

# How to Pray for Another Group Member

Practical advice for a sometimes sensitive subject

by *Randall Neighbour* 12/08/2008

Each week, I have the opportunity to pray for other members of my small group. When it comes time to pray, I always take a deep breath and ask myself the following question: "Am I about to pray a nice, rehearsed prayer, or do I know without a doubt that I'm about to pray something God has given me that will be powerful?"

This stops me cold most of the time. My head is often filled with trite thoughts and earthly advice given in the form of a prayer for a person, and that's the last thing they need! So, I hold back and ask God to tell me how to pray for them. If I don't hear anything, I remain silent.

## Hearing God First

When I do hear God's prompting, I go ahead and pray aloud or share what I need to share with the person. If you don't know the difference between your own voice and God's, just remember that when God give you the words, it's powerful. You'll know it, the group will know it, and the person receiving the words will know it.

It's also important that you remember to speak or pray the truth in love. Often, I know exactly what God would want to say to a person, but my attitude toward him or her is not right, and it would only come out as a harsh criticism or condemnation. In these instances, I don't share; I ask God to speak to the person directly and use others who can deliver the message in love.

About once a month, I hear God say to me, "Someone has a word of encouragement for this person, but it's not you." I'm always faithful to risk telling our small group that I believe someone has a word of encouragement for the person, but is holding back. In most cases, this is true. Someone has something powerful to share or pray over the person in need, but is too scared to do it. This gives them permission to share it during the meeting, be it right or wrong. Or, they call or meet the person between meetings and share what God has given them.

In other cases, I totally confuse the voice of God with the rumbling in my stomach from the extra slice of pizza I had for dinner. That's why it's so important for the small group to have permission to say, "I don't think that was the Spirit of God talking to you, Randall." Believe it or not, this still happens to me; I'm always learning about hearing God's voice!

If this whole subject of hearing the voice of God is foreign territory to you, just start asking God to speak to you each day when you spend time with Him. He's always been a great communicator, and He'll most certainly begin to speak to you through His written Word (the Bible), through other believers, and through thoughts that pop into your head that you know could not have come from you.

Just remember this rule of thumb: God never contradicts Himself. So, if you think you hear God's voice about something or receive a word of encouragement for someone in your group, ensure that it doesn't go against the Bible—and that your small group agrees that it's from God.

### **What's Said in the Meeting Stays in the Meeting**

There's a story about a small group who had developed a deep level of transparent sharing with one another. One night the ministry question was, "What is your greatest struggle today?" Each person shared honestly, and it was turning into an awesome time of transparency. The leader just knew the ministry time to follow would be powerful. Then the last person shared, saying, "My greatest struggle is gossip, and I just can't wait to get out of here!"

All jokes aside, I feel it's important to end this article with a word about confidentiality. Gossip, even in the form of a prayer request on behalf of another member, is damaging beyond one's wildest understanding. Your small group is probably the only place where people will share their hurts, expecting others to love them unconditionally. Part of truly loving other members in your group is not sharing their words, thoughts, or feelings with others.

So, what is shared in your group should stay in that meeting. If a member wasn't there one week and wants to catch up on what went on, feel free to share with them what you alone shared, but that's all. If they want every participant's prayer requests, let them call each person who was at the meeting and ask them directly.

If someone shares something they have done that is harmful to others—something that requires immediate action to make it right—challenge them right then and there to do what's right in the eyes of God and man. Tell them you'll go along with them for support. If they refuse, be assured that your small-group leader or coach will deal with it immediately.

I've heard horror stories about Christians who share other people's secrets and struggles in churches, and it's probably the single greatest reason unchurched people are not a part of a church and following God. Don't fall into this trap with your small group.

—Randall Neighbour; excerpted from *Community Life 101*, © 2005 by Touch Outreach Ministries. Used with permission.