

PRAYING FOR THE SICK



Praying for the sick is actually very simple, yet many people are afraid to pray for a sick person because they fear the person will not be healed or they simply don't know what or how to pray. The only way to escape these fears is to deal with them head-on! If you have a deep desire to pray for the sick, this desire was most probably put in your heart by the Holy Spirit, and all you need to do is to avail yourself of Him.

Here are a few thoughts on how to pray for the sick on a regular basis for anything from a cold or headache to someone who is battling with cancer or in a wheelchair. You don't need to do anything fancy, just pray. It is God who does the work, we need only be obedient. If nothing happens, it is not your fault. You are venturing out in faith and learning the ways of God. Be bold!

Where to start

1. Listen

People always speak about what is bothering them. Ask the Holy Spirit to make you attentive to clues like, "I have such a bad headache today; my back is so painful, or my nose has been running for three days". Now is the time to be bold! Ask the person, "Why don't we pray together now for that pain/ache?" If the person is not a believer, you might say, "Do you mind if I pray for you?" Wait for their answer. People seldom decline prayer.

Pray simple prayers: *"Father, Your Word says that we should pray for one another when we are sick (James 5:16). Right now, I pray for my friend who has a cold. Please touch her with Your healing. In the name of Jesus, remove this cold from her body and let all the symptoms end. In Jesus' name, amen."*

If possible, send them a message an hour or two later to ask how they are feeling. When they are well again, be sure to give God the glory with them, and tell them to testify to others of their healing.

2. Sign up

Become a member of the prayer team at your church, and then you will have the opportunity to pray for people on request. When you are more relaxed in praying for people's needs, whether face-to-face or from a prayer request list, ask the Lord to take you to the next level of confidence in Him.

3. Read Scripture about healing

Study the Word. Scripture is very clear that we should pray for people's healing and therefore we must. Be selective in what you read. There are many books out there on healing which only focus on the healing aspect and not on our relationship with God also. Read books of people who had healing ministries and learn from them. Read with discernment and with your Bible alongside you. It is better to read what Scripture says about a matter first, before you read what others say.

Some golden rules to remember

- If possible, don't minister to someone of the opposite sex without a third person being present (for example, a spouse).
- If this is not possible, explain that it is not how you prefer to pray for people. However, still trust the Lord together for healing. Don't turn someone away quickly; it has taken courage for them to ask for help. Counselling offices often have a glass window in the door, so the integrity of the counsellor/minister is protected.
- In addition to praying for someone on the spot when prompted by the Holy Spirit, also set times to meet people for prayer with a friend present. Few crises are ever so bad that they can't wait until the next day. Beware not to be drawn into midnight hour counselling, except when someone's life is at risk.
- Don't promise people that they will be healed. Instead, bring their prayer request to the Lord and make sure they understand that together you are asking God to intervene in the situation.
- It is very important to get the sick person to pray with you for their healing. Afterwards they will not remember your prayer as much as the fact that they prayed and God answered!

When the sick person is sitting in front of you

Remember, it took a lot of courage for them to come for prayer.

1. Most importantly, be compassionate. Ask the Lord to show you His compassion towards the person you will pray for and put them at ease (Luke 7:13-14).

2. Introduce yourself. After you have introduced yourself, ask where they have pain or what they would like you to pray for. It may be something visible, but if it is something unseen, you will need to wait upon the Lord for discernment – a Scripture or word of knowledge, which is how the Holy Spirit speaks to us (1 Corinthians 12:8). If you receive an impression, test it by asking the person about it.

3. Find out the facts. For example, how the condition came about? Is it through natural causes, a disease in the family, or from an accident? Was something done to them (a sin against them) or by them (they sinned and now suffer this condition)? Don't just get the person's feelings; get the facts. Is the illness related to a relationship problem, for example a lack of forgiveness?

Ask direct questions but use wisdom and ask in love. Ask if it is possible that the illness was caused supernaturally through being involved with occult games and activities. Keep asking for God's help and guidance in your heart all the while you are praying.

4. Pray. From the facts that you have gathered, and with the leading of the Holy Spirit, decide how you will pray. Always ask if you may lay your hand upon them and never do so without their consent. And even then, you must observe the rule to ONLY do it with people of the same sex. Victims of physical abuse may not be able to focus on Jesus if you have your hand on them. Never lay your hand on a person of the opposite sex unless someone else is present.

5. Prayer may include asking for the Lord's healing or just praying softly while waiting on the Lord (Acts 3:6).

6. Enquire. After you have prayed, ask the person how they feel and keep watching them. Ask if he/she senses something specific that they would like to share. This may indicate how you are to continue in prayer or if you should conclude.

7. Give thanks. If healing has begun, you can be certain it will continue after your time of prayer. Sometimes healing is instant, but whatever the situation, pray with thanksgiving to the Lord, honouring Him for what He has done.

8. Encourage. If you will not see the person again, encourage them to stop sinning (John 5:14), read their Bible, spend time with God in prayer and to get involved in a local church, if they aren't already.

9. Testify. When healing is complete, encourage them to testify of it to others, and to begin praying for others' healing also, as soon as possible. They now have a testimony to share! Remarkable things happen when young Christians and people who have been healed pray for the sick.

What if nothing happens?

It is surprising how many times we pray for the sick but never ask how they feel because of fear. If they say nothing has happened, you can suggest, "Let's continue to pray about it tomorrow, and not give up until there is breakthrough or until we hear God speaking directly to us about it." Then, make sure you do just that!

A pastor's wife was once under heavy spiritual attack physically, after a very blessed week of prayer in the community. She experienced some breakthrough after prayer, but the heaviness would return. A few people prayed for her for over a week before the situation cleared completely. Don't assume something's wrong with you if nothing happens immediately. Just persevere in prayer.