

Simplify Your Spiritual Life

Ask People How You Can Pray for Them

Donald S. Whitney

Over and over I've seen one simple question open people's hearts to hear the gospel. Until I asked this question, they showed no interest in spiritual matters. But then after six words—only seventeen letters in English—I've seen people suddenly begin to weep and their resistance fall. The question is, "How can I pray for you?"

This may not seem like such a powerful question to you. Perhaps that's because you hear it, or a question like it, quite often. Your Bible study group or your church prayer meeting asks for prayer requests every week. You may even see requests for prayer solicited each Sunday morning in the worship bulletin.

But realize that most people in the world *never* hear such a question. And while many churchgoers know that a minister is willing to pray for them, in some traditions they're expected to make a special donation to the church for such services. So when you ask, "How can I pray for you?" and it's obvious that you're asking out of love alone, it can touch a person more deeply than you imagine.

This question is similar to one that Jesus Himself sometimes asked: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Matthew 20:32). For what we are really asking is, "What do you want me to ask Jesus to do for you?" And by means of this question, we can show the love of Christ to people and open hearts previously closed to the gospel.

I had tried to talk about the things of God many times to a business-hardened, retired executive who lived next door. He was a pro at hiding his feelings and keeping conversations at a superficial level. But the day we stood between our homes and I asked, "How can I pray for you?" his eyes filled with tears as his

façade of self-sufficiency melted. For the first time in seven years he let me speak with him about Jesus.

It's a short, easily remembered question. You can use it with longtime friends or with people you've just met. It doesn't seem too personal or pushy for those who'd rather give you a shallow answer just now, and yet it often leads to a full hearing of the gospel. You can ask it of people nearly every time you speak with them and it doesn't get old. Just simply and sincerely ask, "How can I pray for you?" You'll be surprised at the results.

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