



# Praying Beyond the Obvious

You probably realize that prayer is not a wish list that God will fulfill according to your personal perspective or timetable. Instead, God always answers prayer with consideration of the request itself, the person making the request, those that are the focus of the request, and others affected by the request. Answered prayer always glorifies God. (See *God Always Answers Prayer but Not as We Think* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/God%20Answers%20Prayer.pdf>)

You may know that prayerlessness and self-centeredness go hand in hand.

(See *Prayerlessness: A Reflection of Self-Centeredness* at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Prayerlessness.pdf>)

You may also know that faithful prayer is essential for you to grow in your ability to love God and others.

(See *Do You REALLY Believe What You Say About Prayer* at <http://wordtruth.org/Do%20You%20Really%20Believe%20What%20You%20Say%20About%20Prayer.pdf>).

However, you may find that you have difficulty knowing what to pray for and, frequently, repeat the same words for the same request. If that's the case, you may find it helpful to pray not only for the obvious aspects of any situation but also for specific needs *beyond the obvious*.

For example, if a child is ill, the *obvious* prayer request is that God would heal the child. You can also pray for the child's parents and other caretakers to remain healthy and for all to exercise wisdom concerning care for the child. If the sick child has siblings, you can pray for their health as well, especially if the sick child is contagious. These are obvious prayer concerns related to this situation.

In praying beyond the obvious, you could pray for the mom, dad, siblings, and caretakers to draw closer to the Lord in this situation. You could pray for the parents to cast their anxieties on the Lord for He cares for them (1 Peter 5:7). You could pray that the parents' testimony of God's guidance during this time will be used to encourage others to depend on the Lord. You could pray for the parents' trust in the Lord to increase in the days and weeks ahead. You could pray that the parents will learn the benefits of this trial so their faith will have greater endurance and strength (James 1:2-4). You could pray that their child's health challenge will provide opportunity for them to ask in faith for greater wisdom in this trial as well as in every other aspect of their lives (James 1:5-8).

**1 Peter 5:7**, Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

**James 1:2-8**, Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,<sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.<sup>4</sup> And let endurance have *its* perfect results, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.<sup>5</sup> But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.<sup>6</sup> But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.<sup>7</sup> For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord<sup>8</sup> *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Since a trial can also become a temptation for one to become more self-centered, you could pray for the parents to encourage one another and to depend on Christ, God's Word, and the leading of God's Spirit in every aspect of this situation.

In his book, *Speaking Truth in Love*, David Powlison reminds us how God uses sickness to mature us. His insights suggest other concerns to pray for over time in this situation.

"Sickness, like any other trouble, can force us to stop and face ourselves and find the Lord. I may find sins I've been too busy to notice: irritability, indifference, self-indulgence, unbelief, joylessness, worry, complaining, driven-ness, trust in my own health and ability. I may find my need for Jesus' mercies quickened and my delight in God deepened. I may develop fruit of the Spirit that can grow only by suffering well: endurance of faith; hope and joy that transcend circumstances; mature character; richer knowledge of God's love; living for God and not my pleasures; the humility of weakness; the ability to help others who suffer. (James 1:3, Romans 5:3-5; 1 Peter 1:6-8, 4:1-3, and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, 1:4)

“Sickness, like any trouble, is itself a temptation. Whether you face life-threatening disease or just feel lousy for a couple of days, it is amazing what that experience can bring out of your heart. Some people complain; others get angry – at God, at themselves, at others, at the inconvenience. Some pretend nothing’s wrong; others pretend they’re sicker than they are to get attention or avoid responsibilities. Some invest hope, time, and money in pursuing cure after cure. Others try to find someone or something to blame, even getting litigious. Still others just keep pressing on with life, doing, doing, doing – when God really intends them to stop and learn the lessons of weakness. Some become deeply fearful, imagining the worst. Some plunge into self-indulgence, manipulating everyone within reach to serve their every need. Others get depressed and question the value of their entire existence. Some are too proud to ask for help. Others brood that God must be out to get them, morbidly introspective about every real or imaginary failing.

“You get the picture! Sickness provides one of the richest opportunities imaginable for spiritual growth . . . Is God interested in healing any particular illness? Sometimes. Is He always interested in making us wise, holy, trusting, and loving, even amid our pain, disability, and dying? Yes and amen.

“People learn to pray beyond the sick list when they realize what God is really all about.”\*

*Verse texts referenced above ...*

**James 1:3**, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance

**Romans 5:3-5**, And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;<sup>4</sup> and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;<sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

**1 Peter 1:6-8**, In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,<sup>7</sup> so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;<sup>8</sup> and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

**1 Peter 4:1-3**, Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,<sup>2</sup> so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.<sup>3</sup> For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10**, And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.<sup>10</sup> Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

**2 Corinthians 1:4**, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Take every opportunity to pray *beyond the obvious* when prayer needs arise. Pray for the obvious specific need(s) but also pray for God’s glory to be realized and for others to trust Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God’s Word throughout the situation. Pray for everyone associated with the prayer need(s) to grow in specific ways toward greater Christ-likeness while learning even more about themselves and God’s grace. Pray that believers involved in the prayer need will demonstrate love for God and love for others in tangible ways so that the love of Christ will be evident to those inside and outside the family of God.

In all things and in all ways, may our loving Heavenly Father be glorified in greater measure when believers consistently and dependently pray *beyond the obvious*.

*To enlarge your understanding and practice of prayer, see the following WordTruth articles.*

**Prayer ... and God** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Prayer%20and%20God%20%28Prayer%20Pt%201%29.pdf>

**Prayer ... and Jesus** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Prayer%20and%20Jesus%20%28Prayer%20Pt%202%29.pdf>

**Prayer ... and You** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Prayer%20and%20You%20%28Prayer%20Pt%203%29.pdf>

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### Footnote

\*Excerpted from David Powlison’s book, Speaking Truth in Love, and reprinted in **A Prayer Perspective to Enlarge Prayer’s Parameters** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/A%20Prayer%20Perspective%20to%20Enlarge%20Prayer%20Parameters.pdf>.