



# THE PRAYER CLOSET

Transforming Lives Through Intercessory  
Prayer And Fasting

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## PRAYING FOR THE DISABLED

(The author of this article is Rev. Steve Mayes. He is the pastor of Pelahatchie Baptist Church in Pelahatchie, MS. He and his wife, Ann, experience the ups and downs of living with disability. Their son, Ben, has a brain tumor and is blind. This article flows out of their experience and their desire to minister to the disabled.)

### A Worthwhile Ministry

There is a simple philosophical test which might help determine whether a person is an optimist or a pessimist. A glass filled with water to half its capacity is set before the person. One who is an optimist would say that the glass is half full. One who is a pessimist would say that the glass is half empty. Both persons see the same glass with the same amount of water. The difference between the two individuals is demonstrated in their attitude or outlook.

A family new to a particular community visits a couple of churches to worship. One of the members of the family has an obvious disability. One church makes the family feel loved and wanted from the moment they arrive in the parking lot. The pastor and members from the church visit with this family in the following week to welcome them into the community and encourage them to become a part of the church. The other church sends a card to thank the family for coming to worship. There is no personal contact from the church staff or any of the members.

What is the difference between these two churches? It may be that the difference is in the attitude or outlook of the churches. The first church saw a family in which an individual member of the family had a disability. They saw this family as individuals with worth and took advantage of the opportunity to minister to them. The second church saw a family with a disabled member also. But they focused on the disability instead and saw an obstacle to ministry.

One of the reasons why we do not always minister to an obvious need is a deep sense of inadequacy. We are often at a loss for words to express our concern for the hurting. We wonder whether we have anything to offer individuals or families that would be meaningful and truly helpful. So rather than taking the initiative to minister to an individual or family, we quietly turn aside or avoid contact with them. We would rather neglect those persons than attempt to minister to them and risk embarrassing them or ourselves.

### An Opportunity Missed

When we turn aside from our duty to minister, it is most often the case that a double blessing is lost. The person who would receive ministry does not receive it and we lose the reward of showing mercy. Jesus said, "Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward," (**Matthew 10:42**). While

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## Faith in Motion

at a feast, Jesus instructed His host to show kindness, not to those who had the means to respond in kind, but to those who lacked that ability. "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:13,14).

There is a growing number of Americans who suffer from some form of disability. The 1990 census indicated that some 18 percent of the United States population (50 million) has a disability. These individuals are present in every segment of the population (young and old, poor and wealthy, black and white) and in every community of our nation. Each of these individuals represents an opportunity for churches to minister, whether in evangelism or in ministries of mercy. If we would only look at our congregations on Sunday morning, we would see by the absence of persons with disabilities that this is an area in which our churches have much room for improvement in outreach and ministry.

Most churches are willing to make the obvious basic physical adjustments to accommodate individuals with disabilities. Some common examples of this are wheel-chair ramps, reserved handicapped parking, wheelchair accessible restroom facilities, and audio equipment for the hearing impaired. These type accommodations normally require a one-time expenditure with slight maintenance thereafter. While these things are commendable, they require disabled individuals to be physically present in order to profit from them.

There are other ministry actions which must be done in order to reach beyond the sanctuary walls and meet persons at their point of need. These actions take on more of a personal nature as the pastoral staff and individual church members engage in ministries of mercy and kindness. There is no need to give in to our perceived inadequacies for ministry and miss the opportunity to reach out in love to individuals with disabilities. In general, no extraordinary skills are required to minister to the needs of these families. We might even be surprised how easy it is to minister to these basic needs common to all families.

What steps must be taken to minister to the disabled? This will require stepping out of your comfort zone and putting your faith in action. The following are some simple but practical steps to reach out to the disabled and their families:

*First, there must be a change in attitude.* A prerequisite to ministry is a change in the way a church perceives persons with disabilities. The tendency in our culture is to judge persons by their appearance or what they might add to our organization. When judged by such an arbitrary standard, persons with disabilities might appear to be less than whole. Rather than adding to the organization, they are perceived to be a drain upon the organization's resources. This viewpoint is directly contrary to the biblical principle of grace. The church consists of individuals who are imperfect and are dependent upon God's grace for wholeness and salvation.

Instead, the church needs to view persons with disabilities as individuals who, like themselves, are made in God's image and are in need of His grace. No matter what disabilities they may have, they are persons of worth and should be treated with respect and dignity. "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the LORD?" (Exodus 4:11). A disability should never exempt one from being seen as an individual with value in the eyes of God's people. As believers we should look beyond the disability to see an individual whose inclusion in the people of God adds value to the body of Christ.

*Second, you must identify the needs.* Many Americans were shocked in December 1999 when a wealthy couple from Pennsylvania abandoned their 10-year-old son who suffered from cerebral palsy. The couple left the boy at a Delaware hospital with a note saying they could no longer care for the boy. A close relative described the couple as loving parents. Apparently the strain of providing continuous care for their son became more than the parents could handle. Some news reports indicated that neighbors had no idea things were so difficult and would have helped if they had known the needs of the family.

A question that must be asked is this: Should the church only respond to a cry for help? Of course the church should respond when help is needed, but there is no reason to wait for a plea. Where there is a disability, there is a need. Families who care for individuals with disabilities are accustomed to doing so on a daily basis. The extent of care given is dependent on the severity of the disability, but the caregiving is a continuous process which can be overly burdensome at times. Since the family is not likely to ask for help, the church should try to meet the family at the point of need.

The first and maybe most important step in doing this is to build a relationship with the family. The best way to know the needs of a family is to get to know the family. By visiting in the home and building a relationship with them, the minister, deacon, or church member will learn first hand information about the family and the needs of the family related to the disability. By showing compassion for and interest in the family, the trust that is needed for effective ministry will also be earned.

*Finally, you must minister to the needs of the family.* Sometimes it seems easier to give money than to give time and energy. While disabilities can be a drain upon a family's financial resources, there are some basic needs to be met where ministry might be even more meaningful. As mentioned earlier, these do not require extraordinary skills or talents. Many are simple gestures which cost little or nothing, but which will mean so much to those who receive them.

Some examples of these ministry acts include:

- ◆ **Preparing a meal** – With so much attention given to providing for a family member with a disability, having a meal provided will free precious time for rest or other activities. Be sensitive to any special dietary restrictions that family members may have.
- ◆ **Household chores** – Many things may be left undone because of time restraints. A couple of hours spent cleaning house, raking leaves, cutting grass, making minor household repairs, or washing a car would bring some welcome relief.

- ◆ **Give some relief** – One who cares for a person with disabilities is often unable to leave that person unattended. If a child is concerned, it may be possible to baby-sit for at least a couple of hours on a regular basis. An adult with disabilities might also need someone to assist them for a short time and relieve the caregiver. This would give family members some time to shop, go to the beauty shop, perform some needed task, or simply take a nap.
- ◆ **Provide a Sunday School class** – This is especially helpful where children with disabilities are concerned. Great peace of mind is afforded to parents when they are able to attend Sunday School and know that their child is settled in a class. If the child is unable to physically attend, home classes might be provided.
- ◆ **Sermon and Sunday School class tape ministry**– Disabilities often limit the ability of families to attend worship services regularly. A tape ministry is very simple, but has some profound benefits. One or more persons are regularly visiting the homes of persons with disabilities. This gives the recipient of the ministry the opportunity to see someone from the church on a consistent basis. It also gives the church a window through which to identify other ministry needs of that family. But most importantly, it expands the preaching and teaching ministry of the church into homes that might otherwise not have an opportunity to hear the Gospel.

This list is by no means exhaustive in scope. But it does highlight some of the areas where simple acts of ministry can be performed. By addressing the physical needs of these families, many opportunities for evangelism and other spiritual ministries will be created. Acts of ministry will give an occasion to pray for and with these persons and families. If asked why we are so willing to give our time, energy, and resources, the door will be opened to explain the gift of salvation, which we have received from God through the death, and resurrection of Christ. Our compassion for individuals will serve as a

reflection of the compassion and grace that God has given to us.

## Prayer And The Disabled

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Ministry involves both prayer and tangible responses to the needs and hurts of people. Without prayer, any efforts to respond to peoples' needs and hurts are going to be vain and ineffective. Prayer releases the power to help and heal in our efforts to respond to peoples' needs. And it is useless to pray for others if you are not willing to be part of the answer. Prayer without action is presumption on God.

This is true in praying for the disabled and those who care for them. There has to be a combination of both tangible, practical responses and prayer. It is not an either/or situation. Both must be included. Both are essential for a positive and righteous impact in this situation. The previous article emphasized the need for taking action and gave some tangible, practical steps in ministering to the disabled and their caregivers. Now I want you to consider how to pray for these individuals, their caregivers, and their situation. These prayer pointers can apply to the person and his/her caregiver(s).

The following is a prayer guide that you can use to pray in this situation. You can use this guide or develop your own from it. The crucial issue is to pray and respond with acts of service and mercy. As always, balance these prayer pointers with particular requests concerning their situation.

- ◆ *Pray that God would fill their lives with hope (Romans 15:13).* Plead with God to grant hope in abundance in their lives. Not only do they have to deal with the daily stress and pressure of life, they also face the ups and downs of living with a disability. Ask God to grant them hope that will sustain them in all their circumstances.
- ◆ *Plead that they would experience the joy of the Lord (Nehemiah 8:10).* The joy of the Lord is not dependent on circumstances. It is

dependent on the character of God and His faithfulness. Since He is an unchanging God, one can experience joy in all circumstances. Living with disability means facing some harsh realities and stressful circumstances. Plead that this person and the caregivers would know and experience this joy daily.

- ◆ *Ask God to grant strength to their bodies (Genesis 2:7).* God is the Creator of the human body. He knows how to strengthen and bless the body. Pray that God will bless both the person and the caregiver with physical strength. Plead that He would sustain them by His might. Pray especially that God would boost and strengthen the immune system of the disabled person.
- ◆ *Pray that he/she might know that he/she is made in the image of God and is valuable and precious (Psalm 139).* Ask that God would grant this person certainty and conviction that he or she is a person made in God's image and is valuable and precious. Pray that God would deliver this person from ever thinking that he/she is less than a person or is not whole.
- ◆ *Plead that he/she will know that God can and will use him/her in His kingdom (Luke 19:11-26; 1 Corinthians 12:18-22).* Ask God to reveal to this person that He can and will use him/her. Paul declares that the body needs each part to function. He emphasizes that no part of the body is more important than any other part. This person is an essential part of the body and the body needs him/her. Plead that he/she will know this and will act in faith.
- ◆ *Pray that their needs will be met (Philippians 4:19).* Call on God to meet all of their needs—physically, spiritually, emotionally, and financially. Ask Him to reveal His sufficiency by granting everything that is needed for them.
- ◆ *Ask God to grant the special sense of His presence and power on the difficult days (Isaiah 43:1-2).* Living with disability has its ups and downs. Yet, there are some days that

are worse than others are. Days when depression, frustration, fear, anger, and despair seem to cloud the lives of both the person and the caregiver. For those times, plead that God will grant them the special sense of His presence and power in their lives. Pray that these times will be opportunities for God to reveal Himself and His love to them.

- ◆ *Pray that God would raise up believers who will help and encourage them (Proverbs 17:17).* Ask God to grant believers who will be faithful to minister to and help them. Pray that God will create in these believers a spirit of consistency. Too many times people will help as long as it does not cut into their comfort zone or convenience level. The disabled person and his/her caregiver(s) need loyal friend who will be faithful over the long haul. Plead with God to raise up believers who will minister and help on a consistent basis. Ask Him to send believers in their lives who desire to minister consistently and not ease their consciences with one-time actions.
- ◆ *Pray that they will grow in their ability to trust God (Psalm 121).* Through all the ups and downs, pray that their faith will be purified and strengthened. Ask God to help them to stay focused on Him in all the circumstances of their lives. A good way to plead for this is by praying **Psalm 121** for the disabled person and his/her caregiver(s).
- ◆ *Ask that they will grow and mature in their walk with God (1 Peter 2:1-2).* Pray that they will grow in their understanding of God and His Word and that they will apply His Word to their lives.
- ◆ *Plead that God would protect them from despair (Psalm 115:11).* Living with a disability creates some discouraging times both for the person and the caregiver. This discouragement can easily lead to despair. When you couple the stress and the discouragement of disability, it makes a person ripe for despair. Plead that God would emotionally strengthen them and provide

protection from sinking under the weight of the stress and discouragement.

- ◆ *Pray that God would grant them the grace to cope (2 Corinthians 12:8-9).* God's grace can sustain and encourage people in all circumstances. Plead that God would grant them abiding and abundant grace to deal with this situation. Ask that His grace would help them to accept the situation and to grant them the determination to work through this on a daily basis.
- ◆ *Ask God to give them wisdom concerning medical decisions (Proverbs 2:6).* In this situation, many decisions have to be made concerning care and medical treatment. Sometimes these decisions can be complex and will have far-reaching implications for the disabled person and his/her caregivers. Pray that God would grant the person or the caregivers the wisdom that is needed to make wise and good decisions concerning these issues.
- ◆ *Pray that God will bring good doctors, nurses, and caregivers into their lives (James 1:17).* Ask that God would bring those medical professionals into their lives that will understand and will provide good and effective care for them.
- ◆ *Plead that God would bless them with good rest and sleep (Psalm 121:3-4).* Ask God to remove anything that might hinder them from resting and sleeping. Pray that God would grant them the opportunity to sleep and to rest well.

## When You Don't Know What To Say Or Do

People shy away from ministering often times because they feel inadequate. They are not sure what to say or to do. This is often the case with those who are disabled or are chronically ill. It also happens in times of tragedy and great suffering.