

# MOTHER'S PRAYER BOOK

**S**everal years after my father's death, I had the heart-wrenching task of moving my mother into a Baptist retirement center in Florida. My father had donated the property to the center before he died, planning for the both of them to live there later. Dad never got to live there, but Mom stuck to the plan. She moved only a few things with her, urging us children to divide up the rest.

After the big pieces of furniture had been shipped out, my two brothers, my sister and I wandered through the old house. Every keepsake had a memory attached—different to each of us. We decided to take turns choosing.

I wanted only one thing: the tattered "prayer book" that my parents had used every morning for years. Actually, it was an oversized photo album with seven pages—one for each day of the week. Each page contained the pictures of those they prayed for that day. My dad had made a little stand so that the album could stay open on the breakfast table, and each morning before eating their meager breakfast, they prayed for their friends.

I took the old book and sat on the back steps, looking at each page.

Monday, they prayed for their local Gideon chapter—an organization dedicated to the distribution of Bibles.

Tuesday, they prayed for the Billy Graham organization—and for Billy's crusades.

Wednesday, they prayed for Tom and Betsy Smoak, then missionaries with Wycliffe Bible Translators in Colombia, South America. I recall sitting at breakfast with them, listening as my mother's voice broke with emotion as she prayed for the six Smoak children by name.

Thursday, they prayed for two elderly women who had given their lives as missionaries to mountain people in Appalachia.

Friday, they prayed for old friends.

Saturday, a family picture helped them remember all their children and grandchildren.

Sunday, even after they were too feeble to attend, they prayed for their local church, and for the staff and residents at the retirement center.

Now mother was in that same center. The book had been left behind.

I took it home. It remains in my study, closed. The stand, however, is on our breakfast table. It holds my prayer book—complete with pictures.

Mother has now left the retirement center for the adjacent nursing home. Her mind is no longer clear. Often, when I visit her, I'll find her sitting in her wheelchair, staring vacantly into space. She told me once she misses her prayer book, but her eyes are too bad to see the pictures.

Last summer I struggled whether to tell her that the doctors had found cancer in my body. Her mind, like her body, was so fragile. I hated to involve her in the heartbreaking emotions I knew the news would bring. Yet I felt I had no choice.

Jackie and I made the familiar trip down the coast of Florida to the nursing home. She was sitting in her wheelchair in the hall, lined up with five or six others—all staring at the opposite wall. We rolled her around to the little chapel. I sat in a chair facing her, feeling her parchment-like skin over those thin, brittle bones as I held her hands. In the car, we had agreed I should tell her only generalities. But holding her hands and looking into her watery eyes, I began to cry. I blurted it out. All of it.

I felt those bony fingers reach up and touch the tears running down my face. Suddenly, she wasn't a 93-year-old woman any more—and I wasn't a 58-year-old man. She was my mother—and I was her little boy.

She squeezed my hands. "Glory isn't such a bad place, son. I've been praying every day asking God to take me there. I've had nothing to live for."

Then, with a twinkle, she added, "Now I know why He's left me here. To pray for you."

Many others prayed, too. The great and the small. God answered! But there's something about a praying mother that touches the heart of God.

Lord Tennyson, who must have come from that kind of home, wrote in "Morte D'Arthur":

*The old order changeth, yielding place  
to new,*

*And God fulfills Himself in many ways...*

*Pray for my soul. More things are  
wrought by prayer*

*Than this world dreams of. Wherefore,  
let thy voice*

*Rise like a fountain for me night and  
day...*

*For so the whole round earth is ever way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of  
God. ■*

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*Jamie Buckingham's mother, Elvira, resides at a Florida nursing home.*



BY  
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