



PRAYING FOR THE AFFLICTED

How to Wage Spiritual Warfare Against Mental Disorders

By Alfred Ells, M.C.

A worried mother called for help with her adult son who had been drinking heavily. “What can we do?” she said. “He is wandering the streets of downtown L.A. and we cannot get him to stop what he’s doing.” The family had tried to get him into treatment, but he refused help and continued to abuse alcohol. Even though I ran an alcohol and drug abuse facility at the time, I had no real answers for this family. What do you do when someone refuses help?

Before hanging up the phone, I offered to pray for the mother and her alcoholic son. It then came to me to suggest that the family organize a prayer campaign, asking God’s help. Encouraged, the mother agreed to organize all of her relatives into teams to fast and pray one day a week to seek healing for her troubled son.

I forgot about the phone call until one spring morning, three months later. The admissions clerk at our residential treatment facility said a man from California was waiting in the hall seeking admission. To my surprise, it was the woman’s son who had been living on the streets of L.A.

He shared his story, recounting how, in a drunken stupor, he had purchased a bus ticket for San Diego, but had somehow ended up in Phoenix. Getting off the bus early that morning, he asked a stranger where he could buy a drink. The stranger was a graduate of our program and instead convinced him that he needed treatment.

A strange coincidence or the hand of God?

From this incident and many others, I have come to believe John Wesley’s words: “God does everything through prayer and nothing without it.” Prayer is arguably the most essential ingredient for overcoming mental, emotional and behavioral problems. The issue is not whether to pray, but how to pray. Through experience, I have found that certain ways of praying are more effectual than others (James 5:16). Consider the following tips on how to pray for someone who is experiencing problems and needs healing.

TIPS TO CONSIDER

Make it a *prayer project* not just prayer.

A project is a plan of action or an undertaking that requires effort, organization and dedication. Mental, emotional or behavioral problems are powerful strongholds in a person’s life, deeply entrenched in the individual’s personality. Issues like alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, irresponsibility, passivity and

sexual obsession all require a considerable prayer effort to make a difference. These types of problems have real power over the individual, who essentially becomes a slave to their disorder. E.M. Bounds, a man of God noted for his understanding of prayer, said it well: "Much prayer, much power; little prayer, little power; no prayer, no power."

Design a *specific strategy* regarding when to pray.

God has a plan of healing and deliverance for each person who experiences mental, emotional or behavioral difficulties. While you may ordinarily pray for someone addicted to drugs at a usual time, perhaps during morning devotions, God may also reveal a unique prayer strategy for that person. Recently, as I prayed for one of my relatives, God encouraged me to pray for him specifically for 15 minutes daily on my way to work. I also gave myself a visual cue to pray for him whenever I saw a Jeep on the road, since that is the kind of car he drove. Another family member felt led to pray and fast one day a week for him. Other family members joined the prayer and fasting effort on certain weekdays. Within months, he was sovereignly delivered from drugs.

Ask God for wisdom and guidance regarding *how to* pray.

Various problems require different understanding and types of prayer. For example, when praying for my family member, I was led to pray for his deliverance from the obsession and desire to use drugs. Other family members felt more led to pray for his safety, health and relationships. Trust God to orchestrate the types of prayers needed, and seek what you are supposed to pray.

Pray *specifically* for what you know the person needs.

The mother in California had asked the Lord for specific requests regarding her alcoholic son. When I informed his mother that he had ended up at our doorstep in Phoenix, she praised the Lord and said that had been her abiding prayer. She and the family had prayed that God would use whatever means were necessary to bring him to Phoenix for treatment at our facility.

Pray for the *eyes of their understanding* to be opened and the *denial* broken (Ephesians 1:17-19).

Before change can occur, the individual must recognize and assume ownership of his or her personal problems and behavioral bondage. If an individual is in denial of how powerful the bondage is, he or she will not take the steps necessary for change. The person will also blame others for his or her problem. A sexually obsessed husband usually complains of his wife's lack of interest in sex instead of recognizing and taking ownership of his own compulsive need for sex. The more he blames and pressures his wife, the more her sexual desire wanes. She feels increasingly guilty while he becomes more resentful and obsessive.

Pray for revelation of the *root issues* of the problem.

Every powerful problem contains hidden issues that make the problem resistant to change. Recently, as I counseled a couple, it became clear that the wife had been deeply hurt by a prior relationship. As a self-protective measure, she vowed never again to trust someone she loved. Most of their marital conflict revolved around her distrust. She called frequently and checked on him at work. If he went out of town on business, she would search his suitcase. She accused him of having extramarital intentions with his female colleagues. Once the root issue was revealed, she recanted the vow she had made and was able to begin trusting him.

Pray the *Word*.

God states that the truth will set you free (John 8:32), that His Word will not return void (Isaiah 55:11) and that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16). People need the Word. The power of mental, emotional and behavioral strongholds within a person's life is always maintained by lies. Someone suffering from depression, for example, will believe a number of self-defeating falsehoods, i.e. "I'm just a failure" or "nobody cares", which prevent him or her from recognizing the truth of his or her identity in Christ and overcoming the depression.

Prayers of *identification* are especially helpful.

In a prayer of identification, the person praying intercedes for another by identifying with the other's sin before God. Nehemiah prayed this way for his family and the children of Israel (Nehemiah 1:6). Similarly, I asked God to have mercy on my family member for all the sins he was committing. I confessed those sins to God and asked His forgiveness on my relative's behalf. Whether you consider mental, emotional or behavioral problems to be sin, sickness or syndrome, sin is always involved. Lack of recognition and repentance of sin are obstacles to the release of God's grace.

Wage *spiritual warfare*.

According to Ephesians 6:12, we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age, and spiritual hosts of wickedness. Practically speaking, this means that every powerful mental, emotional and behavioral problem is multi-faceted and has more than one contributing component. The spiritual realm of demonic presence must not be ignored. For example, we know that alcoholism has a biochemical component, yet the compulsion to drink is also a spiritual phenomenon and therefore subject to prayer. Remember, our weapons are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds (II Corinthians 10:4).

Be *persistent*—do not give up.

I believe people give up on prayer too soon. In our modern, instant-access society, we often expect healing and change to be immediate. I counseled and prayed for a woman with anorexia for over two years. Nothing seemed to break the power of the eating disorder in her life. I set aside times of fasting and prayer. She remained stuck in her disorder, weighing only 50 to 60 pounds. During one particularly anointed time of fasting and prayer, I felt directed to offer prayers of identification for her and her family in ways I had not done before. I sensed a breakthrough. Miraculously, she began eating the next day and has done well ever since.

A strange coincidence or the hand of God?