WHEN PRAYER FOR ONE ANOTHER DOESN’T HAPPEN by David Diestelkamp

We know the Scriptures that say that we are to “pray continually” (1 Thess. 5:17 NIV). We believe in the power of prayer, that “…the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (Jas. 5:16 NIV). We find consolation in knowing that “…the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers…” (1 Pet. 3:12). So why don’t we pray more? Particularly, why don’t we pray more for one another?

To steal a line from Captain Renault in the movie Casablanca, we know to “round up the usual suspects” when we look for reasons we don’t pray more: we’re busy, tired, distracted, overwhelmed, sick, worried, anxious, sinful… We’ve heard lessons on these, and we know that prayer is actually the unused antidote for all of these and more (Phil. 4:6). The above reasons also affect our praying for one another, but it gets more complicated. Prayer for one another is impacted by knowing and caring about one another’s lives and needs.

**Knowing One Another**

First century fellowship among Christians was deep and intimate. They “…were of one heart and of one soul… they had all things in common” (Ac. 4:32, also Ac. 2:44). What happened to one body part was shared by the whole. “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:26). Fellowship is to take us into the struggles and triumphs of daily living. Knowing what to pray for requires knowing one another.

**Knowing requires telling.**

“Confess your trespasses to one another and pray for one another…” (Jas. 5:16). How many of us could benefit from the prayers of others, but we don’t tell anyone? How many of us need the prayers of healing mentioned in James 5:13-16, but we don’t call the elders? The Psalmist wrote: “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long” (Psa. 32:3 ESV). Why do we do this? We are suffering physically, emotionally, or spiritually, but we don’t tell anyone. What could possibly be overpowering our faith in the power of prayer? Consider these:

**Pride**

We don’t want people to think less of us, to think we are weak or needy or complaining, so we don’t say anything. We know prayer helps, but our pride keeps other people from knowing and therefore praying for us. Pride can kill prayer.

**Fear**

We fear people will talk behind our backs. We fear others will think it is too small or too big of a thing to pray about. We sometimes wait until there is more clarity or certainty to ask for prayers when it is the murky, uncertain times for which prayer is most designed. Fear can kill prayer.

**Feelings and Personality**

Sometimes we just don’t feel like talking about a problem. It may be tied up in personality or culture, but we may just not be the kind of people who talk about our problems. True faith in prayer pushes us to act outside of who we are and what we feel. Feelings and personality can kill prayer.

**Helping Ourselves**

We are sometimes silenced by the idea that we need to help ourselves as much as possible before we ask others to pray about it. Brothers and sisters may be shocked to learn of our desperate situations, situations that might have been avoided had we gotten others and prayer involved. Prayer should be a first resort, not a last resort. Although we do participate in some solutions, strong self-sufficiency and self-reliance concepts can kill prayer.

The fact is, prayer for one another often doesn’t happen because we simply do not know about one another’s needs—and we don’t know the needs of one another because we allow carnal thinking and faithlessness to keep us from asking for prayers.

**Not Approachable**

Individuals and congregations can certainly do a lot to be more open and approachable. This is part of the love that Jesus says marks us as His disciples (Jn. 13:35). We must not ask people to tell us their needs, then react poorly or not at all (Jas. 2:16) when they do and expect them to continue to do it. However, people of true faith will not be deterred by unapproachable people. They will seek out and find caring, loving, praying people and ask for prayers.

So maybe our struggles with prayer aren’t just the usual of being busy, tired, and distracted. Maybe pride, fear, feelings, personality, or self-sufficiency have hijacked our willingness to be open and even vulnerable with one another. And that is robbing us of the prayers of the righteous that we know are “powerful and effective” (Jas. 5:16 NIV).

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