

What to Pray When You Don't Know What to Pray

“Would you pray for me? I don’t want to go into detail, but just pray for me.”

I hear this request—a lot. It often comes up at a prayer meeting at church, sometimes with nothing more than a raised hand and the single word: “unspoken.”

What do you pray for someone when you don’t know what to pray?

We are called to pray for each other. We are the body of Christ, and as a single body, we have a responsibility to take care of each other—and that includes prayer.



The Model Prayer includes this petition: “Give us today our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). Note that this request is praying for “us.” In fact, the whole prayer is a corporate prayer. Yes, we can pray it for ourselves, but we should also pray it for others.

When someone comes to you with an ambiguous request for prayer, you can still pray for the person. Without knowing the specifics of their situation, here are six things you can pray taken from the Model Prayer:

1. **Hallowed be your name.** *Lord, work in his life for Your honor and glory. He needs Your help, so do it in a way that points to You.*
2. **Your kingdom come.** *Father, lead her to let You reign as Lord and King in her life. Help her to surrender all to You and lean fully on You.*
3. **Your will be done.** *Lord, give him the heart and the courage to do what You want him to do. Show him your plans and desires, and help him carry out Your will.*
4. **Give us today our daily bread.** *Lord, give her the physical things she needs to live and function*

today. Give her health. Give her the money or things she needs to take care of herself and those you’ve entrusted to her.

5. **Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.** *Father, show Him where he has sinned against You. Convict him and lead him to confess and run back into Your gracious arms. And if his sin is unforgiveness, give him the grace to let go and truly forgive the one who hurt him.*
6. **Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.** *Lord, help her stand strong in a world that seeks to pull her away from You. Surround her, remind her when temptation is approaching, and by Your Holy Spirit, help her stand in the face of spiritual battle.*

There is no greater honor we can do for our friends than to go on their behalf before the throne of the Lord of the universe.

In many ways, prayer remains a mystery to me. In preparation for my doctorate project, I read scores and scores of books on the theology and practice of prayer, and yet this question remains unanswered: Why would the all-powerful, sovereign God of the universe choose to work through the prayers of someone like me? Why won’t He just do what He deems best without my involvement?”

I may not know the answer, but I know the result: God *does* work through our prayers. And that singular truth convicts me that I don’t pray like I should for the daily needs—physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual needs—of others as I should.

- “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” (Eph. 6:18).
- “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (Jas. 5:16).

What a responsibility—but what a privilege!