

Guidelines for Pray-ers

By Allan Pole



During a worship service, group meeting or a personal conversation someone brings to your attention a need for which they want prayer. Here are some things I would like you to know.

Your Preparation

Your openness to the Holy Spirit's leading is crucial to the effectiveness of your prayer ministry. Proverbs 4:23 exhorts: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." If you want the goodness and power of God to come out of your heart you must allow Him to first pour it into you. This involves:

- Daily reading the Bible, memorizing Scripture and applying the principles that you are feeding your mind.
- Sharing with the Lord your thoughts, feelings and burdens for others through prayer - both in times of solitude and while you engage in your daily activities. This establishes the habit of openness of communication with God that will be evident to others.
- Listening to the Lord's voice. In John 10:4 Jesus explains that His sheep hear His voice. It is normal Christianity to hear Him. Our culture will not encourage this skill, so it is important that you sharpen your spiritual hearing by fasting periodically (e.g. abstaining from food, television, radio). One practical way to develop your spiritual hearing is to write out your prayers in a journal. Ask the Lord to speak to you then write out the thoughts that come. Take these recorded thoughts to the Bible and to godly counsellors to weigh whether or not they are from God. You will learn to distinguish the voice of the Holy Spirit from the voice of the enemy or your own thoughts.

Your life is to reveal a commitment to Jesus Christ that is growing stronger all the time. I am not asking for perfection, but to demonstrate that through your will, habits and the Holy Spirit working in you your thoughts, words and actions are becoming more and more like God's.

The Interview

Stand squarely in front and look right into the eyes. You might be nervous on the inside and feeling rather timid about barging into this person's private world, but by coming forward and asking for prayer they have already invited you into their private world. Position yourself so you can hear well and communicate confidence. The eyes can be windows to the soul. The more you can look into someone's eyes the greater the opportunity you have to observe what is happening in their soul.

Ask what the need is. I have gathered in a group praying over an individual and no one ever bothered to ask what the need was. There is no shame in asking what the need is. In Luke 18:41 Jesus asked a blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?" The man's specific request, "I want to see," revealed to Jesus the man's faith and helped everyone to see how God answers specific requests.

Your Prayer

Discern whether or not the request is within the will of God. 1 John 5:14-15 assures us that if we ask in harmony with God's will we will get what we ask. Is the request Biblical? Unselfish? Glorifying to God? If yes, then ask boldly. If no, ask for the Lord's will to be done with the request.

Remember the promise of Jesus in Mark 16:17-18:

17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." NIV

Praying in tongues is very helpful to you but can be distracting or even scary to the one for whom you are praying. In 1 Corinthians 14:15 the Apostle Paul explains that he prayed with his spirit (in tongues) and he prayed with his mind (words that he understood). Speaking in tongues can be an excellent way to tune into the Holy Spirit's leading. We encourage the speaking in tongues but not to the point of distraction when praying for someone. A person who is effective in praying for others is sensitive to the Lord and to people.

Pray with your eyes open as much as possible (but try not to make the person self-conscious by staring at them) to observe the manifestations of God's power in them. Tears, eyelids fluttering, limbs twitching and inability to stand can (though not necessarily) all be indicators that the Holy Spirit is touching this person.

If they are unable to stand, invite them to be seated, motion for someone to help them to the floor or prepare to slow their descent to the floor. If a person does collapse do all you can to prevent injury and to ensure that ladies are appropriately covered.

It can be helpful to you to occasionally and sensitively ask the person what is going on inside. How is that physical need for which you have prayed for healing? Are there physical sensations of God's power? This will provide further direction in your prayer and welcome feedback in a relaxed atmosphere of faith and expectancy.

Why do people sometimes not receive a solution to their problem or a healing for their physical need? The answer I would like you to be the quickest with is, "I don't know." Sometimes only God knows. Other times there are reasons that we understand: sin (in this person's life or in someone else's who has influence on them), lack of faith (in you or the person for which you are praying), time (sometimes God says wait or more time is needed to put the pieces together), habits (abuse of their bodies), wrong request (out of the will of God) and/or demonic activity (that has yet to be identified and driven out).

When the answer is not immediate you may wish to have an extended time of prayer with this person. Invite them to join you after the meeting for such a time.

When you become aware of answers to prayer, ask the person's permission then encourage others by sharing these good reports.

Your Role

You are not being asked to provide counsel, to preach or to teach in this setting. Resist the temptation to "fix" the problem by suggesting solutions. This is not the time to refer someone to your doctor, to recommend an herbal remedy or to sell them a product that you think will help.

You are a role model. Make your prayers as clear, simple and brief as possible. We want to demonstrate to people a communication with God that anyone can enjoy.

You do not have the answer to everyone's problems. I relieve you of feeling that you must be prepared for any scenario that arises. Feel free to ask someone else to join you in prayer and to refer the needy person to another person for help.

Anointing with Oil

My desire is for the church to be a safe place where James 5:13-16 can be practiced with wisdom and compassion:

13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. NIV

This passage leads me to believe that anointing with oil is the domain of church elders and is one of many means that the Lord uses to bring healing to this in need and to set aside individuals (e.g. Aaron in Exodus 29:7) and property (e.g. the tabernacle and its furnishings in Exodus 40:9) for His purposes.

Your Safety

It is generally best to have males pray with males and females pray with females. Where this is not possible, ask someone else to join you - preferably someone who is the same gender as the one requesting prayer. Husband and wife teams are welcome to pray over people of either gender.

It is important that you stay close to the Lord through Bible reading, Bible memorization, praying, fasting, worship and fellowship with other Christians after you pray with someone. If you do not, you can be vulnerable to the enemy's attacks.

Perhaps you are not ready to pray with others. Stand around people who are experienced in praying for others and observe how they do it. Lay your hands on the one praying and simply agree with them in prayer under your breath. Ask someone to mentor you.

In Ecclesiastes 4:12 Solomon observes, "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." With the help of the Holy Spirit, church leadership aims to equip men, women, boys and girls that fulfill this Scripture.

Thank you for your service to the Lord and to people by stepping forward to pray for others. We will see lives changed forever as we bring the power of the Holy Spirit to bear upon the needs that we encounter!