

PRAYER POINTS

STEPS TOWARD EMPATHY

Empathy, one's ability to recognize, perceive, and feel directly the emotion of another is the key to praying for others with sincerity and effectiveness. While most people wish to possess this trait, there are real obstacles:

A lack of time and focus: If one hears of a situation that does not touch their heart, it is probably because they have not stopped to visualize the situation. Perhaps they have not made the effort to fully absorb the impact of the information. That may be because they are in a hurry and on to the next thing: before an emotional response can take hold.

Skepticism: Often, people protect themselves from becoming emotionally involved in other people's difficulties by presuming that the difficulties are either overstated or that there are other adequate sources of help available.

There are several practical exercises for one who wishes to develop a keener sense of empathy:

Be aware of your own emotions. This is essential to understanding the feelings of others. As you connect to the range of emotional experiences within yourself, you build a bridge to the emotions of others. This enables a person to feel the other person's need and to offer help.

Reflect on several situations in which you were able to demonstrate empathy. Then compare them with situations in which you missed opportunities to respond with empathy.

Think of someone who is in a situation for which prayer is needed. Think what you would want others to pray for in that situation.

When you hear of someone who needs your prayers, use visualization to create a more vivid image of their difficulties. Imagine their anguished expressions, their fears and hopes, even his family's feelings. Keep these images in mind as you pray for them.

One should make an effort to do good and to help alleviate one's pain...as actions influence one's heart. Similarly, one should pray regarding another's pain even if the words of prayer do not come from one's heart.

Identify with others both in heart and soul. A person can come to look upon themselves and others as one body if they act with kindness toward others with all their being. They will then feel completely united with them.

POINTS TO PONDER

Empathy is essential for one to effectively pray for others.

A lack of time and focus, or a cynical perspective, stands in the way of one's ability to feel for others.

By becoming more aware of one's own emotions and focusing on the vivid reality of others' situations, one can build a keener sense of empathy, which will in turn afford more heartfelt prayers.

Genesis 43:29 Looking about, he saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and asked, "Is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he went on, "May God be gracious to you, my boy." ³⁰ With that, Joseph hurried out, for he was overcome with feeling toward his brother and was on the verge of tears; he went into a room and wept there. (TNK)