

Why You Should Stop Telling People Who Are Hurting to Pray Harder

I remember sitting on the floor of our youth building one Sunday morning while one of the dads who attended our church led a small group for me and four other boys.

I was bored, I was ready to leave, and I was hoping he didn't ask me if I memorized the Bible verse from last week; because I didn't. I was around 12 years old and had just begun a dark and weary descent into what I didn't know would be a six-year battle with severe depression. All I knew was this; I didn't want to sit around with people who didn't know me and act like everything in my life was OK. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired, and I no longer wanted to pretend like my life was just dandy.

Our small-group leader had asked the group to share what God was doing in their lives and how the rest of the group could be praying. After all the other boys had shared with the group what God was up to in their lives, it was now my turn to share. I debated whether or not to give some shallow and cliché answer.

But while I knew that would have been the easy way out of having a deep conversation, I decided I no longer wanted to act like nothing was wrong. Instead, I told everyone that I was struggling, hurting and having a hard time with my relationship with God. Blank stares began to fixate themselves on me. Confusion filled the group. It was as if everyone was thinking, *Wow! He actually took the question seriously.*

I felt a little embarrassed for sharing my heart with a group of people I really knew nothing about, but I felt that sharing my pain was probably the best way to find healing for it. To

my surprise, it seemed that not even the small-group leader knew how to handle my honest response to his question, and his reaction to my cry for help is something I have never forgotten. He looked at me and said, *"Well, Jarrid, I'd encourage you to just pray harder. God will take care of it."*

Yup. That's all I got.

When you tell someone who is hurting, *"You just need to pray harder,"* what you're really saying is, *"You're not praying hard enough"*—which in itself is a false depiction toward the way God moves in the lives of everyday people. If God answered prayers by how hard someone is to pray, then God would be a transactional genie and not an almighty and sovereign God. Sure, God responds to our prayers, but He isn't controlled by them.

I remember going home defeated, thinking that my already shaky faith in God was actually worse than I thought it was. I felt insulted and not good enough and thought my small-group leader had just confirmed everything I had already thought about myself—that I was a broken and terrible Christian. I'm assuming this was one of the many experiences that attributed for my years of distaste toward God and church.

Looking back, I understand why my small-group leader said what he did. He didn't mean any harm. He had good intentions. He just wasn't equipped with the tools necessary to handle the honest conversation. I know he was trying to give me advice that pointed back to Jesus, but his advice fell short on many levels. Regardless if someone is well-equipped to handle every situation they are thrown in life, I believe the statement, *"Just pray harder"* is something that should be used with extreme caution and understanding. We must be willing to help people in their journey of pain and hurt, not pawn them off to Jesus because it's easier than spending time with someone who needs you.

Prayer is a powerful weapon, but “Just pray harder” without follow-up is horrible advice. {eoa}

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