

Prayer With Older Adults

"Pastor will you pray that my husband will be healed?" There are no more troubling words a pastor or any other caring person can hear! For in these words lie volumes of trust and assumptions and hopes. In these words lie expectations that might be unrealistic. The person asking for prayer (young or old) is speaking in short hand of the human experience. Behind these words lie several assumptions. Some of these are:

- There are some situations in life we can not handle alone
- God is able and willing to do something about these situations.
- The one being asked for such prayer will be able to get God to respond.
- There is strength in the community of faith.
- God controls our lives so completely that even life threatening illness is under God's control.

Theologically I believe all of these things to be true, but the literal interpretation of them needs unpacking. But that is not the point of this article. The point is that there are some events in life that inexorably will lead to death no matter how hard we pray. I believe that we are more faithful to the word of Jesus if we constantly distinguish between praying for a healing and praying for a cure. Most people seem to mean pray that I be cured rather than pray that I be healed.

What do I mean? More than once in my pastoral ministry have I been struck by the faith and insight of someone with a life threatening illness that is able to say, "Pastor, whether I recover or not, I am going to be okay. God will see to that!" That person, I believe is healed. Whether or not a cure comes matters less than the "peace that passes all understanding" which is spoken in such an affirmation.

So respond to such requests for prayer carefully and empathetically helping the person to experience that promise of God, "Lo, I am with you always!" Pray for a cure, but pray clearly as well for a healing. And when you do, help the person with whom you are praying to see the difference and to learn to wait on the unfolding of God's love.

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