

Lifting up Those Who Are Suffering

By Sandra Higley and Danielle Schofield

Suffering comes in all shapes and sizes: chronic illness, persecution, relational heartaches, loss of a loved one, senseless tragedy, stresses of many kinds. We all face suffering at one time or another. In addition to praying for specifics centered on individual circumstances, here are a few ways to pray, based on what Scripture says about suffering.



Kingdom Warfare

Father, this child of Yours has gone through unspeakable distress. Help those who are suffering to worship You in the midst of circumstances they don't understand. Lift them out of the hurtful details of what is happening so they get the bigger picture of its Kingdom impact. Help them trust You and hold on to the end, knowing You have a plan in mind for them. May they know You in a deeper, more meaningful way as a result of this circumstance (Job 1-2; 42:1-6, 10-16; Ps. 71:20).

God's Glory

Father, if this suffering is intended to bring You glory, let it be so! Give Your suffering children the strength and joy to honor You during this difficult time. Deepen their understanding of the inheritance issues at stake when they

share in Christ's sufferings. Help them to recognize that what they are going through is no comparison to the glory that will be revealed in them; help them wait for it with eager expectation. As they run the race through this trial, help them resist confusion and instead manifest the fruit of the Spirit (John 11:4; Rom. 8:17–19; Gal. 5:7–8, 22–23).

God's Grace

Lord God, help Your servants embrace Your no as well as Your yes. Assure them that You see and hear them. Enable them to see Your power at work through these difficult circumstances. Show Yourself strong through their fragile state. Thank You that in spite of everything they are not crushed, driven to despair, or abandoned by You. Help them get up when circumstances knock them down so that Jesus' life shines through them (2 Cor. 12:7–10).

Identification with Christ

Jesus, help Your beloved to see that this hatred they are experiencing is visible proof they belong to You and not the world. Encourage them to take a humble view of this identity as they continue to obey Your teaching and walk in love. Help them to fully know You and the power of Your resurrection, even as this situation causes them to become more and more like You. Let every act of unjust suffering commend them to God (Isa. 43:1; John 15:18–21; Phil. 3:10; 1 Peter 2:18–20).

Faithful Friends

Heavenly Father, give Your suffering children true friends who seek to lighten their load rather than cause additional heartache. Give friends and family empathy for what the

sufferers are going through; help them resist the urge to judge or assume they would handle things differently if put in the same situation. Help friends and loved ones to look for ways to encourage rather than chastising, condemning, or minimizing these overwhelming situations. Hold accountable those who profess to speak for You. Help sufferers to forgive and pray for any who allow the enemy to use them as unjust accusers. Help those afflicted to bless and not curse (Job 42:7–10; Luke 6:28).

Proper Discernment

Father, give these dear ones a proper understanding of what is going on through this trial. Give them wisdom and courage to ask the right questions about fears, concerns, and needs. While it is commendable to suffer without cause, show Your children if there are other reasons this suffering has come to them. Without guilt or condemnation, help them to recognize any sin in their lives that needs to be dealt with according to Your Word. Help them to find a trustworthy person to come alongside them in prayer and confession if needed—someone in right relationship with You (Rom. 8:1; James 5:13–16; 1 Peter 2:18–20).

Forbearance to Wait on the Lord

Father God, give Your hurting child the forbearance to wait on You, knowing we go through various seasons and each one has its purpose. Thank You that while weeping lasts for a night, You bring joy when the night is past. Turn their mourning to dancing! (Ps. 30:5, 11; Eccl. 3:1–3).

—SANDRA HIGLEY is an author and the editor of *Real Life Downloaded* (Youth Edition), an online Sunday school curriculum supplement that is free of charge. Download the free Real Life

Downloaded app. She co-authored this article with her daughter, who has a debilitating (sometimes fatal) disease with no known cure.

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Warfare Prayer for Believers

A Clash of Kingdoms

By Kathy Branzell



Family can evoke strong emotions. I am very protective of my younger brother Keifer. We never fought while growing up. And if anyone messed with him, I was there to protect him in a heartbeat. Even as adults we still have each other's backs.

Most of our families have some disagreements or squabbles among ourselves, but when an outsider comes after one of us, all the family members take their battle stations, coming to that person's defense. Taking aim at one member of our family is a declaration of *war* on us all!

The apostle Paul reminds us of the nature of war, especially

in the spiritual sense, in 2 Corinthians 10:3–5:

Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (nasb).

Who are the people in your family? I pray you see yourself belonging to *God's* family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, a bond even stronger than siblings by blood or marriage.

God's family members pray all types of prayers for each other: protection and provision, direction and desires, jobs and joy, fruitfulness and finances. We even pray over weddings and the weather. We intercede for those who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. We pray over our own needs and the needs of others around us.

But as family members in the eternal sense, each of us is also at war with otherworldly spiritual forces, and we need to take our battle stations to fight for each other.

Developing a Warfare Mindset

Do you consider yourself a “go-to-war” type of family member? It's a good question for all of us. When Satan starts pursuing or pressuring our brothers or sisters in Christ, do we rush into God's throne room in fervent prayer on their behalf? In deep suffering and adversity, do we press in and pray scriptural promises with tears, tenacity, and faith?

When a mother fights for the life of her unborn baby that she is in danger of losing, are we likely to casually lift up a request? Or do we fall before God and plead with Him to

glorify Himself in this life and situation?

How do we pray regarding a neighbor's cancer diagnosis? How about that pregnant teen at church whose life is about to change drastically? Can you and I be counted on to do battle in prayer when someone in our small group is "let go" at work? Do we have the courage to prayerfully approach a brother or sister who is being tempted or tormented?

When a fellow believer is wrestling against powers of darkness, God calls us to watch each other's backs. Think about your response when you hear of turmoil and distress. Are your prayers yielded to the Holy Spirit and filled with faith so that they produce divinely powerful responses from the Almighty Hands that formed the universe and keeps it in motion?

John Piper says, "We cannot know what prayer is for until we know that life is war."¹ In every breath, decision, and activity, Satan and his fallen army are fighting to fill their kingdom of eternal torment. After all, misery loves company. They do not care about people; there is no affection in them, no desire to see people fulfilled or happy. Their intent is to tempt, trick, and torture any soul into an eternal separation from God. Their goal is to hurt God by stealing His children away from Him. It is *war!*

Fighting the Right Way

We do not fight this war with gossip or judgment—or by leaving people alone to make their own bad choices. When we fail to press in and persevere in prayer, we're abandoning our posts. We're surrendering territory and family to the plundering of our enemy.

We must armor up, so to speak, and stand firm on the front lines (Eph. 6:10–17). We fight first on our knees in

travailing prayer. We give ourselves to agonizing intercession that expresses our grief and God's sorrow as He sees His child becoming a target of Satan's battleplan to kill, steal, and destroy.

- *Family battlegrounds.* If you are a parent, you may know the pain of one of your children being drawn away from the spiritual and physical safety of your household rules. You've determined family guardrails for protection and success, but your children rebel, thinking you're withholding happiness from them.

Parents, overcome Satan's tricks with truth! Wield the sword of God's Word over them in prayer (Eph. 6:17).

- *Community battlegrounds.* Millions of Christ-followers enter the marketplace every day. They take their places in schools, the military, law enforcement, business, and retail. They assume roles as government officials, judges, first-responders, and teachers. As influencers in our society, these believers may experience some of the most intense warfare.

Become an intercessor for one or more of them.

- *Cultural battlegrounds.* It's easy to complain about the eroding of biblical values in our culture, to post our frustrations on social media, or to rally in protest. Posting and protesting may make us feel better, but do not change things.

Fight in a more effective way. Try pressing in and praying for God's servants to be bold and courageous in making the right decisions and acting in righteousness.

James 5:16 tells us that the fervent prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective. Prayers tear down the devil's defenses and destroy his schemes. When we, as prayer warriors, fall to our knees, anything set up against or above God will

tumble. The haughty are silenced in the humble prayers of God's servants. Even children can overcome fear and join in warfare prayer for others when they pray in the strength and authority of Jesus.

Finding a Higher Perspective

Growing up, all I dreamed of doing was joining the Air Force and becoming a SR-71 pilot. Known as a spy plane, the SR-71 was the fastest manned plane used for strategic reconnaissance. I wanted to serve my country, protect it from harm, and defeat its enemies.

I planned and worked for this my whole life. But, because of one eye exam, my dreams came crashing down—or so I thought. I was night blind.

A few years ago I told this story to my small group. A friend who knew me well leaned forward, looked intently at me, and said, "Wow, so God put those desires in your heart. But His plans were to use you in His Kingdom, not a country—to fight every person's enemy, not just America's. God is allowing you to fly above the earth's atmosphere and into the spiritual realm in warring prayers. God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours, but thankfully you have volunteered in the 'Kingdom Air Force.'" "

Years of questions and pain faded as I realized God had deployed me to thousands of prayer battles. He gave me incredible squadrons of fellow prayer warriors who had my back, prayed me through, and taught me truths about prayer.

In warfare never fly alone. We all need prayer partners to defeat a deceiving enemy. Lock your shield with the shields of other warriors who pray with you and for you. Paul reminds us in a passage about spiritual warfare: "Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With

this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people" (Eph. 6:18).

The war between God's Kingdom and the kingdom of darkness is raging. Our family (the family of God) is under attack. It's time to mobilize heaven's army on our family's behalf with passionate and persevering prayer.

¹John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010) 65.

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His Kingdom or My Comfort Praying?



Longtime Presbyterian minister, Dr. Wilbur Chapman (early 1900s) was 26 when called to be pastor of Wanamakers Church in Philadelphia. His first Sunday,

an old gentleman came up to him and said, "you're much too young to be the pastor of such a fine church as this." Chapman thought the guy was a kook. But the gentleman went on to tell him that he had decided to pray for him, that the Holy Spirit's power would fall on him each time he stepped into the pulpit. And he had another man who would pray with him.

Chapman report that those two men soon turned into 10, the 20, then 50, and finally more than 200 men who gathered each Sunday morning before services and pray for the Holy Spirit's enablement. Over the next three years the church saw 1,100 people come into the kingdom—more than 600 of them men.

Somewhere along the line churches have lost sight of what they should be praying for! Today, most churches' prayers are almost exclusively for needs within the body. Prayers that each person's life would get back to normal. Seldom are there prayers that cry out for the fullness of Jesus Christ to come upon a body, for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto a church, that Joe's life would glorify God and people would be drawn to Christ as he walks through this difficult time, that our youth would desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit. No, we stay focused on the "little answerables" that have upset our people's ease in life. No thought is ever given as to "God what do you want to do in this situation in Bill's life"; no our prayers are always, "Get Bill out of this!"

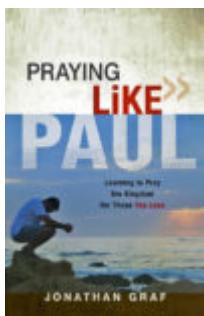
I'm struck by the prayers of Paul. Even though he had many people with life and death needs under his care, Paul—at least in the prayers we see in Scriptures—never prayed for a logical answer to a specific need. (His own request that his thorn in the flesh be removed is the closest he comes; but God said, "no," so he stopped asking.) Instead, Paul focused on spiritual fruit and spiritual growth issues.

For the Roman believers, who were undoubtedly suffering intense persecution, Paul prayed "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust him, so that you may

overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13). No “Get them out of this!” Paul knew the Holy Spirit would draw people to Christ if they saw believers go through tough times with a sense of hope, joy and peace.

How do you pray when faced with a situation in your life or in the life of another? Do you simply default to “get them out of this” mode? Or do you recognize that God wants to do something in and through this situation in someone’s life. Spiritual growth, maybe. Glory to His Son, maybe. Growing the kingdom, maybe. Maybe we and our churches would see more kingdom growth if we changed the way we prayed.

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To read more about praying kingdom prayers, we recommend Jon’s book [Praying Like Paul](#).

The Unwanted Gift of Unanswered Prayer

By Eleanor Shepherd



As the train sped through the French countryside in early February 2013, I spent my time praying for my son repeatedly. “Lord, You can do anything. Please keep John safe as he travels this weekend.”

I felt restless. I even doubted that God was hearing my prayers. But I was compelled to seek Him on behalf of my son.

That Sunday night we were traveling on the high-speed train from Valence, in the south of France, back to our home in Paris.

Although my body was in France, my mind and heart were in North America with our children. John, then studying in Boston, had driven to Montreal that weekend to attend a conference and visit his sister Elizabeth. I was worried because I knew road conditions could be treacherous in winter.

The next morning, during my morning prayer time at home, my heart tightened when the phone rang. Our daughter Elizabeth, calling from Montreal, said that John had been in a car accident. Stunned, I listened to her report. John’s vehicle had hit black ice and rolled over. His neck was broken from the impact. John was paralyzed.

My prayers had not been answered.

During the following months, a kaleidoscope of emotions jumbled together with questions. I tried to understand why God did not answer my prayer. What if I had prayed in a different way? What if my prayers had focused on surrendering to His sovereignty more than insistent pleading? Would it have made a

difference?

Certainty in the Answer

All of us, at one time or another, have experienced unanswered prayer. We have poured our hearts out to God with a desired outcome, only to find God not answering the way we had hoped. Some of us struggle even now, trying to understand why God has not intervened and responded to a long-standing prayer of our hearts.

What provides a glimmer of hope for me is the way Jesus prayed, as recorded in Hebrews 4:15: “We do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

As God, Jesus is sovereign, yet He also knows what it is like to contend with the challenges we face—even unanswered prayers.

I think of Jesus, kneeling in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:32–42). I note His transparency. He does not pretend that He easily embraces the suffering that threatens Him. He is honest and says to the Father, “If it is possible, don’t let this happen to me! Father, you can do anything. Don’t make me suffer by having me drink from this cup” (v. 36, CEV).

These words of Jesus take me back to my urgent prayers on that train in France. I had prayed that God would protect John from any harm that might come his way.

But Jesus concluded His prayer in the garden, telling His Father, “Do what you want, and not what I want.” Perhaps Jesus could say that because He had the absolute certainty that what the Father wanted was best for His Son—and for everyone impacted for all eternity.

In fact, after praying in the garden and then facing His

accusers, Jesus was certain that the choice of the Father was the right one. When Peter drew a sword to defend His Master, Jesus confidently told Peter to put it away. Jesus confronted Peter with a question that revealed His determination: "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11). He spoke out of His clear-sighted understanding that this is the way it must be.

Faith-building in Unanswered Prayers

What can we learn from Jesus' example about dealing with our "unanswered" prayers? We discover that unanswered prayers build faith.

One day Donna, my friend in another ministry, said to me, "Have you ever noticed that when a person comes to Christ, it seems like their prayers are answered so often, yet as they continue on their faith journey, the answers become less frequent?"

After further discussion, we concluded that this is one way the Lord enables Christians to grow in their faith. If all our prayers were answered without fail in just the way we desire, we would eventually take God for granted and fail to value all He does for us. We would be tempted to treat God like a vending machine, expecting to receive whatever we ask for. The result would be a shallow faith. In fact, we would be placing our faith in the effectiveness of our prayers rather than trusting God for whatever way He might choose to answer.

Understanding that God does not always answer the way we expect Him to, forces us to go deeper. We then must ask ourselves hard questions: Have we lost our connection with Him? Does He have other plans for us? What is going on?

It forces us to intimately engage with God in even more fervent prayer.

Strength in Surrender

Questions and reflection teach us to trust confidently that God is in control of our lives, even if we do not understand what is happening. He always gives us a choice. We can hold onto our demands, or we can surrender them to Him and allow Him to work out all things for our good. The answers might not immediately bring happiness or satisfaction, but God always acts for our good (Rom. 8:28).

A statement I heard in a sermon once has remained with me: "You never know how much faith you have until it is tested." One way our faith is tested is that God doesn't always answer our prayers the way we believe He should. While it is evident that Jesus fully embraced the Father's will for Him, it wasn't easy. In fact, He struggled so intensely in Gethsemane that, according to Dr. Luke, His "sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). As Jesus took upon Himself all our sins, He knew what was ahead: not only the agony of His torture and crucifixion but the fear of abandonment by His Father. He was saying yes to something beyond anything we can imagine.

Our yes to His will, even when it leads us to suffering, pales in comparison. Yet, like Jesus, we would prefer another option. God may not change the circumstances He permits, but He will not force us to accept that this is part of His will. Our strength is found in our relinquishment.

Answers in Time!

Now, more than 15 years after John's accident, adjustment to his new life as a quadriplegic has been extremely difficult. Some of my prayers have remained unanswered. Others not. After about eight years, John told me he had finally dealt with his anger over the accident. That was a huge answer to my prayers.

However, throughout his lengthy struggle to find employment,

we did not find an answer as quickly. Three years after the accident John went back to school and completed his MBA from Harvard Business School. But a well-educated young man, finding himself seemingly unemployable because of physical limitations, needs huge amounts of courage to keep going each day.

God continues to answer this prayer. John has used his time profitably. He has scoured all the journals and books available about spinal cord injury. At his own expense, he developed an online program to help people with spinal cord injuries. Currently John is working to achieve the academic credentials needed to speak and to teach people with serious long-term diseases some ways they can live and thrive.

The Gift in Unanswered Prayer

Is unanswered prayer really a gift? At first it seemed like an unwanted gift, but after my initial disappointment in my prayers for John, I discovered something even greater. When we surrender our prayers—and the answers—to God, He uses the seemingly unanswered prayers:

- to develop faith
- to test that faith and refine us as our faith holds
- to discover that His strength is ours through our willing relinquishment to His sovereignty
- and to find our joy in His plans and purposes for us in our imperfect situations.

As difficult as it has been to go through this faith test surrounding John's accident, I'm learning that we can confidently ask God for the desires of our hearts, and we can rest assured that His answer, in His time, is part of His perfect plan for our lives.

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More Questions than Answers, and *Sharing Faith by Listening*, which won The Word Guild Award in the Christian Leadership category.

This article appeared in *Prayer Connect* magazine. To access more articles like this we encourage you to [subscribe to Prayer Connect](#).

Spiritual Awakening at Arizona State University



About five years ago, the Sentinel Group, directed by George Otis, Jr., began working with a small ministry in Tempe, AZ, called LoveASU. Comprised of intercessors, ministry workers, and students, the group had been inspired by Transformations videos to pray for spiritual awakening on the campus of Arizona State University (ASU).

In recent months, this university has been in the grip of a spiritual awakening. United prayer is a major factor behind these developments. After several tough years, during which campus ministries tended to go their own way, things changed in the fall of 2017. Instead of the usual two to three ministries coming together before God, prayer events at the local Campus Christian Center experienced a three-fold increase in intercessory participants.

Last year, a dozen ministries united behind a 40-day prayer focus, during which petitions were lifted day and night from within a tent erected near the main campus square. The

initiative was so fruitful, the ministries decided to continue the effort over the balance of the academic semester. In fall 2018, the tally of participating ministries and campus churches reached 17. A fresh 56-day campaign drew prodigals, atheists, Muslims, New Agers, and students suffering from depression. In addition to witnessing numerous conversions, healings, and deliverances, the intercessors also watched God begin to move among the university faculty and administration.

One of the more significant breakthroughs involved the school's Interfaith Council of Religious Advisors. For years, the woman directing the council was motivated to establish ASU as a model of the global interfaith movement. As time went by, her attitude toward Christians hardened, and ministries found their access to campus facilities severely limited.

Faced with this opposition, students and ministry leaders began to pray that God would either change this woman's heart or install someone more sympathetic.

Within a period of weeks, this woman disappeared from the Interfaith Council. Today, the council is headed by the son of a Baptist minister. Even more dramatic has been the departure from the university of an atheist professor who routinely packed out an auditorium on campus by bringing in atheist luminaries such as Richard Dawkins and the late Stephen Hawking.sentinelgroup.org

Transforming winds have also been coursing through the university's athletic department. In late 2018, more than 100 Christian student athletes attended an all-sport gathering in the men's football facility, worshiping, praying, and listening to inspirational messages. An estimated 20–30 football players have turned their lives over to Jesus in recent months. As one student athlete told Otis, "The identity of ASU is being flipped."

—GEORGE OTIS, [The Sentinel Group](http://TheSentinelGroup.com), adapted from a Nov. 15,

2018, email.