

Five Birthday Wishes (Hopes) for My Son

My little boy turned four years old today. I am so proud of him and am overjoyed that God has entrusted him and his big sister into my care as a father. Simon and I sometimes have a rocky relationship. He loves his mommy fiercely (so do I), and sometimes doesn't want me to help him with things. I've



learned not to take offense when he doesn't want my hugs or kisses, and have learned to love the times when he dresses up like Spider-man, because I know it means he is ready to wrestle and I am always the villain.

When I look at my son I see a little boy with a wonderful personality, who is learning who he will be. But when I look at him, I also see me. I know some of the struggles he will face and some of the joys he will experience. We are so alike in some ways that I can even guess how he will feel about and react to certain life events. And so, on this special day, I want to make a few birthday wishes (hopes) on my son's behalf.

1. No fear

My first wish for my son is that he would live a life devoid of fear; fear of death, fear of failure, fear of loss, or any other fear. We are constantly reminded by Scripture that we should not be afraid. We live with a hope and a peace that transcends fear and that expresses itself in fear's antithesis: joy.

2. Joy

And so my second wish for my son is that he will experience a life of joy. I'm not merely talking about a life of temporary, passing joy that we sometimes experience at life's special moments. I want his to experience that joy too, but also something much deeper. My wish for Simon is that he will experience an abiding joy that can only be found when one comes to know that he/she is a beloved child of God, in whom the Almighty delights.

3. Patience

I have been very impatient at various times in my life. In fact, it is something I would say I have struggled with on a deep level. Sometimes this patience has manifest as anger or sarcasm or grief. But most often when impatience takes hold it quickly turns into deep-seeded bitterness. My son is like me, and I know he will wrestle with impatience as he is figuring out who God has made him to be and what he will do with his life. It is my wish for him that he will learn patience early, that he will trust fully in God to act when the time is right, and that he will never allow bitterness to enter his heart, where it can so easily take root and grow.

4. Faith

My fourth wish for Simon on his fourth birthday is that he will become a man of faith. As he grows, he will meet with so many challenges. For much of my life I had what I would call a very rudimentary faith. I believed that Jesus is the Son of God and that he dies for my sins. But beyond that, I had very little faith that I could be a better me, or that God would ever see much value in me. It is something I struggled with into adulthood, and I would wish with all my heart that my son never experiences that struggle.

My wish for Simon is that he will never doubt his value to his Heavenly Father. I want so very much for him to know and love Jesus with his whole heart. I want him to be unashamed of this

love and faith. I want him to experience the joy and peace that come from knowing that our Father in heaven loves us and is pleased with us. I want him to experience newness of life through Jesus Christ. I want him to devote himself and all that he chooses to do to God and his glory.

In other words, I want him to remember always that he is a beloved child of the living God, and a co-heir of glory with Jesus Christ. My wish for him is that he will live the words of Paul to the Philippians, when he said:

“**7**But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. **8**What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ **9**and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. **10**I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, **11**and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

5. Love

My final wish for my son on his birthday is this: that he would learn to love extravagantly. Simon has a sensitive heart. I can tell you from experience that it will bring him heartache in a number of ways, but it will also give him great capacity for loving others. My wish for him is that he will not lose this, for it is worth all the suffering of this life to be able to show true and extravagant love to others in the name of Jesus. And only Jesus can take the heart that God has given Simon and cause it to overflow with love. A sensitive heart left to its own devices slowly turns in on itself. It seeks ways to hide from hurt. It becomes jaded, scarred, withered, and finally corrupt.

I nearly lost the battle for my own heart to corruption, until Christ stepped in and rescued me. It is my wish for Simon that he early on (even now) gives over the fight for his heart to Christ. That he will allow the Spirit of God to live in him and take this sensitive heart of his and use it to lavish others with the extravagant love of a father for his children. This is the legacy I would have him leave.

I have become a lot more introspective these last few years, as I have watched my kids grow. I have wrestled with the knowledge that they will experience both pain and joy, that they will make good decisions and poor ones. It has been my prayer that they will not wrestle with the sins I have wrestled with and that they will always put their trust in God through Jesus Christ.

It is my greatest wish that they know Jesus intimately and walk with him always. And it gives me great comfort to know that God never stopped pursuing me, and he will never stop pursuing them.

Happy Birthday, Simon! I love you, and I am proud of you. May all your wishes and the ones I have made for you come true.