

JIT Prayer

My first encounter with Just In Time Prayer came after I'd heard Stephen Curtis Chapman's song *Let Us Pray*. In that song he suggested that whenever we hear about a need, we should go ahead and pray right then.

I hear you say your heart is aching;
You've got trouble in the making;
And you ask if I'll be praying for you please.
And in keeping with convention
I'll say yes with good intentions,
To pray later making mention of your needs.
But since we have this moment here at heaven's door,
We should start knocking now, what are we waiting for?

The song had been getting a lot of play in those days, so it was fresh on my mind while I was sitting at Starbucks one morning drinking coffee and writing another book. Back then, I'd been there almost every day and I'd become a fixture with both the staff and the regulars, so I wasn't surprised when the woman who always ordered a Grande Soy Latte Extra Hot sidled up and began a hushed conversation. "I know you're a church person, so I hope you don't mind. I just learned my mom has breast cancer and it's pretty bad. Would you ask your church to pray for her?"

And there it was ... the perfect opening for Just In time Prayer.

Like the phrase suggests, Just In Time Prayer is practiced "just in time," that is, when it's needed most. The best thing about Just In Time Prayer is that when you step up, it accomplishes four things.

- It demonstrates you care.
- It shows you believe in prayer.
- It witnesses that you're a Christian.
- And it can help grow your church.

I assured the woman that I would be happy to enlist my church to pray, but remembering Chapman's song, I made an offer I'd never made before (remember, this was my first time).

"Could I pray for you now?"

Her eyes widened ever-so-slightly and she nodded. Since I was sitting on a Starbucks' bar stool, I was already at eye level. So I put my hand on her shoulder, I kept my eyes open, and I prayed four short sentences:

God, we come to you in prayer to ask for your healing touch on this woman's mother. Be especially present with the family in this difficult time. Give your wisdom to the doctors

and medical staff who minister to her. And give her mother strength to endure. In Jesus' name, Amen.

She raised her head, opened her tear-filled, and then confided, "No one has ever done that for me before." Before she left, I gave her my card, asked her to keep me posted about her mother's progress. She thanked me rather profusely and left with her latte.

I've been practicing Just In Time Prayer ever since, and have discovered it's a great practice that can help grow your church. Here are some things to keep in mind.

1. Whenever you have a conversation with someone, listen for prayer opportunities. People will often share something that's going on their lives, but too often we miss the chance to offer prayer.
2. Offer to pray when it's Just In Time. It may seem difficult to offer the first time you offer, especially if you've been uncomfortable praying aloud. But the response you'll get when you pray for someone is so gratifying that you'll stop hesitating in the future.
3. Keep it short and keep it simple. Don't use "church" or fancy language. Just pray as if you're having a simple conversation with Jesus.
4. Keep your eyes open. Don't call attention to yourselves as you pray. This is between you, God, and whomever you're praying for.
5. Pray in Jesus' name. Many religions end their prayers with an "Amen." By praying in Jesus' name you're making it clear to whomever you're praying for that you're a Christian. (And as a side note, praying in Jesus' name is in keeping with the instructions in Ephesians 5:20 and Colossians 3:17.)
6. Assure them that you'll continue to pray for them, give them your church card and ask them if it's okay for you to add them to the church's prayer list. If they agree, then be sure to add them.
7. Finally, ask if you can follow-up later to see how it's going. And again, if they agree, be sure to follow-up.

Just In Time Prayer is one of the most effective and powerful ways to share your faith – plus it can be an open door for those who most need the church.