

When You Pray Together

Depression was something I suffered with for many years. As far back as I can remember I struggled every day to find a reason to live—a reason to get out of bed—a reason for my very existence. The first decision I had to make each morning was, “Should I kill myself now or can I make it through another day?”

Yes, I had been to psychiatrists but the medicine they prescribed didn’t help me. In fact, taking it made me feel even more hopeless about my situation. If that was the best medical science had to offer, then what hope did I have of ever getting better?

I tried everything I could find to get rid of the feelings of sadness, despair, hopelessness and deep hurt in my heart. I tried to drown them in alcohol and drugs. I tried to rise above them with occult practices and desperately wrong relationships. But nothing ever worked.

After the effects of every bad choice wore off, I was back to the way I had always been. I had a perpetual lump in my throat that was painfully sustained by a continuous effort to restrain the tears. I knew if the floodgate ever opened, a tidal wave of overwhelming proportions would rush out.

A Glimmer of Hope It wasn’t until I was 28 years old that a friend took me to meet Pastor Jack Hayford. There, in his office, I received the Lord into my heart and that’s when things began to change in my life.

Before Christ, I had been adrift. I was lost in space with no oxygen mask—sentenced to life imprisonment without food or water.

But now, suddenly, I was rescued. I was filled with the breath of the Holy Spirit. Living water bubbled up from my innermost

being and flowed through my soul. I was fed and edified by daily bread from the Word of God.

I felt it strengthening and reviving my entire being. I finally understood what it was like to have hope. I learned that my life had a purpose. With one simple decision, my life had changed.

But I still had the depression.

I started going to church and receiving great Bible teaching from Pastor Jack. I learned to read my Bible every day. I couldn't put it down. I couldn't get enough. Life was finally making sense, and I had a lot of catching up to do.

That old familiar emptiness that had been in me as far back as I could remember was now finally becoming more and more filled. The truth of the Word was bringing life to the dead places in my soul.

I still had the depression. But now I could cope with it a little better...or could I?

One Sunday morning, while attending church services, I ran into Michael, the man I would eventually marry. We had met a couple of years earlier when we worked together on a Christian music project, before I became a believer.

After our second "chance" meeting, we started seeing each other socially and dated almost a year before we married. Even though I was happy to be married to him, it surprised me to discover that marriage didn't take away the depression like I thought it would. Not long after the wedding, that unwelcome despair returned once again.

A Different Kind of Cure One morning I woke up, looked at my life, and saw how much of it I had wasted on pursuing worthless things instead of the things of God. I have completely blown my one chance to do anything worthwhile for

the Lord, I thought. I felt that because of my miserable, failure-filled past, I had forever forfeited the opportunity to do something that could actually make a difference in the lives of others.

I sank into a deep depression from which I didn't think I would ever recover. It was so bad that I couldn't even get out of bed.

At my husband's suggestion, I went to a pastor's wife at the church. She was especially gifted in the areas of discernment, knowledge revelation and Christian counseling. Mary Anne knew the Word and the power of it, and she understood how to pray in the authority of the Holy Spirit. She was well acquainted with the God of the Bible who delivers, heals and transforms lives through prayer.

I told Mary Anne my story. She suggested that we fast for three days. Then, she would see me again, and we would pray. I did as she instructed and went back the following week to meet with her and another pastor's wife. From the moment they laid their hands on my head and shoulders and began to pray, I could sense the power of the Holy Spirit.

They prayed, among other things, that I would be set free from depression, suicidal thoughts and fear. And the most amazing thing happened as they prayed: I actually felt the depression leave. I mean I felt physical sensation in my arms and shoulders as the heaviness and depression lifted off of me. In its place were lightness, freedom, peace, hope and joy.

The next morning I fully expected the depression to return, even though the counselor said it wouldn't. But she was right; it wasn't there. And it didn't come back the next day either—or the next. In fact, it never came back. It was entirely gone.

There had been a complete work. It was something God had done, when nothing and no one else could do it.

From that time on, I became a believer in the power of praying together with other Christians. If God could, in one instant, take away a hopeless lifelong condition, then what more could He do? What more does He want to do?

I came to see that the possibilities were limitless because God is without limits. Anything was possible because with God nothing is impossible!

For more than 30 years now, I've always had a prayer partner, or two, or three, or five or seven—depending on the particular time in my life. I've found that I can't live without prayer support. I can't be a good wife, mother, writer, speaker, or minister of God's love and grace without it.

When We Agree I encourage everyone to find someone to pray with on a somewhat regular basis. I also remind others never to overlook or bypass the many golden opportunities to pray with people they see in the course of a day, even if it's only briefly.

I'm not suggesting that we neglect our own personal prayer times with God. To the contrary, our time alone with the Lord is the most important time of all. It's when we develop our relationship with Him. It's when we grow. Our personal prayer time is the foundation for all other effective prayer.

When I used to play the violin, I found that I was a greater asset to the orchestra if I practiced on my own. The more I played alone, the better I was with the group. It's the same way with prayer. The more time we spend alone with God, the more powerful our prayers will be when we pray with others.

But so often we just pray alone and don't spend any time praying with others. We don't recognize the power of two or more. Jesus promises that His presence will be in our midst in greater power when we join with one or more persons.

He said, “‘Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them’” (Matt. 18:20, NKJV). I can’t think of a stronger case for having prayer partners.

He also said, “‘If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven’” (Matt. 18:19). That seems easy. All we have to do is just show up, join with one or more and pray. But wait. What is that other word? It says that we have to agree? That could be a problem, the agreement part, that is.

On what, exactly, are we supposed to agree? And how do we know if we are actually agreeing?

One of the most important things we need to agree on is to whom we are praying. Are we all praying to the one, true, almighty, holy, living God—the Creator of the universe? And are we praying in the name of His Son, Jesus? If we don’t agree on that, our prayers aren’t going to have enough power to make it beyond the ceiling.

Do we agree that we are filled with, and led by, the Holy Spirit, who enables us to pray, as we ought? If not, our prayers aren’t going to have enough substance to keep from evaporating into thin air.

Do we agree that God hears prayers and answers? Do we agree that our prayers can make a difference? If, for example, you doubt that God answers prayer and I believe that He does, how can we be agreed on anything concerning prayer?

Another thing we need to agree on is about what, exactly, we are praying. If, for example, you are praying for a friend to be able to make a move to another city, and I’m praying for that same person to stay in town, then we are not in agreement. There is no power in our prayer.

If, instead, we can both agree to pray for God’s will to be

done in this situation, then the prayer will be powerful. Agreeing on what we are praying about before we pray will mean the difference between ineffective and powerful prayers.

Leave the Outcome to God There are a surprising number of people who find praying in front of others very difficult. I used to be one of them. One of the main reasons for this difficulty is fear. People are afraid they won't do it very well. They've heard the eloquence of others' prayers and feel they have to live up to them.

But the truth is God looks on our hearts and not our proficiency as a public speakers. I still have to remind myself of that each time I get up to pray in front of a crowd, especially when the people who have gone before me prayed powerful prayers. I have had to learn to get over myself and just pray from the heart, no matter how simple the prayer.

Another reason I used to be intimidated to pray with and for others is that I was afraid God wouldn't answer my prayers. What if I prayed for healing for this person and they weren't healed? What if I prayed for a breakthrough in someone's life and nothing happened? What then?

It was faithless of me to think that way, I know. Plus, it was arrogant—as if getting the answers to my prayers was up to me. I finally realized that it was my job to pray. It was God's job to answer. I just had to do my job and let God do His. That realization freed me, and I was able to pray together with people whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Pastor Jack told a story about a missionary lady who was trapped with some people in a dry riverbed just as a flash flood came. The people immediately joined hands and withstood the power of that thing by strengthening one another. As they were united against the sweeping waters, their lives were spared. This is a perfect picture of why believers need to come together in prayer.

Collectively, we must stand strong against the things that would seek to wash away our lives and destroy them. When we find ourselves in serious circumstances, we can stand united with other believers and pray for one another.

When we join with other people to pray for one another, it forces us to verbalize our prayer needs and share our burdens. When we pray together for other people in the world, it not only releases them into all God has for them, it releases us as well.

A bond of love develops between us that is eternal. That's because you always grow to love the people for whom you pray—even those you don't know. You develop God's heart of love for them. And therein lies the true power of praying together with purpose.

Read a companion devotional.

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