

Prayer and Privacy

In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words.

Romans 8:26

What if they don't want public prayer?

This is the most difficult subject for many Christians. To want to pray for someone and not be free to do so is difficult.

If we are to value these people we should clearly not pray for them publicly. There is nothing to stop us from lifting them up in prayer in our hearts during the time the congregation is praying. Even more we should take the challenge to pray for them in our own prayers that they may know the touch of God in their lives.

At times it may be possible to pray for them as "my friend" without mentioning names. No matter who they are if you feel you must mention their situation in the prayers of the congregation it would be best to still use "my friend" as the means of describing them; as many members of our families and our neighbours are known by other congregation members making it easy to work out who is being prayed for even if no more information is given.

This brochure is intended to free you in your prayers for others. It is neither final or definitive but one guide to help. It is only meant to begin a process of growth in prayer for others, not end it.



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Praying for others in public

Permission for prayer

When we pray we are seeking the best for all those we pray for and so it can be troubling if we are not sure if someone has asked for prayer. There are two things that will help to alleviate this fear. The first and often unstated part of this is that as a congregation becomes comfortable with the expectation that anyone who is prayed for has already been asked then the congregation will be able to pray with increased confidence and a common heart.

Secondly, when we are praying it may be helpful to say something like "John asked us to pray for him" Then those participating in the prayer will have the confidence that this person not only knows they are being prayed for but desires the prayers of the congregation.

This also challenges us to declare our own faith as we offer the opportunity of prayer to another. When we have the courage to say "Can our church pray for you?" we acknowledge God's love for that person.

When we pray the most important focus is on God and His desire for all people.

Next we should give attention to the person or people we are praying for.

Our goal should be what is best for them. Accordingly we should treat them in the most respectful and loving way we possibly can.

We should treat them with the same respect as if they were Jesus.

So when we pray for others the limitations of the privacy act should not be a difficulty.

If we know the person is happy for the congregation or group to pray for them then there is absolutely no difficulty for us.

What if I don't know?

Often we will not know if someone desires the congregation's prayer. When this situation arises one helpful way of responding might be to not refer to them by anything other than "my friend" or "my auntie" or "my neighbour". In this way their privacy is not breached as they are not identified clearly. It also leaves us free to approach them later to offer the prayers of the congregation without guilt.