

From the Introduction "A Prayer for Children" by Ina Hughes

One of the hardest "facts of life" discussions I ever remember having was the morning I heard a five-alarm scream coming from my daughter's bedroom, setting in motion the lion in me. I went racing to the rescue, only to find her white-faced and hysterical, eyes glued in horror at what was happening inside her gerbil-cage. The (adult) gerbils had eaten their own babies. Try explaining that one to a six year old.

We humans have been given the mental and physical equipment to outdo other species in blessing and nurturing our children. Our brains have been fine-tuned to the point that we should automatically put their needs, their welfare above our own. But that's not all. The human heart is big enough to accommodate other people's children as well, to see that not only are we responsible for flesh of our own flesh, but for all children, in all places. As long as one child suffers -- be it in Rwnd... or sitting next to us in church - it shames us all. We don't eat our own babies, as gerbils do but sometimes, we exploit them. We forget them. We abuse them. Sometimes we hush them up or forget that they are the real measure of success, be it a family's or a Nation's. When we do this - whether we are parents, politicians, preachers or simply talking over a cup of coffee at the office - we slip down a notch on the animal - vegetable - mineral chart. There is something gerbil-like in the way we have become immune to facts, figures, even to the faces of children on the nightly news.

A Prayer for Children (By Ina Hughes, adapted by Emma Jordan-Simpson)

We pray for the children

who sneak popsicles before supper,
who erase holes in math workbooks,
who can never find their shoes.

And we pray for those

who stare at photographers
from behind barbed wire,
and from the insides of juvenile
detention centers
who can't run down the street
in a new pair of sneakers,
who never "counted potatoes,"
played Marco Polo or sang in the
school chorus,
who are born in places where
we wouldn't be caught dead,
who never go to the circus,
who live in an X-rated world.

We pray for the children

who bring us sticky kisses
and fistfuls of dandelions,
who hug us in a hurry and
forget their lunch money.

And we pray for those

who never get dessert,
who have no safe blanket
to drag behind them,
who *watch* their parents
watch them die,
who *wait* for families to love them,
who *wait* for families to love them,
who grow up and still *wait*
for families to love them.
Who can't find bread to steal,
who don't have rooms to clean up,
whose pictures aren't on anybody's
dresser -- whose monsters are real.

We pray for the children

who spend their allowance
before Tuesday,
who throw tantrums in
the grocery store
and pick at their food,
who like ghost stories,
who shove dirty clothes
under the bed,
who never rinse out the bath tub,
who get visits from the tooth fairy,
who don't like to be kissed or
hugged in front of their cool friends,
who fall asleep on church pews
and scream into their cellphones,
who send text messages just to say
that they are laughing out loud,
whose tears we sometimes laugh at
and whose smiles can make us cry.

And we pray for those

Whose nightmares come
in the daytime,
*Whose neighbors never seem
to see anything,
never seem to hear anything,
never seem to know what
to do about daytime nightmares...*

Whose schools blame them
for needing to be educated
Whose streets are closed for
tutoring but always open for bullets
Who will eat *anything*,
Who have never seen a dentist,
Who aren't spoiled by anybody,
Who go to bed hungry
and cry themselves to sleep,

Who live and move,
but have no being

We pray for the children

Who want to be carried
and for those who must,
We pray for children we never
give up on and for children who are
given up; for children who never get
a second chance.

We pray for those we smother
and for those who will grab the
hand of anybody kind enough to
offer it.

***Dear God, we pray
for all of Your children.
Amen.***