

Praying For One Another

Introduction. On Christmas morning 1998, Russ Robinson and his family climbed into their motor home and headed from Chicago to Phoenix, Arizona. Russ and his wife took turns driving all day and into the night. While cruising along in the darkness, the headlights suddenly revealed a woman dressed in black, walking in the middle of the road. Russ swerved, but it was too late. The motor home crashed into the woman. Her head hit the windshield, and her body smashed into the right side of the vehicle, tossing her into the ditch.

The woman, who was trying to commit suicide, survived. But Russ was devastated. He phoned a friend at his church. His wife called another friend at church. They gathered two groups of friends to pray for Russ. He writes:

Their prayer support helped me begin the road to emotional recovery. My community listened during long conversations while I tried to process confusing emotions. When I wrestled with God — seeking to make sense of the experience — people offered reassurance and other help. I needed people to pray with and for me, and I came to know what it was to have someone “weep with those who weep.” I experienced how the body of Christ can extend real, personal hands to someone in pain.

The “one another” statements in the New Testament make for an extremely interesting study. Loving one another, submitting to one another, serving one another, forgiving one another, and encouraging one another are all wonderful exhortations for New Testament Christians. You need to invest in community today so you can reap the benefits during tomorrow’s seasons of deprivation and loss.

Lately our world has been crazy. This intense, almost daily, chaos has caused a lot of distress. What can you do? None of us have the capability to change national and international events directly — but we can pray! James 5:16 says to “pray for one another” and we are ensured that prayers of righteous people are very powerful and can produce wonderful results.

Having a “sweet hour of prayer” is a worthwhile decision for you, just like it was for Old Testament believers (Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10). My life needs spiritual rhythms so I pray that God will give me discipline to seek Him more and more (Psalm 32:6-7). Prayer builds my intimacy with God, and I build my intimacy with others by praying for them. It is so unfortunate that some Christians are starving themselves. They need to get to the banquet table, and prayer is a good way to do that.

I. In Seasons Of Distress And Grief

- A. To be heard, our prayers must be from a sincere heart (James 4:3). We must also ask in agreement with God’s revealed will (Isaiah 59:1-2; Psalm 66:18; Proverbs 15:29; 28:9; 1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 5:14). God answers prayer when all the conditions are met.
- B. When we pray for one another, there are several seasons of life where people need our prayers. In perfect appropriateness, the Bible explores those times of life in the people mentioned in its pages.

1. Anxiety — Moses (Numbers 11:11-15).
 2. Discouragement — Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10).
 3. Gratitude — Solomon (1 Kings 8:22-53).
 4. Penitence — Ezra (Ezra 9:5-15).
 5. Persecution — Daniel (Daniel 6:10).
 6. Distress — Jonah (Jonah 2:1-9).
 7. Temptation — Jesus (Matthew 26:39, 42).
 8. Sickness — Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).
- C. All of these godly, conscientious people demonstrate that it is always time to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1). Prayer works so don't turn your back on God (Matthew 7:7-11).

II. My Soul Has Often Found Relief

- A. Even though I become a more robust Christian by praying to God, what's not considered often enough is how much capacity there is for my spirituality to expand when I pray for others.
- B. I can find stunning relief for the anxieties I feel for others, and I can more deeply root myself by offering thanks for the blessings that others receive.
 1. Pray for your family — for respect and maturity (1 Peter 3:7; Ephesians 6:1).
 2. Pray for your community — for peace and righteousness (Jeremiah 29:7; Titus 2:12).
 - a) Friends.
 - b) Coworkers.
 - c) Neighbors.
 3. Pray for your church — for love and increase (John 13:35; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 2 Thessalonians 3:1).
 - a) Erring brethren.
 - b) Spiritually weak.
 - c) Elders who lead the flock.
 4. Pray for your nation — for repentance and wise rule (Proverbs 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:1-2).
 5. Pray for unbelievers — for teachers and salvation (Ephesians 6:18-20; Romans 10:1).
 6. Pray for the sick and oppressed — for health and fair treatment (James 5:14-15; Proverbs 29:7).
 7. Pray for the suffering — for strength and perseverance (Luke 22:31-32; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).
 8. Pray for your enemies — for forgiveness and the removal of bitterness from our hearts (Matthew 5:44; 6:14-15; Proverbs 24:17).

Conclusion. Bill Lacovara was fishing near Atlantic City, New Jersey, when he spotted a plastic bag floating in the water. Inside he found about 300 requests for prayer that had been mailed to a local preacher. Most of the letters were unopened. The preacher had died two years earlier, and authorities speculated that the letters had been dumped as garbage after his house was cleaned out.

Some of the prayers were frivolous. “I’m still praying to hit the lottery — twice,” wrote one man. “First \$50,000 — then, after some changes have taken place — let me hit the millionaire.”

Many of the letters were heartbreaking. They came from anguished spouses, children, and widows, all crying out to God. Some prayed for relatives who were using drugs, gambling, or cheating on them. One man wrote from prison, saying that he was innocent and wanted to be back home with his family. A teenager poured out her heart on yellow, lined paper, begging God to forgive her and asking for a second chance. “Lord, I know that I have had an abortion, and I killed one of your angels,” she wrote. “There is not a day that goes by that I don’t think about the mistake I made.”

Lacovara was despondent that so many prayers had been tossed away unheeded. “How many letters like this all over the world aren’t being opened or answered?” he wondered. “There are hundreds of lives here, so much struggle, washed up on the shore.” But those prayers aren’t unheeded. God hears His children, and He is willing to answer and comfort those who seek, trust, and obey Him. Of course, pray for yourself — for physical and spiritual needs (Matthew 6:11; Colossians 1:9-11), and then serve the living God with all your heart, soul, and mind.