

A WEEK OF PRAYER FOR OUR CHILDREN & YOUTH AUGUST 15TH-25TH

GOD'S HEART FOR CHILDREN

Looking at the life and ministry of Jesus, we see that he is *serious about children*.

When his disciples sought to push them aside, Jesus declared, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these," Luke 18:16. He taught us that, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name, welcomes me," Mark 9:37. A short time later, "He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10:16).

When asked who was the greatest in the Kingdom of God, "He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven' " (Matthew 18:2-4).

Jesus went on to warn us, "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea" (Matthew 18:6).

Towards the end of his earthly ministry he declared, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise" (Matthew 21:16).

In the last verse of the Hebrew scriptures we read these words, "He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse" (Malachi 4:6).

THIS GUIDE

This prayer guide is designed to help us align our hearts with God's as we turn our attention to the plight of the children in our city, and to help us pray in unity. Use the prayer guide in your devotion time, during the prayer at meal times, in your Life Group, or in the prayer ministries of your congregation.

It is our hope that praying people will arise, seeking God's heart for the children of our city.

DAY ONE

Praying for the Children and Families of Many Nations in Houston

Did you know that in 2007 an estimated 75% of children in Houston between birth and 17 are non-Anglo? Houston is the second most diverse city in the U.S. with over 300 people groups and 140 nations represented. More than 200 languages are spoken in Houston. Let's pray for the growing diverse population of children across our city.

Prayer Targets for Day One:

1. Pray for God to give us His heart for the nations in our city (John 3:16).
2. Pray that we would see each family and each child as he sees them – as potential new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16-17).

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we worship you as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. You are the God of all people and there is no god like you. We celebrate your love and guiding hand as many nations have come to live, work, attend school and experience the blessings and benefits within our city. We recognize that fullness in life comes ultimately from you, the author and sustainer of life.

Forgive us, Lord, for consciously or unconsciously allowing walls of prejudice to form in our thoughts and actions. Forgive us, Lord, for erecting walls of division and classism that grieve your heart and damage relationships. Take the bricks that we have used to build walls and use them to build bridges of love, goodwill and unity. During this special season of prayer for our city's most vulnerable children, help us to celebrate the remarkable diversity that makes up our city.

We especially pray for children of all nationalities in every community. We ask your Spirit of truth and justice to inform our thoughts and guide our actions as we seek to be loving witnesses to our neighbors – rich or poor, regardless of race or ethnicity. Lord God, you have deposited rich gifts in all people – from all nations. Cultivate within our hearts a love that blesses and calls forth the inherent gifts you've given to all the children and parents you've brought to our city.

We worship you, the God of all nations and the King of Glory. These things we ask in the strong name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

DAY TWO

Prayer for Children and Families in Poverty

"In the poor, we find Jesus in distressing disguise." Mother Teresa

Did you know that 24% of Harris County children live in poverty and a total of 47% live in low-income families? Texas is ranked 46th in percentage of children living in poverty, with only Alabama, Louisiana, New Mexico and Mississippi doing worse. Related to poverty, Texas has the highest percentage of uninsured children in the nation at 24.6%.

Prayer Targets for Day Two:

1. Pray for God to give us his heart for the poor, Isaiah 58:6-8.
2. Pray that we learn to minister to the poor as unto Christ, Matthew 25:37-40.

Prayer:

Almighty God, source of life and every good gift, we worship you as Savior, Lord and provider today. In you, the scriptures declare there is no want. Thank you that you love all people with an everlasting love, and that you are for us! Your heart breaks when people are in pain. Thank you for the many times you have met us during our times of physical, emotional, spiritual and material need. Thank you, awesome God! We thank you for programs and ministries that are effective in providing for the needs of the poor. Thank you for those who serve faithfully to empower parents so they can become financially stable and provide for their families.

Lord, we recognize that your heart is moved by the cries of the poor. We add our voices to theirs and ask you to come to their rescue. Motivate your church across this city to turn their hearts and attention to the plight of the poor. Forgive us for our sins of apathy and indifference – when your heart is filled with compassion. Help us to prioritize our lives so that we can better reflect your heart.

Come, Lord, especially during this season of financial challenge. At every level of life and commerce, renew us with an urgent sense of faithful stewardship of money, time and talents. Help us make the needed changes in our lives, our work and our financial stewardship so that we can honor you. Come, Lord, today and deal with systems of injustice we have either created or allowed to perpetuate through passivity. Renew your church to the spirit and practice of loving our neighbors as you love us.

We praise and worship you as the one who guides and provides. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY THREE

Mental Health and Juvenile Justice

Did you know that at least one in five children and adolescents in the U.S. have a mental health disorder? One in ten of these children suffer from a serious emotional disturbance severe enough to disrupt daily functioning in the home, school, or community. Despite these statistics, it is estimated that only about half of all affected children receive specialty mental health services. When untreated, mental health disorders can lead to school failure, family conflicts, drug abuse, violence, and even suicide. In 2008, approximately 229,055 the children in Harris County were living with a mental illness and approximately 22,906 were suffering emotional disturbances serious enough to disrupt daily life.

Prayer:

God of Heaven and earth, we worship you today as the sustainer of life. You are the Alpha and Omega. In you we live and breathe and have our being, and we come today to seek your face. Your love is from everlasting to everlasting; it never fails. Thank you, Lord, for all the ways that your love is demonstrated to us on a daily basis. Today we celebrate that you are a God who is intimately involved in our lives, deeply concerned for our well-being.

We lift our voice today, loving God, on behalf of those children in our neighborhoods and communities who are suffering from mental illness. We cry out to you on their behalf. Hear our cry, Abba Father. We pray for healing in each of their lives. We ask you for parents and homes where love and understanding are present. We pray with the Apostle Paul for the transforming of the minds of those with mental health disorders. We ask, Lord, to grant grace and insight to uncover all the social issues and injustices that need to be addressed to create significant change and reflect noticeable progress relative to these needs.

We ask you to raise up loving, compassionate mentors and advocates who will come along side these children and youth and lovingly guide them to your love. We pray for our District Attorney and for all of those who have influence in the criminal justice system. Give them compassionate hearts and godly wisdom to know how to deal with the massive numbers of children that they deal with on a yearly basis. We pray for the transformation of the criminal justice system in our city even as we pray for the children it serves.

Forgive us, Lord, when we stand by in apathy unconcerned for the children impacted by mental and emotional illness. Forgive us when we have judged them and their families. Give us repentant hearts that lead us to action.

You and only you, Father, can give us what we need to face the enormous challenges in this prayer we are lifting today. We exalt your name as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. We know you as the one who always stands on the side of the weak and the oppressed, and it is to you that we turn to for intervention and guidance. In the name of Jesus, the Christ, we pray. Amen.

DAY FOUR

Prayer to End Human Trafficking

*Did you know that the U.S. Department of Justice estimates 14,000 to 17,000 persons are trafficked into the United State each year? Human trafficking involves both international and domestic victims and can include labor and/or sex trafficking. The victims are largely women and children, with runaways being especially vulnerable. **Houston is the American hub for human trafficking.** The Church in Houston must stand up against this injustice. We cannot continue to worship in peace and safety while our city is being used for such an evil endeavor. That stand starts with prayer.*

Prayer Targets for Day Four:

1. Pray for God himself to come to the aid of those being exploited (Psalm 146:7).
2. Pray for the church to rise up with one voice against this practice (Ephesians 5:11-13).

Prayer:

Lord, you alone are holy. Father, you alone are worthy of all glory, honor and praise. We praise your holy name for all that you have done in our city. We thank you for the growing unity in the Body of Christ in Houston. We thank you that you have brought to our attention the plight of those being forced into slavery.

Lord, we declare that this cannot stand. We choose to unite as your people against the trafficking of human beings throughout our city. Houston is a city of freedom. As the church in Houston we stand in the gap against this injustice.

Father, we pray that you will expose the trafficking rings, especially those in charge of the trafficking. We pray for the Houston Police Department and all law enforcement agencies in this city. We ask that you give them wisdom in locating and breaking up all the trafficking rings. We declare freedom for all those forced into this system. In the name of Jesus Christ, we decree that all the captives must be set free.

Father, forgive us for our ignorance, apathy and complacency. Forgive us for not taking up this cause and standing against it in a greater measure. Father, help us to pray, invest, and stand against this activity in our city. No longer will Houston be known as the hub of human trafficking for North America. We say, "Come, Kingdom of God. Be done, will of God. Let your Kingdom reign and your will be done in Houston as it is in Heaven."

Father, let your name be exalted in this city. May your name be glorified as this city rises up to defeat human trafficking. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

DAY FIVE

Prayer for our Educators and Educational Systems

Did you know that we have only a 48% freshmen-to-senior same school graduation rate in Houston? Only 15% of Texas students will complete a four-year degree. In Houston that means that out of 58,000 students who are 18, only about 8,700 will finish college within 6 years. (44 states scored higher). Our education system is broken. Education is the way out of poverty. If we want to see those we reach out to break the cycle of poverty, we need to insure all children have a quality education.

Prayer Targets for Day Five:

1. Pray for God's Spirit to rest upon those responsible for our educational system (Isaiah 11:2-3).
2. Pray for the church in Houston to become salt and light in the school system (Matthew 5:14-1).

Prayer:

Lord, you are great and greatly to be praised. You simply spoke, and the worlds were created. We give thanks to you for a nation that makes education a priority. We thank you for the public and the private education in America. Father, we thank you that every child born in this great nation has an opportunity to receive an education.

Father, the educational system in our city is in need of your healing. The problems are overwhelming. We ask you to raise up wise leadership to address the systemic problems so that the children of our city will complete both primary and secondary school. Give school administrators and government officials your wisdom and understanding. Give every teacher and administrator your heart for the children they serve.

Father, forgive your church where we have not wanted to invest our time and resources in our educational system. Forgive us for our failure to make education a priority in our homes. Lord, help us to work together so our children will be motivated and achieve more.

Lord, restore our educational system in Houston. May you be glorified as our children's test scores rise, as our drop-out rate declines, and as our educational system becomes an effective system to develop the full potential of each child.

To you, Father, be all honor, glory and majesty. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

DAY SIX

Childhood Obesity

Did you know that over the past 20 years, the prevalence of overweight children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 19 has nearly tripled with one-third of children overweight or at-risk of becoming overweight? The increase in the number of children who are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight is an alarming public health epidemic of this generation. Texas ranks 32nd (50th being the worst) in overall prevalence with 32.2% of children considered either overweight or obese.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we worship you as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and as God of all people. There is no god like you. You alone are worthy of all glory, honor and praise. Today we join our voice with thousands of others across the greater Houston area who are praying for the children and youth of our city. With our fellow brothers and sisters who love you, we worship you, O God!

Father, we face an epidemic of childhood obesity in this great city. While children in many places in the world starve every day for a lack of nutrition, our children, raised on a lifestyle of consumption, face alarming physical distress as a result of over eating. Help, O Lord! Create a sense of urgency in us. Give us eyes to see the deep systemic ties between our consumerist lifestyle and the impact on our children.

We turn to you, Lord, for wisdom and discernment as we search for ways and means to reverse this pattern and trend. Come, Holy Spirit! Show us what is needed to protect and bless the lives of all children at every stage of development. We thank you for people and programs you have provided in our communities and pray that you would encourage them, bless them and multiply their efforts. We pray for the parents in our city who make choices daily about what to feed their children. We pray for public school cafeteria workers who plan and provide meals daily. We pray for school administrators who make decisions about what will be served in the cafeteria and in the vending machines on the campuses.

We ask you, Father, to convict us of our propensity to take the easy way. Raise up leaders with an urgent sense of passion for the physical health of our children, and give them a prophetic voice among us. Forgive us as parents from our own poor health habits, and help us to repent and lead the way in teaching our children that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Lead us to fasting and simplicity as a way of life in the midst of a land of consumption.

As Creator and Sustainer of life, we ask you to give us everything we need to address the great challenges we face in this epidemic of poor health among our children. And where human hands leave off and fall short of needed remedies, we ask that your mighty hand would move among us. We pray this in the name of our Lord, Jesus. Amen.

DAY SEVEN

Advocacy Works

Did you know there are people, programs and organizations all across Texas who faithfully serve the needs of at-risk and vulnerable children? Many have been doing so tirelessly for decades. There's also a growing commitment by the Church to reach up in prayer and out in love to reverse these damaging trends in the lives of at-risk children.

Prayer Targets for Day Seven:

1. Pray for God to strengthen and empower those who are called to advocate for the children at risk in our city (Psalm 68:35).
2. Pray for the Church across the city to become aware of and partner with those God has raised up to serve at-risk children and families (John 12:26).

Prayer:

All knowing and all loving God, we are in awe of your great concern for the world you have created. We are privileged beyond words to call you "Father" and humbled that you call us "friend." As we consider this idea of "advocacy" for vulnerable children, help us to know how to invest in things that really matter.

Throughout this week of united prayer, we are reminded that children really matter to you - deeply! We praise and bless you for all those who experience and express your heart and concern for children – especially children at risk.

Thank you for every person, organization and congregation who is serving, advocating, and "standing in the gap" for those the gospel describes as "the least of these." Bless them today as they express your heart and love for the most vulnerable among us. Pour special grace and favor upon them. Provide wisdom and every human and spiritual resource needed as they help parents to reverse every destructive trend they face.

Forgive us, Lord, for overlooking this dire human need that breaks your heart every day. Joined with thousands of voices across our city today, we declare "may your Kingdom come, may your will be done, in our city as it is in heaven."

We declare by faith that the days ahead will be days of increased blessing for everyone involved in serving the children at risk in our city. By faith, we look for the damaging trends and reports of vulnerable children to reverse.

All these things we pray in the name of Jesus, who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. According to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Jesus Christ throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.