

Creative meditative prayer idea

Praying for people facing bereavement or loss

This topic was our issue in focus for a week in April 2015; we created this resource out of tools we used to pray for it.

The first section – which we found helpful preparation – is taken and adapted from the mourning section of our full beatitudes resource - <http://www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/praying-with-the-beatitudes-pursuing-an-upside-down-life.pdf> - but if you are limited on time, you could start with section 2 onwards which is the start of what has been newly created to pray for people facing bereavement or loss.

This resource works well used individually or in small groups, but could easily be adapted for use with larger groups either by creating prayer stations from it, or by leading the activities from the front stage by stage. You will need: a copy of this resource printed out, enough photocopies of the templates provided on page 5 for each person taking part, pens, scissors and blue tac.

1. Preparation: Blessed are those who mourn (Matt 5: 1-2)

- Take a moment to consider what you think makes this beatitude different to the others. While every other beatitude talks about people with character attributes and lives that indicate they are submitted to God... everyone is universally addressed here. This promise of comfort is given to *everyone* who mourns, which we know includes absolutely *everyone* at some stage during their life.
- Consider that although mourning is universal whether people know God or not, we all often face a choice whether we mourn in each situation, or whether we stay at the early stages of grief. Consider also that we face the choice whether to mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). Thank God for the healing power of mourning to help us process bereavement and loss, and the privilege of reflecting his heart when we choose to mourn for our loss or alongside others in theirs.
- Thank God that in his compassion, comfort is extended to everyone who mourns. Thank him for drawing close to the broken-hearted (Psalm 34:18) and for the fact that he mourns with them. Thank him that he has reflected his desire to comfort the broken-hearted in the way he has created us, so that people around those who are grieving often naturally want to give comfort.
- Are you also grieving and processing loss? Bring your pain to God again and ask for his help in becoming more aware of the mourning process he is helping you through and the comfort and healing he is weaving through it. Tell him about the comfort you long to receive and ask that he would provide this directly through his presence and indirectly through bringing the right people around you.
- Ask for God's help to be someone who seeks to mourn with those who mourn without letting go of the reality of how your own losses are affecting you or recognising the limits of what he is calling you to empathise with or carry. Pray he will also help you to learn from your own experiences of mourning and receiving comfort in order to better walk alongside and comfort others.

2. Never alone

- Using the templates provided at the end of this resource, cut out a heart and a person shape.
- On the heart, jot down what comfort looks and feels like in your experience – both in terms of what you receive from God and from others. What helps you and others receive time and space to express mourning and to feel supported, loved, understood and able to heal?
- Thank God again that every person who is mourning is promised comfort - from God and from others.
- Cut out a person outline and hold it outside the heart. In the midst of grief, people can feel completely isolated. But the reality is they are always held in the heart of God – and in most cases in the hearts of others.
- Now place your person outline inside the heart as a symbol of this truth.

3. Who is on your heart?

- Spend some time listening to God – and your own heart – who comes to mind that you would especially like to pray for today. Who known to you is facing bereavement or loss? What are the situations in your community or in the headlines is characterised by grief? Ask God to highlight just one person or group of people to you now.
- Write the name of the person (or group of people) you have chosen to pray for onto the person.
- Pray for the permeation of God and others' shared mourning and ministering of comfort into their lives – that they would be able to receive it and feel less isolated in the midst of journeying through mourning and processing their loss.

4. Walking together through every stage...

- Many people have identified different stages to grief – sometimes four and sometimes five. These usually include some combination and ordering of the following distinct elements:
 - Shock and/or denial
 - Intense concern (where the loss comes to mind in every moment and context)
 - Feelings of deep sadness, anger, anxiety, guilt (and bargaining)
 - Acceptance
- Ask God to help you understand what thoughts and feelings will be at play for the person/people you are praying at each stage of their process and pray a blessing on them to helpfully move through these with God and others.

- Thank God for the massive spread of emotions expressed in the psalms which demonstrate how honest we can be with him and others about our struggles and feelings as we seek to move through them. Pray for the courage, freedom and support around the person/people you are praying for to enable them to express the emotions they are feeling healthily and safely.
- (If you are praying for someone personally known to you, it may be that you are quite strongly aware of elements of their process. Feel free to focus most of your prayers on the stage that they are at now, trusting God for the ones that are still to come in time.)

5. Refill: recognising God's ultimate responsibility

- You have sought to mourn with those that mourn. Ask God to make it clear to you whether you are to continue to pray for this person/people and to what extent and/or whether there is an action he is asking you to take to be a further part of ministering mourning and comfort into their loss.
- If you feel a sense of a continuation, spend some time asking for God's guidance on its nature, frequency and time-span. But either way, remember that God promises to comfort all who mourn, and that it is he – not you – who holds the ultimate responsibility for this person. Let go of any sense of responsibility, burden or desire to fix a situation that is beyond his call in this situation and/or the relationship commitment and role that you have in this person's life.
- Leave them in God's heart, recognising they are safe there.
- Ask that God would fill you with his Spirit again where you have poured out.

