

# **Chapter 13**

## **Ineffective Prayer Meetings**

*Are We Groaning in Prayer or Moaning in Despair?*

Too many Christians are quick to complain about their afflictions rather than taking it to God. Too often, a prayer meeting or a prayer chain is a means of complaining and gaining sympathy rather than crying out to God. When you are quick to cry out to others rather than taking your burden to the Lord, you miss the blessing He has in store for you.

My friend, if you are right with God, He hears you! *“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much.”* That means you. Prayers of righteous people are effective. God is more concerned about your intimate relationship with Him than He is about your aching body.

Make no mistake, God is concerned about what ails you. But that is not His first and primary concern. He wants you to be one who walks and talks with Him in intimate daily fellowship. There are no shortcuts to being a man or woman of God.

### **Are You Known At the Throne?**

Years ago, a statement in Acts 19:15 concerning Jewish exorcists who tried to cast out demons using Jesus’ name struck me. The demons, who usually lie, told the truth in this instance. They said, “Jesus we know and Paul we know, but WHO ARE YOU?!” That statement boomeranged on me. God asked me, “ARE YOU KNOWN AT THE THRONE?”

Are you known at the throne, or are you a stranger to the throne of grace? Are you daily spending time alone with God in worship, fellowship, and petition? Or are you a Christian who only prays when it is convenient, or when you have a desperate need?

### **Roll Your Burden on the Lord**

I am not against requesting others to pray for your needs. That’s a good thing. I think prayer meetings, shared prayer requests, prayer chains and prayer groups are good and helpful. I have created them, promoted and encouraged the use of them in my churches. But prayer meetings and prayer chains are not a substitute for having a deep personal prayer life.

There is a danger in rolling your burdens on other people rather than on the Lord. Trusting that other people’s prayers are better than your own is not faith. Trusting a prayer chain to bail you out when your faith is weak is not wise. The word of God

says, "Whatever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:23) We are not to live by the faith of others. We are to live by faith personally.

I am not saying we shouldn't ask for the prayers of others. What I am saying is before you enlist an army of prayer warriors on your behalf, you should be your own prayer warrior and taking your burdens to the Lord and leave them there.

Peter said, *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Casting all your care on HIM, for HE cares for you."* (1 Peter 5:6-7) It does not say, *"Cast your care on your brothers and sisters to care for you."*

James 5 encourages us to do that the right way, after you have called on the Lord yourself and you still need His touch, then enlist the help of others, not before! When sickness persists despite prevailing prayer, then call for the elders to pray for you, with you, and over you.

### **The Crutch of Prayer Warriors**

Often we think if we get a great number of people praying for us, God will hear. This is a strange doctrine and practice that has invaded the church concerning prayer. We think if we get 10 people praying, or better yet, a 100 or a 1,000 people praying, we'll get better results. Where do you find that in the Bible? Where in Scripture does it tell you to enlist an army of praying people to pray for your sicknesses? It doesn't.

Jesus said, *"I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."* – Matthew 18:18-19

**Apparently, Jesus valued a prayer circle of three friends more than an army of thousands.**

Faith is the victory, not numbers of people praying. Pray first. Pray hard. Pray long. Pray with passion. Pray with your Bible open. Pray and fast. Wait on the Lord. When you have done all to pray and roll your burden on the Lord, then enlist others to pray with you, for you, and over you. When all else fails, call on the elders to pray with you, for you, and over you. That's God's pattern!

## **Worthless Prayer Meetings**

Paul Washer, founder of Heart Cry Missionary Society, and pastor/teacher, upset many with his message on "*Worthless Prayer Meetings*." I agree with Paul Washer. Many prayer meetings are worthless prayer meetings because prayer is not the central activity. Prayer requesting is the center of our prayer meetings. It often becomes a community gossip session, moaning, groaning, pitying, commiserating, and detailing about everyone's troubles and ailments. This is not prayer!

Prayer is not requesting. Prayer is praying! Pastor Washer said that in most prayer meetings, they spend 20-25 minutes gathering prayer requests (95% of which are for people's health). I had led small church congregations that took verbal prayer request before the pastoral morning prayer. It often would take 10-20 minutes to gather the various requests and 5 minutes (if that much) to pray over them. I believe sincere prayer warriors will take those requests to the Lord throughout the week. But wouldn't it be far better to talk less about the need and pray more about that need?

## **A New Kind of Prayer Meeting**

In some of our prayer meetings, we decided not to list prayer requests. Instead, we would take them one at a time. When a need was brought before the group, we stopped and asked one person to lead us in prayer for that request, while others agreed in prayer. Often it resulted in many catching a burden for that person and piggy-backing on that prayer, lifting up cries and passionate prayers of intercession.

When it was a personal request of someone present, we would ask for a few people to gather around that person, laying hands on him/her, and praying over him/her, then and there. What a transformation that brought to prayer meetings! There were tears of joy during every service. It was a time to pray one for another, not to talk about one another.

In some of our prayer gatherings, we encouraged people to call the sick person on their cell phones to pray with them directly. We've done the same for missionaries via Facetime with Wi-Fi connections. We could all join in vocally with the missionary, together lifting him up to the Lord. It was so encouraging to the sick person, or missionary, to know they were loved and cared for in that way. My point is this: Let's stop talking about prayer and do it!

## **Don't Promise to Pray, PRAY!**

In my ministry, I customarily greeted people at the door after the service. I would often have people whisper a personal prayer request to me and I would say, "Yes, I'll pray for that." One Sunday morning, the Lord stopped me in my tracks and whispered to me, "No, you won't. You rarely remember those requests." The conviction was so deep that it led me to preach a message on praying for one another. In that sermon, I promised never to say, "I'll pray for you," without praying for you then and there. I explained that meant whether at the door of the church, on the phone, or in the supermarket, I would stop right there and say, "Let me pray for you right now!" If we were together I promised to lay hands on them and pray. I would first ask if I could lay a hand on their shoulder and pray. Then with a left hand on their shoulder I would lift my right hand to the Lord in audible prayer for them. A funny thing happened. People stopped requesting my prayers because they were uncomfortable with the fact that I would pray for them immediately.

## **Praying on the Sidewalk**

The first occasion for this was the week after that message. I met one of our dear saints on a downtown sidewalk and in our conversation she asked me to pray for a certain need she had. I smiled and said, "Linda, remember my message on Sunday? I said I wouldn't promise to pray for you without praying at that very moment." She affirmed she remembered and that I could pray right there on the sidewalk, so I did. I laid a hand on her shoulder and lifted my hand to heaven and prayed out loud for her. The next week she confessed to me she walked away so embarrassed she wanted to hide. As she thought on this, the Lord whispered to her heart, "Are you ashamed of me and my word? Are you ashamed of praying in public?" Right then, she said it changed her mind about praying like that. Then she said, "Pastor, now I've started doing that with people in the supermarket."

## **Praying in Walmart**

The second happened a year later. I met one of our young leaders in Walmart and in our conversation, he said he was praying about a mission trip. He asked me to pray for him to have the Lord's leading. I reminded him of my commitment to never to promise to pray without praying then and there. I asked him if I could pray for him right there in the store. He smiled sheepishly and said, "Go for it, pastor!" There in the houseware department of Walmart, I laid my hand on his 6 foot shoulder and lifted my hand to the Lord and prayed. Later, he told me it made him so proud to have a pastor bold enough to pray over him in public. That young leader heard

the call of God, went on a short-term mission project, then he, his wife, and whole family went to Guatemala as missionary teachers where they have been for seven years.

### **Praying Door to Door**

Another situation occurred in my first church when I was going door to door, inviting people to church and asking them if there was anything I could pray about for them. I arrived at one humble home and a little seven-year-old boy with Macrocephaly, an enlarged head, answered the door. He was blind. I told him who I was, and that I wanted to invite him to Sunday School and church. At that moment, his mother arrived at the door. She immediately launched into a tirade against God and the church and how could a good God allow her son to have this disease?

When she ran out of things to say, she was weeping. I shared with her some incidents of other children having terrible disease, and I offered to pray with her and her son right then and there. I laid hands on her son and prayed fervently for his healing and the healing of her heart. Her son did not experience healing, but she found comfort in knowing that someone cared enough to come into her home and pray for him. While we pastored that church, Junior and his mother attended Vacation Bible School and church. God healed a mother's heart.

### **Praying for an Injured Boss**

Yet another event took place some years earlier with a member of my congregation. He was working a night shift as a custodian in a large company. That evening, he encountered the president of the firm in his office. In the conversation that ensued, it became obvious the man was in severe pain because of a back injury. The subject immediately turned to Jesus Christ and his power to hear and answer prayer. This humble custodian wasn't sure if he should offer to pray for this important man, but the Lord seemed to compel him to do so. He asked if he could put his hand on the man as he prayed. This CEO consented and Perry prayed. When he finished, the man was weeping and said, "Perry, no one has ever prayed for me like that before." In other words, no one ever bothered to put his hand on him and pray over him. Later, this executive said his back was better.

### **Pray With, For, and Over Them**

*"PRAY, for one another, that you may be healed."*

Oh, what revivals we miss because we are ashamed to pray publicly. Instead of just praying **FOR** someone, be sure to pray **WITH** them and **OVER** them. It will bless you and bless them. It is also amazing how many of those requests are granted. God answers prayer, not requests for prayer. ***“PRAY ONE FOR ANOTHER THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED.”***

# Think About It

## Chapter 13:

### Ineffective Prayer Meetings

Do you love prayer meetings?

Do you go to prayer meeting? Why not?

What don't you like about corporate prayer meetings?

If you were in charge of prayer meeting what would you change?