

“As a mother of multiple children with serious health conditions, there are times when I don’t know how or what to pray. Eric and Jessika’s heartfelt, Scripture-based prayers put words to thoughts and feelings that can be hard to express, while also helping parents like me to look to God and hope in him.”

**Katie Faris, Author, *God Is Still Good and He Will Be Enough***

“As someone who has walked through multiple miscarriages, I can personally attest to the experience of deeply longing to cry out to the Lord yet having no words to do so. Eric and Jessika have given me those words. *In His Hands* gives simple yet profound examples of how and what to pray amidst loss, fear, or grief during a child’s medical crisis, as well as the myriad of circumstances that come with it. This book is a gift to those who are walking through this season as well as those who are walking with them. Highly recommended!”

**Kristin L. Kellen, Assistant Professor of Biblical Counseling,  
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary**

“*In His Hands* is a precious resource for families who are clinging to God during the heartache and confusion of medical crises. These prayers are steeped in Scripture; they are full of humble wisdom, honest lament, and godly hope. When circumstances are so overwhelming that you don’t even know what to say, these prayers will draw you close to God and help you find your voice.”

**Scott James, MD, Author, *When Your Child is Ill: Nurturing Faith in Hard Times***

“What a gift Schumacher and Sanders offer the hurting with *In His Hands*, a beautiful, poignant collection of prayers for those touched by child illness and loss. Nuanced with the wisdom of personal experience and saturated with Scripture, this book will offer a voice to the suffering when words fail, and point them to the one, true Word who has borne their sorrows and is acquainted with grief.”

**Kathryn Butler, MD, Author, *Between Life and Death and Glimmers of Grace***

“This beautiful book is deeply moving—the prayers are affective, touching the heart in a way that child, sibling, parents, and family will identify with. It is deeply pastoral—the prayers are comprehensive, covering all possible scenarios that child, sibling, parents, and family may experience. And it is deeply needed—the prayers are instructive, giving child, sibling, parents, and family words to pray when they know not how to pray. What a beautiful blessing this book will be to many!”

**Jonathan Gibson, Author, *The Moon Is Always Round***

“This is a book for the moments when you don’t have the words to pray. Eric and Jessika remind parents of the hope of the gospel with every prayer.”

**Kristin Schmucker, The Daily Grace Co.**

“When our child faces a medical crisis, fears can paralyze, emotions can disorient, and we often lack the words to express the whirlpool of thoughts and feelings within. I was deeply impacted by these beautifully real prayers, which in many ways speak into countless circumstances. When you lack the words to pray, open the pages of this book and you will find the words your heart longs to cry out to your Heavenly Father.”

**Sarah Walton, Co-Author, *Together through the Storms***

“This book is a gift. It’s not just a gift because you can (and should) gift it to suffering parents. It’s a gift because it is written by people who have learned, through deep pain, how to suffer in faith. Rather than offering superficial platitudes, this little book will draw your heart deep into the heart of the Suffering Servant who knows and loves. I highly recommend it.”

**Elyse Fitzpatrick, Author, *Unloved: The Rejected Saints God Calls Beloved***

“By masterfully integrating the words of Scripture to help parents and children give voice to their laments, hopes, pleas and praises, this book helps us all to see how God meets us wherever we are in the pediatric medical crisis journey. Schumacher and Sanders offer these prayers as parents intimately familiar with crisis, and intimately familiar with the Lord who carries us through both healing and loss. This book is a much-needed resource for families walking through the indescribable tension between grief and hope, and for those looking to support loved ones in medical crisis with truthful, gritty, platitude-free faith.”

**Hui-wen (Alina) Sato, Pediatric ICU Nurse**

“Using Scripture and compassion, *In His Hands* provides words and prayers for not only families facing difficult diagnoses but also those praying for them and their medical team. Today, I learned of a friend’s cancer diagnosis and found comfort in this new resource. I plan to use it with our center staff and give it as a gift to families we support.”

**Michelle Nietert, MA, LPC-S, Clinical Director, [HopeHelps.me](http://HopeHelps.me)**

# In His Hands



Eric M. Schumacher  
*and* Jessika Sanders

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In His Hands

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*For David and Linsey,  
in memory of Madeline Joy.*

—Eric

*Because everything that I have is yours, I humbly  
dedicate this book to you, God. I put it back into the very  
hands of the One who gave me the words to pen these  
pages. I thank you that suffering is never for nothing,  
and that this very book is proof of that. May it be not  
only a guide for families walking through childhood  
illness, hospitalizations, or child loss, but also a tool to  
help them grow in their relationship with you.*

—Jessika

## Foreword

*by Brad and Emily Jensen*

We clutched each other's hands across the truck arm rest as we drove toward the big-city Emergency Room. Eye contact wasn't required to feel the blanket of tension, grief, and trepidation in the air.

Just ninety minutes earlier, we'd been trying to decide what to eat for dinner and when to leave for the pool when a phone conversation with our son's neurologist changed everything. He told us we needed to bring our son to the hospital, now. ("Oh and pack a bag, because he'll need to at least stay through the night.") So we dropped our pool towels and pulled a suitcase up from the basement. We called in backup and arranged for our other kids to stay the night with family. We loaded the suitcase into the truck, and we prepared—mentally, physically, and emotionally—for the battle ahead.

This wasn't our son's first seizure. By this point, we'd not only crossed the threshold of "strange medical event," we'd waded up to our knees in all things epilepsy. Daily medications and conversations about precautions, risks, seizure response training, and emergency plans were now as ordinary as talking about chicken nuggets and missing socks.

There wasn't much time to stop and analyze it—to think about what this was doing to our hearts, our faith,

our marriage, our health, or our kids. When your child needs something and they are suffering, you just step in and do. You make the appointments and arrange the childcare and call the pharmacist. You stand up and step up and show up. But sooner or later, all that standing makes you tired and your knees start to tremble.

When your child has medical needs—long term or short term—where can you go to collapse? When the only place to sleep is a stuffy recliner next to the hospital bed, where can you go to rest?

You can go to the Lord.

After more than eight years of walking through diagnoses and disabilities with our son, and more than three years of adding epilepsy into the mix, we understand how that answer can be both frustrating and comforting. We've longed to not need rest because we've found a cure. We've wanted this journey to require fewer frantic night wakings and more vacations without kids, but it just... hasn't. Yes, we've had moments and even months of relief, but we've also had to carry a weight that is too heavy for us to bear. Yet in that, when no other answers or support have been able to hold us, we have found security in Christ and his promises.

And so, as we held hands in that truck on the way to the Emergency Room that evening, we had nothing else to do but open up our mouths and pray—knowing that God was listening, and he has always been faithful.

As you read about our story, perhaps there are elements you can relate to. Maybe the thought of Emergency Room



visits and hospital recliners and ambulance sirens jolt your nervous system into action. Maybe you're deeply acquainted with the weight of words like "diagnosis" and "medication" and "doctor's appointment." It's likely that those come with difficult memories or future fears that make your shoulders tense, your jaw tighten, and your eyes fill with tears. But whether you're at the beginning of a journey you never wanted to be on in the first place, in the midst of a fog you're hoping to come out of, or decades along this weary road, we hope you're still open to hearing about how prayer matters in the midst of it.

The book you hold in your hands is a unique one. Because in all the other places that you've found words about suffering and fear and grief, we're pretty sure you haven't found specific prayers for the specific moments when you need words you don't have. Eric and Jessica have walked similar roads and have put words to some of the deepest longings and toughest moments a parent walking through a medical crisis can experience.

We're grateful for this book and will keep it nearby for the many moments when we're in need, and are too weak and unsure of how to articulate it. We hope that when you're all alone or clutching the hands of those you love, you'll open this book and remember you're in His.

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*Brad and Emily Jensen live in central Iowa with their five children. They are small-business owners, and Emily is the author of multiple books, including *Risen Motherhood: Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments* and *He is Strong: Devotions for When You Feel Weak*.*



## Introduction

**P**arents are always seeking to protect their children. We provide them with nutritious food, plan their schedules carefully, buy them the things they need and want—all so that they will flourish. From the very first scan in the womb, we hope and dream for them.

No parent hopes to walk through a medical crisis with their child. Extended illness, health complications, or loss are not in our plans for our little ones. So when we are thrust onto these unplanned journeys, we find them agonizing, bewildering, daunting, and debilitating.

We both know these realities well.

*Jessika:*

My son Ezra spent thirty-seven days in intensive care as a newborn and three additional days as a toddler. I remember feeling completely powerless as I sat idle at his bedside. I confess that though I desperately wanted to pray big, bold prayers as his life hung in the balance, I often felt too paralyzed to pray. Yet despite my shortcomings, I know nothing is wasted in God's hands.

*Eric:*

My wife and I have endured four miscarriages, each uniquely painful. In one instance, we discovered the pregnancy just before losing our baby. In another, we held our

child in our arms. We've faced the painful and frightening medical aspects of pregnancy loss.

Since then, both of us have walked alongside other bewildered, angry, and sorrowful parents, witnessing their faith and their doubts. Yet we've also seen God supply amazing strength, comfort, and healing to his suffering people.

If you are going through a medical crisis of any kind with your child or unborn baby, you are probably painfully aware of your limitations. All the work, worry, care, and attention you have given to your child seem to have made no difference. You suddenly feel that your life and your child's life are not in your hands. It is a terrifying feeling.

But even in the midst of these fears, there can be great comfort in knowing that we are in *his* hands—in God's hands.

Both of us know the suffering and fear that comes with serious threats to a child's health. But both of us also know the blessing of prayer, and the mercy of the God to whom we pray. We've written this book to help you know that blessing and that mercy, too.

#### IN TIME OF NEED

Consider these words from the Bible—verses which provide crucial answers to help us in a time of crisis.

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin.*

*Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16)*

*What is prayer?*

Prayer means approaching the throne of grace—that is, God’s throne. We come to him as weak children asking a parent for help. We ask boldly, because we trust in his love.

*How can we know that God hears our prayers?*

It’s important to realize that nothing about us requires God to listen to us, much less answer us. We’ve all disobeyed, disregarded, and even despised God. Yet he has made a free choice to love us and invite us to be his children. He did this by sending his Son, Jesus—the “high priest” mentioned in Hebrews 4:15.

Jesus took on human nature, experiencing all the pain and weakness of a human life. Yet he lived the life we have all failed to live, flawlessly loving and obeying God the Father. Finally, he chose to die on our behalf—taking the punishment for the ways in which we all have disobeyed God. And God raised him from the dead as a sure sign that sin and death have been conquered.

We can pray because of Jesus. If we believe that Jesus lived, died, and rose in our place—if we trust in him—nothing can stop God loving us, or stand in the way of God hearing our prayers. It doesn’t matter how weak we feel: if we trust in Jesus, we can know that God cares for us, listens to us, and is devoted to our eternal good. That is a wonderful thing to know when life is at its most confusing.

*What can we pray for?*

Hebrews 4:16 tells us that when we pray, we will “receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.” Matthew 7:7-11 invites us to ask for any good thing. We can ask for healing, for strength, for peace, for help with practical needs. We can express our doubts and fears, ask for more faith, and pray for the people around us. Most of all, we can ask for God himself to be with us, and to work for our good and our child’s good.

God will not always answer our prayers in the way we want him to. We won’t necessarily be able to see why he is allowing things to take the course that they do. But there is something better: we can know that he loves us enough to die for us, and we can know that he is always answering our prayers in the way he knows is best for us and for his glory. That can give us great confidence to pray to God on our child’s behalf.

## WHEN YOU DON’T HAVE WORDS

Even so, sometimes prayer is hard. Sometimes, our souls are so exhausted that we can’t put feelings into thoughts, much less thoughts into words. When that’s the case, how can we pray?

The apostle Paul wrote an important but often overlooked truth: “We do not know what to pray for as we should” (Romans 8:26). If you find yourself there, don’t be discouraged—even an apostle of Christ and a writer of Bible books knew that struggle! Yet Paul also knew this

comfort: “Christ Jesus ... is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us” (v 34).

What a wonderful thought! Jesus is in heaven praying for us! No matter how weak and pathetic our prayers feel, we are well prayed for at God’s throne.

There is other help too. God doesn’t expect us to always use our own words when we pray to him (though he invites us to). He provided an entire book of prayers, the Psalms, that we can use as we speak to him. And he can use other believers—friends, family, pastors—to provide you with words to pray in the darkest times.

This book is our prayerful effort to supply you with words to pray when you don’t have words. We’ve tried to offer prayers covering a variety of situations, concerns, and needs faced by those walking through childhood sickness and loss. Some of these won’t apply to you; others will. Whichever prayers you choose, we are asking God to use them to help you come to his throne of grace with boldness—trusting in Jesus, and finding grace and mercy to help in this time of need.

Start by skimming the table of contents, asking the Spirit to lead you to the right prayers for you. We invite you to:

- *Pray personally.* Add the name of your child or specifics about your situation. (Phrases in *italics* invite you to personalize.) Add your own prayers in the margin or in your mind.
- *Pray with others.* Many of the prayers are written as “I” rather than “we,” but you can also use them together. Each section also features a responsive reading

specifically designed for a group to pray together. You might use these as a family, or with a pastor or trusted friend.

- *Pray with your child.* Each section has a prayer specifically written for your child to pray, if they are of an age to do so. Many of the other prayers can also be said together. You may wish to pray some of them out loud as you sit with your child.
- *Pray in whatever way feels natural.* You may prefer to pray out loud or silently. You may pray through tears. We would advise praying slowly, reflecting on the words.
- *Pray with faith.* Know that Jesus loves you and gave himself for you. He is praying for you. He will work for your good.

## OUR PRAYER FOR YOU

Good and gracious Father,

We pray that all who come to these pages  
find words that point them to the hope  
that is found in Jesus Christ the Lord  
and that help them to pray to you  
in the power of your Spirit.

Heal their children  
and their hearts.

Amen.



Jesus said,  
“Leave the little children alone,  
and don’t try to keep them from coming to me,  
because the kingdom of heaven  
belongs to such as these.”

*Matthew 19:14*





# 1

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## Prayers for Uncertain and Fearful Times

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## **A Child's Prayer**

Dear Jesus,

You invited children to come to you,  
so I am praying to ask you for help.

I am sick, and I am scared.

Something is wrong with my body,  
and I don't know what will happen.

Please, Jesus, heal me and give me peace.

Amen.

---

*Matthew 19:13-15; John 5:1-9; John 6:16-21*

## **For Peace**

Jesus, wake up!

Out of nowhere,  
a storm has overtaken us.  
We've been entirely caught off guard;  
we're totally ill-equipped.

The sky darkens.  
The winds intensify.  
The boat rocks violently.  
The waves slam into our vessel.

Jesus, wake up!

The storm is raging now.  
The wind and the rain are like  
bullets pelting us relentlessly.  
We are scared we won't make it.

Prince of Peace, rebuke the storm.  
Rebuke the wind, the rain, and the waves.  
Command them to be still in your holy authority.  
Speak peace over our circumstances.  
Speak peace over our minds.

Jesus, we call on you  
because you can.

---

*Matthew 8:23-27*

## **For Wisdom and Clarity**

We do not know what to do, but we look to you.

Lord, this situation is beyond us;  
we don't understand what's happening.

We face a thousand questions  
and don't know where to find answers.

The counsel of professionals is over our heads,  
and the advice of family and friends confuses us.

We do not know what to do, but we look to you.

You are the only wise God!

Yes, the depth of your wisdom is unsearchable!  
You founded the earth by wisdom  
and established the heavens by understanding.

No one directed you or gave you counsel;  
no one taught you how to be wise.

We do not know what to do, but we look to you;  
we ask for wisdom in faith, without doubting,  
because we know that you give to all  
generously and ungrudgingly.

We do not know what to do, but we look to you.

---

*2 Chronicles 20:12; Romans 16:27; 11:33-34;  
Proverbs 3:19-20; Isaiah 40:12-14; James 1:5*

## **For a Clear Diagnosis**

God of creation,  
you make no mistakes.  
You are altogether perfect.  
All your works are wonderful.

But, Lord, we live in a world that is  
corrupted by disease, decay, and death.  
Our child is not well, and we don't know why.  
The medical team is seeking to find the cause.  
Lord, in your mercy, give us a correct diagnosis.

God, you knit this child together carefully,  
and you know exactly what's wrong,  
so we pray for an accurate diagnosis.  
Even if it is not what we want to hear,  
give us strength to walk the road  
that you have prepared for us.

Holy Spirit, guard our hearts from despair.  
Transform our thoughts so that  
we might hope and trust in you  
no matter what the diagnosis may be  
or the future may hold.  
Equip and empower us to  
run the race you have set for us  
with wholehearted devotion and faith.