cares, and offers grace.

The prayers in this book will prove useful to anyone who wants to nurture the growth and development of teenagers. They supply words when our own may seem insufficient or incoherent. In addition, these prayers touch on the key themes and issues in teenage life. Each prayer can be easily adapted to various situations.

One important feature of the prayers is that each includes a passage from the Bible. By including biblical passages, the prayers not only set our attention on God but also offer God's word to inspire, challenge, and comfort us. The prayers give us words with which to communicate with God and also provide us a way to listen to what God is telling us.

USING THESE PRAYERS

Before you offer a prayer, pause briefly using the Call to Presence at the beginning of the section to calm yourself and to bring to mind the teenager or teenagers about whom you wish to pray.

Read the selected prayer slowly, but naturally. Permit the words to sink in. Listen to the Scripture passage with your heart and mind open and welcoming.

Where the letter \mathcal{N} (or its possessive form, \mathcal{N} 's) appears, say the name or names of the teenager or teenagers for whom you are praying. This symbol (\sim) indicates

a place to insert your own words about a particular person or situation.

After you have offered the prayer, you may wish to add a short prayer of your own that personalizes it even further. For instance, after a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, you might say something like, "Tonight, I thank you, God, especially for ~."

These prayers may serve you well as morning or evening prayers and as sources of reflection or meditation.

It is hoped that however you use these prayers they will help you draw closer to the teenagers in your life and to the God who is the source of all life, all goodness, all wisdom.

The Wisdom We Need

Call to Presence

All-wise God, you are here, now, ready to shed your light on me.

(Take a few moments to recall the teenager or teenagers on whom you wish to focus your prayer. Reflect on the wisdom you see in them as well as the wisdom they may need in life right now.)

ASK GOD FOR WISDOM

James 1:5

The Apostle James tells us: “If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.” That is good news indeed.

God, I ask for wisdom in dealing with **N**. Teens confuse me. Sometimes I wonder if I am coming or going. I know that this is often how they feel, too. And even though **N** does not always give signs of wanting my “wisdom,” help me to speak it when it is needed. Right now I need your wisdom about

~.

DISCUSSION AND COUNSEL

Sirach 37:16

All-wise God, teenagers tend to want answers (and the answer they want!) right *now*. I guess I am not all that different sometimes. But the Scriptures say,

Discussion is the beginning of every
work,
and counsel precedes every
undertaking.

In other words, look before leaping to an answer.

I want this to be true for *N* and me. Instead of discussing, we argue, or I make a declaration, or *N* just tells me what's what. Help me know how to discuss matters with *N* so that our undertakings are *our* undertakings, and counsel is really counsel. I specifically could use your wisdom about
~.

WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING

Adapted from Ephesians 1:17–19

Living God, I make Paul's prayer my own:
"May the God of Jesus our Savior give us
wisdom and understanding of all that has
been revealed. May we marvel at God's work
and see the hope that God offers us. The
inheritance God grants to us is rich. Great is
the power of our God."

I ask for wisdom and understanding,
particularly about \mathcal{N} . Your power is great,
my God. Amen.

FALSE PROPHETS

Matthew 7:15–16

Merciful God, knowing the truth proves difficult because we are surrounded by half-truths and untruths from TV, advertisements, people trying to put a spin on something for their own benefit. Promises both false and true tempt us in all directions. I cannot always tell what's true, so it is no wonder that \mathcal{N} sometimes gets twisted around.

Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits." Help me be aware of false prophets, con artists, and cheats, and help \mathcal{N} , too. I am especially concerned that \mathcal{N} is being fooled by \sim . Guide \mathcal{N} in dealing with this, and guide me in helping.

FERTILE GROUND FOR GOD'S WORD

Matthew 13:31–32

God's Reign is "like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

God, may I be fertile ground that welcomes your Word in my soul so that your way grows in me. May I have the rich generosity of the tree that gives itself for the good of others—for their shade, for their shelter, for their nourishment. I especially need your Word rooted in my soul so that I can share it with *N*.

TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE

John 8:31–32

Jesus assured us: “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

God, I desire the truth that will set me free—free from my compulsions, free from my anger and sadness, free from ignorance and division. With truth in my heart, grant me the strength to help set free **N**. May your words become a home for me, and for **N**. Open our eyes and ears, hearts and minds.

DO NOT BE CONFORMED

Romans 12:2

Holy One, help me heed Paul's warning, when he said, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable."

May I renew my mind through prayer, through listening to your word, and by loving my neighbors as myself. Then I can give \mathcal{N} the kind of example that will lead to goodness. If I conform to the distorted values of this world, I can hardly expect \mathcal{N} to conform to your standards. God, renew and transform me. I want to do your will. Show me what it is, so that I can do good and grow in your image.

RIGHT JUDGMENT

John 7:24

Jesus says, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

Making up my mind on \mathcal{N} 's outward appearance can be all too easy. When I take the easy way, I don't have to search for the heart of the matter or for what is really true. But true wisdom is not so easy, for it seeks to know the whole story.

God, send your Spirit into my heart and mind so that I may find out the truth and judge accordingly. Make me a seeker of truth. In particular, help me to see the truth of this situation \curvearrowright with \mathcal{N} . Lead me, my God.

A HUMBLE HEART

Proverbs 11:2–3

The Scriptures say,

wisdom is with the humble.

The integrity of the upright guides them.

God of all truth, grant me the wisdom of humility: that is, help me to learn from everyone and to listen to truth wherever it may be found, even from \mathcal{N} . The humble recognize that everyone has some of your divine light shining out to the rest of us. None of us has all the answers to life's questions. Give me a humble heart so that I may attain the wisdom that will guide me with integrity.

For \mathcal{N} I pray for wisdom and humility, too; may \mathcal{N} have integrity as a constant guide.

WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING

Proverbs 19:8

Holy One, I need wisdom and understanding if I am to be a source of wisdom and understanding for *N*. This is what you will for us. As the Scriptures make clear,

To get wisdom is to love oneself;
to keep understanding is to prosper.

Pour forth your Spirit into me, Holy One, so that I keep my eyes, ears, and heart open to your wisdom wherever it may be found. Urge *N* and me to “keep understanding,” to keep learning, to attend to your presence in our experiences and in our neighbors. In this way, Creator of us all, we will not only gain wisdom but we will love ourselves as well.

QUIET WORDS OF THE WISE

Ecclesiastes 9:16–18

Merciful God, I pray for wisdom, recalling
the words from the Scriptures that

wisdom is better than might. . . .

The quiet words of the wise are more to
be heeded

than the shouting of a ruler among
fools.

Wisdom is better than the weapons of
war.

Indeed, without wisdom, we resort to
might and weapons of war. When \mathcal{N} and I
interact, may we seek wisdom together rather
than power over each other. I cannot expect
 \mathcal{N} to be a seeker of wisdom if I am not. Help
me become a wise person with quiet words of
truth. Help us both become seekers of your
wisdom.

DISCERNMENT

Job 11:6

God, source of all wisdom, the Scriptures tell us that “wisdom is many-sided.” All too often I seek and offer simple answers to complex questions. Teenagers need more than this. After all, your wisdom teaches us that most issues have many sides.

Help me be dissatisfied with oversimplification, with pat answers, with snap judgments. Lead me instead to stay with my discernment so that I see issues in all their facets, especially issues dealing with \mathcal{N} . Give me steadfastness until your light breaks through my confusion.

Listening
and Waiting
with Patience

Call to Presence

Loving God, present here, you wait patiently for us to respond to your grace, and you listen to our every concern.

(Take a few moments to recall the teenager or teenagers on whom you wish to focus your prayer. For what do they yearn and need more patience? How might you be a model of listening and waiting?)

LISTEN

Psalm 34:11–13

God, you want us to listen carefully to one another but also to speak the truth. As the psalmist says,

Come, sons and daughters, listen to me;
I will teach you reverence for

Yahweh. . . .


Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.

We can hear the voice of God in the wisdom of other people, including our teenagers, but we must listen. In turn, God directs us to speak honestly and to refrain from words that hurt and manipulate. May we listen and speak to our teenagers as God would want us to. This is the way of true wisdom, the wisdom we want to share.

BE ATTENTIVE

Exodus 23:20–21

God, you told the people of Israel in Exodus: “I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Be attentive . . . and listen to [the angel’s] voice.”

I am no angel, Holy One, but you do call me to bring others to the place you have prepared for us—your reign of justice, love, and peace. So grant **N** and me the graces we need to be attentive to each other and to your Spirit present in each other. May we listen to each other with the same respect that the people of Israel gave to your messenger. I particularly have a hard time listening to **N** about . Help us improve our communication about this, and about all things.

MEMBERS OF ONE ANOTHER

Ephesians 4:25–26

God of mercy and compassion, you always listen to your people. Now I seek the graces that I need to do as Paul urges: “Putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.”

Source of all truth, help me listen and speak the truth with **N**, remembering that we are part of the Body of Christ. And if we do grow angry with each other, help us forgive instead of turning to sarcasm, sniping, hateful words, or worse. May I always keep before me as a prayer, “we are members of one another.” It would be a gift if **N** could remember this, too.

LISTEN AND ATTEND

Sirach 6:33

Your words are truth and life, Holy Wisdom.
So the Book of Sirach tells us,

If you love to listen you will gain
knowledge,
and if you pay attention you will
become wise.

Help me learn to listen attentively, Source
of all wisdom, particularly during times
when listening to \mathcal{N} is a challenge for me.
Help \mathcal{N} likewise, especially when \mathcal{N} does
not have an easy time listening to me. May
we remember these words from the Scrip-
tures so that when we listen we learn, and
when we pay attention to each other we plant
the seeds of wisdom. God, help us listen and
attend.

TELLING STORIES

Matthew 13:13

Jesus explained to his disciples, “The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’”

Loving God, when I am speaking with **N**, may I choose words and stories that we both understand. May we communicate clearly so that we can both be wiser and better. Jesus taught us to tell stories, so strengthen us to share our stories and our experiences. Help me always remember that **N** has stories to tell, and give me ears and heart to hear them. Give **N** ears and heart to hear my tales, too.