Prayer and caring for others

Prayer is an important foundation and an important tool when caring for others. Sometimes we may feel that all we can do is pray, but through prayer God can change situations. Prayer also draws and turns people towards God. Prayer directs people to the source of all hope, help, healing and strength for the situations they face. Prayer also shows people that we care about what they are going through and that we love them.

Prayer as a foundation for caring

When visiting a person or when we find ourselves in a care situation (eg. after church on a Sunday):

- Try to pray beforehand. Ask God if there is anything you feel he wants you to say to the person if an opportunity arises. Ask God if there is any scripture that he wants you to share.
- Silent prayers during the visit / time of ministry can be useful if you feel out of your depth, need God’s help or are uncertain about which direction to take conversation in. (Nehemiah 2:4-5)
- Pray for the person after they have gone. Pray that God may help them in their areas of need and for God’s blessing upon them.

Prayer as a tool when caring for others

The following are useful tips to think about when praying with others:

- The end of a visit is always a good time to offer to pray for the person.
- Don’t force someone to pray or to receive prayer if they don’t want to. Always respect someone’s free choice.
- Usually it is best to ask before laying hands on a person when you pray, especially if it a person of the opposite sex. However if you know the person well then it will not always be necessary to ask first.
- Know what you’re praying for! Ask if the person would like anything specific to be prayed for. Make sure that you listen carefully and then cover all these thing in your prayer. You can pray for things that have been talked about during discussion if the person would like you pray but specifies nothing specific. Pray about any needs or crises shared.
- Sometimes is may be appropriate to read a Bible passage before you pray, especially if there is passage which relates to any situation that has been discussed or if there is a passage which you think will raise the persons faith.
- Praying for the whole family who live in the house is a good idea as it shows the person that you are interested in the whole of their life. Include any non-Christian spouses or children in your prayers if possible.
- Prayer can be praise (for something God has done) or petition (asking God for something). Prayer can reflect the joy (eg. birth of a new baby) or the sadness (eg. death of a parent) of a situation.
• Prayer can be asking that God will guide the person about the best thing to do in a situation.
• Remember each person that you pray for is unique. Just because God solved someone’s similar problem in one way that it doesn’t mean he is going to solve this person’s problems in the same way. God treats us as individuals and we need to remember that in prayer eg. God gave X a new job within a week after he lost his, doesn’t mean that God is going to give Y a new job within a week after she loses hers. Therefore, praying something like the following is not helpful: “Lord I know that you are going to going to give Y a new job this week because that’s what you did for X. So Lord open the door to this job that you have for her.”
• Listen to God and be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit as you pray. God may give you a picture, word, vision, Bible passage for the persons encouragement or building up.
• It may be helpful to pray along the lines of Philippians 1:6 – “… he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”
• Don’t pray for too long! Always be sensitive to the person some people are happy with long prayers and others may only want you to say few sentences. Especially don’t pray for too long if the person is sick as they may not be able to cope with a long prayer.
• Matthew 6:7-8 – Don’t be deceived into thinking that you can manipulate God to act through long prayers, long words or saying the right combination of words. God knows what the person needs before we even begin to pray. Simple prayers are sufficient. Also don’t pray prayers to impress the person you are praying for or to make yourself look more spiritual (Matthew 6:5).
• Be aware of the type of language that you are using when you pray, especially if English is not the person’s first language. Use words that the person can understand and don’t be afraid of praying using simple ‘childlike’ words if necessary.
• Don’t feel that you are responsible for your prayers being answered. God is sovereign and chooses to answer our prayers according to his will. We are only called to have faith and trust in him as we pray.
• When praying for someone it can be useful to keep your eyes open, especially if you feel that God has given you a picture, word of knowledge, passage etc. with them. You can then see how the person is acting / reacting (eg. tears, smiling, nodding head in agreement with what you are pray etc.) This can further help you as you pray. Also it may be appropriate to ask the person afterwards about things you noticed as you were praying eg. “I noticed you nod as I shared what I felt God was saying. What was going through your mind then? What did it mean to you?”
• Don’t be afraid to pray for healing. Even if you think the person may die, don’t be afraid to pray for healing as this will build faith and hope in the sick person as the look to God. Also God may do a miracle!
• Don’t always assume that the best thing is to pray for God to take away someone’s pain or struggle. Sometimes God needs us to go through a time of pain and struggle so that we may greater reflect the likeness of Christ. Sometimes it is more appropriate to prayer that God will strengthen the person and give them the support they need to get through.
• It may be appropriate to suggest that the person prays as well as you, however be sensitive to those who struggle to pray out loud.

• Remember you don’t always have to pray what they ask you to pray if you know what they are asking is wrong. Be honest if you don’t feel comfortable praying for something OR turn it around to something you can pray for eg. If someone asks that you pray that “this man leaves his wife so he can be with me” it would be better to say “I can’t pray for that but what I will pray that God’s will will be done in this situation.”

• Sometimes we may hear about someone who is in need and we don’t have the free time to visit, we can always phone to find out how they are. At the end of the call we can offer to pray for them there and then over the phone. We don’t have to be physically with the person to pray for them!