



People often ask us to pray for them, whether they're facing challenges personally, at home, at work, or they're battling a particular illness. The common practice is that we promise to pray for that person, putting it off to some point in the future (that, let's be honest, doesn't always occur). Instead, one thing we can do when someone asks us to pray for them is to promptly ask the person, "Would it be alright for me to pray for you right now?"

Many people are hesitant to pray with someone spontaneously because of the fear of looking foolish. How long do we pray for that person? Should we place our hands on them while praying? How will we know what to say in our prayer? Fortunately, there are no rules set in stone about how we ought to pray with someone else. The keys to praying with someone are relying on the Holy Spirit and realizing that it is God, not us, who brings about any change in the person we are praying with. There's something that happens when we seize the moment and pray over someone as soon as they ask for prayer, because in that moment, the person is most cooperative with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

What do we do with our hands?

What I usually do is face the person who has asked me to pray for them and ask if I can place my hands on their shoulders. Something in each of us appreciates physical contact – whether that's through facing them and laying our hands on their shoulders, holding their hands or whatever else feels comfortable at the time.

Praying with our whole being – body and spirit – gives all power possible to our prayer requests (CCC 2702). **By praying with someone right there and then, and physically reaching out in some form, we tangibly demonstrate our love for them.** God's response to an open heart that is calling to Him, is additionally supplemented by our

human expression of love. The person we're praying for knows in that moment that God and we have their back. This realization can work wonders in both the spiritual and physical life of anyone.

This video on how to do prayer ministry, setting aside the references the Alpha Program for the purposes of this post, is helpful as a guide for people on how to pray with others.

What do we say?

Before we start to pray, it's a good idea to pause for a quick second and ask the Holy Spirit to give us the words to pray in that given scenario. I continue to be amazed at the words that come forth from my lips, when I allow myself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, even if my prayer is only a few words long. It also helps to quickly gauge, as best as possible, where the person we are praying with is in their walk of faith. This will help determine how long we could pray for that person before they start to get uncomfortable (in any case, we can never go wrong with keeping things short and simple).

More than being a prayer, our words can also be a source of comfort and strength to the person we're praying over. **A great way to pray with someone is to draw some of our inspiration from a point of empathy.** For example, if someone just lost a loved one, picture yourself in their situation. Undoubtedly, they're looking for comfort. They're looking for mental and/or emotional strength to cope with their sorrow. They're trying to make sense of the range of emotions they're feeling. Speak into the different dimensions of the situation and pray for each of these needs in a clear and simple way, asking the Lord to bring His presence into each area.

For example: "Lord, I pray for Joe as he deals with his father's passing. Give him the strength he needs to carry the burden of his sadness and grief. Thank you O God for the gift that his Dad was in his life. Help Joe to turn to You right now. We pray O Lord that You fill Joe's heart with Your peace and presence, so that his heart, which is filled with sorrow right now, may be filled with You instead."

Similarly, if someone who is sick asks you to pray for them, it's easy to empathize with that situation. With illness comes physical weakness, frustration, impatience, the desire for healing, etc. We can flesh out our prayers for any need in the way described above, whether someone is in need for spiritual strength, physical healing or just a little pick-me-up when things are a bit rough.

What do we think?

When praying with someone, the foundation of our prayer should be humility and we should raise our minds and hearts to God in our petitions to Him (CCC 2559). Whatever ultimately happens when we pray with someone is between God and that person. This is not our time to shine trying to come up with eloquent prayers that shift the attention to us, rather than God. The focus should be on God, His power and love, and the emotional/physical healing we are asking Him to carry out. Jesus asked us to approach the Father in His name and that's pretty much what we should aim to do: Ask the Father to help our friend in need, through the name of Jesus.

But to reach a point where we are able to pray with someone spontaneously with a certain degree of ease, we have to prepare our hearts continually (and grow a thick skin for the many rejections we may receive to our offers of prayer). It's imperative to maintain a regular prayer life if we want to develop this discipline. While praying with someone is primarily something that is led by the Holy Spirit, we have to work at it to be able to grow in confidence and competence. Our hearts need to be in tune with God, so that when praying with someone, we can be led by Him, not by our own wisdom.

Some more tips...

* **Be respectful and sensitive.** If someone asks you to pray for them, but then doesn't want you to pray over them spontaneously, that's fine. Don't take it personally (but do remember to pray for them later nonetheless!).

* **Don't worry** if the person you're praying with has a lukewarm reaction to your prayer, or worse still, nothing seems to have happened at all. Something always happens, even if there is no immediate or perceivable sign.

* **Relax.** Again, you are not working any wonders here. You're just an instrument in God's hands.

* **Don't go nuts.** Anything resembling theatricality or sensationalism should not occur.

* **Don't forget to share what the Holy Spirit is speaking to you.** What can happen sometimes is that while we're praying, we may find that God is inspiring us to share a particular message or Bible verse with the person we're praying with.

* Always ask them how they're doing after you've prayed over them.

* **Praying with someone for healing is not a substitute for the sacraments.** If someone is suffering from a serious illness and is in any danger of death, please call a priest immediately to administer the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

Regularly practicing praying over others helps us to fine-tune our approach in asking people if we can pray for them spontaneously. We also learn how to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's promptings in guiding the prayer session. Over time, even someone who feels like a total rookie in this area will grow to be able to do a pretty decent job of it.

Since we are brothers and sisters in Christ, we can pray for each other without necessarily needing to do so right there and then, or even by placing hands on each other. But the fact that a person consents to being prayed with is huge, because it is a choice they have intentionally made in that moment to open the doors to God. Trust me, God can do a lot with a door that's open just a crack! So, try it out... The next time someone asks you to pray for them, just ask them if you can do so right there and then... and then let God do His thing!