

Praying for people we don't know

From time to time in our intercessions on Sundays names will appear of people who need our prayers, and whom we don't know. Often the names will be familiar, or known well to a few people in the congregation. Sometimes, however, someone will ask for prayers for a relative, a work colleague or a friend who is unknown to everyone else. We may sometimes wish we knew more about who we are praying for – the problem is that those leading our prayers may not be able to include all the details we may like, for a variety of reasons: confidentiality, for example, or because they simply don't know anything more than a name.

When we're praying for people, we want to be able to ask God to give them what they need – healing, inner peace, strength to carry on, whatever it may be. And it can be difficult to be specific if we know nothing about the person's identity or circumstances. But then it can be helpful to remember the words of Jesus to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount:

“...your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” *Matthew 6:8*

We can be confident that God knows the people we're praying for and what their needs are, far better than we ever can. We don't need to give information to God – our prayers are about aligning our hearts and minds with each other and with God's loving concern for those individuals. God already knows *all* about them, so, in asking that their needs be fulfilled by God, we don't actually need to be very specific.

We can perhaps best pray for those we don't know by hearing their name, holding it in our minds and hearts before God, and willing the same love and concern for them that we know God will pour out on them through God's Spirit. And if we feel a need for something more specific, maybe holding in our minds the image of Jesus at the bedside or on the sofa of the person who is going through a hard time can be a powerful way of asking for God's continued presence with them in their need.

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