

When we think about praying with people and interceding for them, we often think that people might need healing of some sort, and that is why they want us to pray for them. It can be quite a big leap to reading about Jesus praying for people in the bible and healing them, to us having a go ourselves.

We might feel unworthy, incompetent and might be concerned that we find ourselves saying the wrong thing. But that's ok, because we then very often find ourselves relying on God to do the job, rather than on ourselves, which makes all the difference, don't you think? Because healing has everything to do with God and nothing to do with us.



I first got involved in the Healing Ministry – that just means praying for people who need or ask for it – over 30 years ago. It wasn't anything that I thought I might be good at, in any way, shape or form. But I was asked to be involved in a prayer group that prayed for Healing Services, which took place on a Sunday evening once a month. And getting involved with something is the best way of learning about it.



I found out a lot about healing from the bible, from the teaching that was given, from listening to others pray for healing, and eventually being brave enough to open my mouth and utter a few haltering words.

Once, there were two of us praying for a lady with a frozen shoulder. She was due to have an operation the following week. We prayed for her and when we looked again she was on the floor! When she eventually got up she showed us that she could swing her arm in any direction and the pain was gone. God was at work, but I don't know who was more surprised – her or us!

Of course, not all people that are prayed for always recover in the way we would like. God is the only one who knows all the circumstances, and he might think that the long term greater wellbeing of a person is better served in some other way than by responding to our request with an immediate and definite yes. But I am convinced that he does always hear our prayers and acts on them. God's response might result in an amazing cure, which none of the doctors thought possible. These things do happen sometimes. At other times, help might come through being given the strength to live through the bad times or the ability to come to terms with the inevitable. God has many responses to prayer; he always hears and gives an answer. As humans, we don't always see what is best suited to our longer term betterment. But we can trust that God does.

When someone knows that they are being prayed for, it makes a difference to them. The fact that someone is willing to spend time and effort in praying for you can give you a sense of affirmation, comfort and even love on the part of the person who is praying. That contributes to a sense of wellbeing and is helpful to the healing process.



When I was in hospital, waiting for a heart procedure, the knowledge that I was being prayed for gave me a sense of peace and comfort. In hospital I was asked to take part in a trial where people who were due to undergo significant operations were asked about their thoughts, fears, worries about the outcome and state of mind. I was told that I was one of the calmest and most positive patients they had seen in quite a while! The sense of being held by God and the fact that so many people were holding me in prayer had a major impact on my attitude, and I was able to tell this to the people undertaking the survey. And I hope that this is so also for the many, many people I know who have been prayed for down the years.

Praying for someone else can be planned, but it is not always like that. Sometimes it can be more immediate and sometimes there is no time to plan your words. I love the way that Jesus usually used simple language or even no words at all.

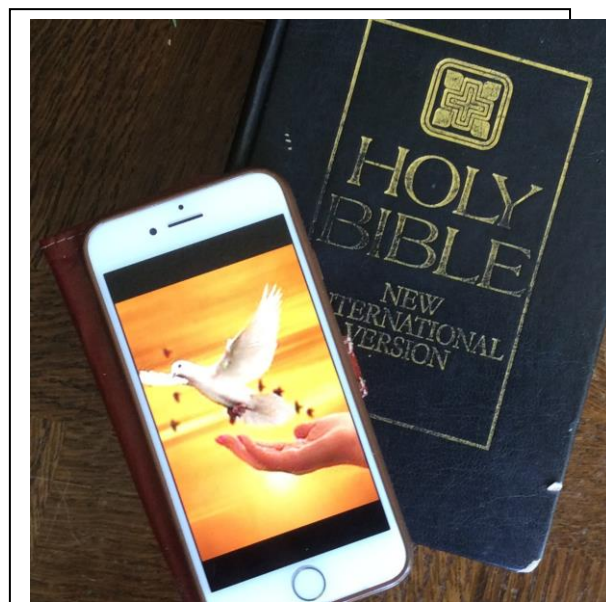


When the woman who had suffered with bleeding for many years touched the robe of Jesus, he realised what had happened and that her faith had made her well. 'Go in peace and be freed from your suffering' he told her.

We don't need lots and lots of words when we pray for people. Just faith that Jesus is able to heal.

It might not be just for healing that people need prayer. It could be anything really. Most of us have problems at some time in our lives – family, finance, relationships, decisions to be made, work associated problems and so on. Jesus himself said 'In this world you will have trouble.' But he also said 'do not worry, I have overcome the world.' But we do tend to worry, don't we? Coming alongside someone in a difficult situation, praying with them - in person or not – showing that you care is a huge thing. You don't feel alone or isolated, and someone can pray for you if you don't have the words yourself.

This is why we have a Prayer Chain in church. Prayer requests are telephoned around (or more likely emailed nowadays) to people who will pray consistently and confidentially. Those who are praying don't always know the results of their prayers, but we can be assured that God does.



People can sometimes think that they can't pray properly – they don't have the right words! But as we have seen, it's more the intent rather than the exact words that are important. And if we can't find any words at all, then we can just hold the person silently before God. The Holy Spirit can also help us.



Romans 8:26-27 says
In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

This series is entitled 'Finding Joy in Prayer.'

Prayer is not a duty, but can be an offering. It is an offering to God because among other reasons, he just loves to hear from us and communicate with us. It is also an offering to those we pray for, as we care for them in praying for them. The joy comes from doing something for others and speaking to and listening to God. And maybe we can feel a little bit of God's joy as we come near to him, for the joy of the Lord is our strength.

This verse from Nehemiah 8:10 has been a favourite of mine for a long time!

