

How Mr. Bud's prayers get me through COVID

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When I was a seminary student in New Orleans, I had the privilege and pleasure of serving as pastor of the Wanilla Baptist Church, about 2 ½ hours north of New Orleans. This South Mississippi congregation left a lasting mark on Meredith and me. Life in the parsonage was every bit as educational as my formal studies in the classroom.

The same group of faithful Christians shuffled in to three services a week at Wanilla Baptist Church. Sunday morning services had the big game feel and excitement. Sunday night was relaxed, with plenty of time to walk through the books of the Bible. The Wednesday evening prayer service was the family gathering.

We shared our burdens, worked out our problems and, from time to time, swapped produce. The nights Paul Wilson gave out brown paper sacks of peaches are particularly memorable.

Prayer on Wednesday night

Like in many congregations, prayer requests took on a bit of a predictable rhythm on Wednesday nights. After a little while, you just knew who was going to pray for what.

We all had sick folks we cared about. Certain people made sure the missionaries were covered. A saintly veteran always prompted us to pray for the national leaders charged with leading our country. A retired teacher made sure we lifted up teachers and kids. It was an organic division of labor.

Mr. Bud laid claim to the most unique and consistently offered prayer request. Each Wednesday evening, Mr. Bud asked us to pray for the lost, the providentially hindered and the unconcerned.

It took me a few Wednesday nights to sort out these categories. I think about them frequently these days, as we navigate the residual impact COVID-19 is having on the church. Mr. Bud's categories are helpful.

The lost

Mr. Bud had a true concern for men and women who lived outside of a relationship with God in Christ. Jesus' parables teach us lost persons are precious. They were precious to Mr. Bud. They were his lead prayer request.

The providentially hindered

Mr. Bud taught us to have prayerful concern for professing Christians who had life circumstances that kept them from gathering with their church community.

Some of these were chronically hindered due to age or illness. We kept up with this group. We visited them. We prayed for them. They watched Charles Stanley and John Hagee on the satellite dish. But they would rather have been coming to church.

Some others were acutely hindered through an emergency on the farm or a sudden commitment out of town.

The bottom line was the providentially hindered would be actively engaged in the church community if they were solely in control of the situation. We felt for them, because we loved them.

The unconcerned

We did not let a Wednesday roll by without a prayer for the unconcerned. This was a group of professing Christians who just simply did not engage the church any longer. They claimed Christ but had lost their commitment to the church.

Mr. Bud loved these folks with a heartbroken family love. They were to be prayed for and encouraged. His attitude and actions are helpful in the current climate.

What group are you in?

Every Christian in the United States became providentially hindered on the same day in 2020. It has been a long and difficult road. God has been faithful, and the church has been creative and resilient. There is much to celebrate. There also is a great deal to be concerned about.

As we progress from stage to stage out of the pandemic, Christians are reengaging the church in different ways. Some continue to be or have become freshly hindered by life circumstances. Church leaders must be sensitive to this and minister accordingly.

Others have been molded by new habits and have moved from hindered to unconcerned. The pastors I talk to are deeply concerned by this.

It is time for every Christian to search his or her heart. It is time for every Christian parent to search their calendars. For some, COVID has moved from concern to cover. This is something worth praying about.

I am leaning on Mr. Bud's example these days. As the church continues to emerge, we are lifted by our prayers. Prayer turns into love which turns into meaningful action. So friends, let us pray for the lost, the providentially hindered and the unconcerned and keep an eye peeled for

peaches.

Matt Snowden is senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Waco. The views expressed are those solely of the author.