



DEVELOPING
DYNAMIC
PRAYER
IN A CHURCH

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This e-book is published by the Church Prayer Leaders Network, a ministry that seeks to come alongside churches to help them make prayer foundational to their ministries and in the lives of their people. The CPLN has a robust website, <https://prayerleader.com>, with close to 1,000 articles and helps on prayer. Much of it is open to the public, but purchasing an annual membership will give you complete access to all the CPLN offers.

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JESUS BUILT A PRAYER MEETING!

One of my favorite books on prayer is a modern classic, *With One Accord in One Place: The Role of Prayer in the Early Church*. It was written in 1978 by Dr. Armin Gesswein, a Norwegian pastor, shaped in his early ministry by revival, who later had a profound influence—through prayer—on the early ministry of Billy Graham.

In the first chapter “[The Jerusalem Congregation—Full of Surprises](#),” Gesswein writes:

When Jesus builds His church He builds a praying congregation. Every single member was a praying member. A strong praying member. An intercessor. A real priest.

In this Jerusalem congregation we do not read of a “church within the church” (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*, as it is called). All the members were together. All were “with one accord in one place.”

Nor do we read of “the church prayer meeting,” as today. The church was the prayer meeting. The entire assembly was at prayer.

Could you imagine pastoring or being a part of a church that “was the prayer meeting,” where its central gathering was so prayer saturated that it—like the early church—could see its world transformed?

That is why I am so passionate about the power of corporate prayer—praying together on a unified theme—and what it can do to the life of a church.

I hope you will imagine that as well as you read through this little e-book.

ENCOURAGE AND EQUIP

This e-book is not put together to intimidate you. It comes out of my 22 plus years encouraging and equipping churches to pray. It is meant to inspire you, to challenge you, and to equip you as you consider how you can influence more powerful, more dynamic corporate prayer in your congregation.

Most of the chapters are popular articles I have written for the CPLN website, prayerleader.com, or are chapters in books I have written on growing prayer in the local church.

It is my desire to encourage and help you in your passion to grow prayer in your own church. After reading this, if it spoke to you, I highly encourage you to join the [Church Prayer Leaders Network](#), so I can continue to encourage and equip you in your ministry.

-Jonathan Graf

THE BENEFITS OF PRAYING TOGETHER

I was recently in a small church that for years has struggled to grow beyond sixty people. They are dear, sincere people who want to trust God to use them in greater ways in their community. I challenged them to focus more on Kingdom issues in their prayers (as opposed to just the needs of the congregation).

In a Facebook chat a few weeks later, the pastor's wife commented that they had tweaked the way they were praying, and a neighbor had prayed to receive Christ that week. A month after this they saw six women pray to receive Christ at a women's event. I will continue to pray for a renewed passion to seek the kingdom as they pray together.

Despite the fact that many churches do not have significant corporate prayer expressions, most prayer leaders and pastors believe praying together is important. But what are the benefits? There are many benefits, but here are three significant ones.

1. Praying together invites the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Chronicles 6-7, we see the dedication of Solomon's Temple. While "the whole assembly of Israel was standing there" (2 Chron. 6:3), Solomon prays a dedicatory prayer in which he invokes the presence of God. "Now, my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. Now arise, O Lord God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with

salvation, may your saints rejoice in your goodness” (6:40-41). Of course the presence of God entered with dynamic power!

There is a different atmosphere in churches that pray together and who have praying people. Worship seems more powerful. There is a sense of connection with God that is not there in non-praying churches.

A few years ago, I held a conference at a church in Michigan. The church had invited many other churches to attend the conference and they had responded—more than 300 were in attendance. As these people (hungry people who wanted to grow closer to God through prayer) worshiped and prayed together, something happened. God showed up! There were multiple times where we so sensed His presence that we had to just be silent for seemingly long stretches of time (up to five minutes).

A number of years ago at our prayer leaders’ convention, Dr. Tommy Barnett, pastor of First Assembly of God Church in Phoenix, Arizona, said, “The presence of God in the midst of a church is directly proportional to the amount of prayer that takes place there.”

When the Spirit of God is manifestly present, other things happen. People hear Him speak, giving direction and encouragement. The church in Antioch saw this truth in action: “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2-3). During a normal time of prayer and worship, the Holy Spirit gave crucial direction that forever changed the world—Saul (Paul) began his missionary work.

As you pray together as a congregation, God will begin to “show up” more and more.

2. Praying together increases the faith of a congregation to believe God for the miraculous.

Matthew 17 and Mark 9 tell the story of a father who brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples. They could not cast the demon out. The boy was taken to Jesus, who issued a simple command and the demon left. Later, the disciples came to Jesus and they were baffled. Why? Because they knew how to cast out demons. (The story takes place after they had been sent two by two into villages casting out demons and healing the sick.) They asked Jesus why they couldn't do it.

Jesus said two things: "because you have so little faith" (Matthew 17:20), and "this kind can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:29).

I wonder if the disciples attacked this demon issue cavalierly or routinely. They knew the words to say, the steps to take. But nothing worked because they were not prayed up enough. Their faith was not there as a result. There is a clear connection between prayer and faith (beyond the fact that we are supposed to pray in faith).

I believe the most significant thing that is lost in a church that does not have corporate prayer is faith. There is simply no expectation that God will do the miraculous. One of the main reasons most churches are stagnant and do not see God at work in miraculous ways in their midst is that most churches and individuals do not know what it is to pray in faith anymore. But faith grows as we pray together.

Here's how it works: Maybe I personally am going through a tough time. In the midst of it, I try to pray with trust and faith, but it is difficult because I only see the issue. If I go and pray with others, however, what happens? As I listen to others pray with more faith than I have, my faith grows.

Here's how it works in a corporate situation. Let's say our church is planning to build a new facility, and we feel it is God's will for us to do so. But I'm

an elder who is skeptical of the plans because they are beyond what we can afford to do. I begin to pray with others regarding this. God can now put a heart of trust in me, He can bring me to unity with others, He can give me the faith to believe Him for the miraculous—His vision and plan for my church. When I only pray by myself, that is less likely to happen.

Churches that do not pray together still minister in whatever ways they can, given their resources, abilities, and sacrifices. But churches that pray together begin to see the miraculous power of God at work in their midst. It goes beyond what they can and should do into what God wants to do through them.

A few years ago, our ministry's founder, Dave Butts, shared on becoming a praying church at a pastor and elder gathering at Lincoln College in Illinois. A number of leaders from Northpoint Church near St. Louis were there. A year or so after his presentation, Dave received an email from its prayer leader. In it, he shared what God had been doing in their church since the gathering. In March of 2009, Northpoint was not growing and its budget was \$40,000 in the red. Dave's message inspired these leaders to encourage and challenge their people to come out to their Sunday morning prayer times. The prayer meeting grew in number of attendees. They focused prayer on God's blessing, asking that His transformational power would once again move Northpoint forward. They put forth a prayer challenge called "750 in the Black," meaning they wanted to grow to more than 750 attendees and be financially in the black. Less than a year after increasing the prayers, they were well in the black and more than 700 were coming to services each week.

If you increase the level of praying together among your congregation, you will see more miracles happen as your faith rises.

3. Praying together moves people from seeking their own purposes to desiring God's purposes.

Most people's prayers seek the best fix for a situation. We typically pray whatever we are told to pray for a situation, with no real thought of "What does God want to do here?" Something happens to that dynamic, however, when people pray together. They start to let go of their desires to see their purposes fulfilled and start to open themselves up to what God wants. The value of this to a church is huge when it comes to ministry and decision making. If people pray together over an issue, even if people come to prayer thinking they know what the church should do, praying together opens them up to God's desire.

Years ago, I was a part of a church plant in Colorado Springs that was meeting in a school. We felt the Lord leading us to purchase land. We found two pieces of property—one was very close to the school and forty-two of our families, the other was three to four miles away. That distance was not a big deal, but it was not in the neighborhood we had been ministering in for the past five years. The property close to us cost 1.5 million, the other \$450,000. Many of us felt the issue was not the difference in price, but where God wanted us. Pray, figure that out, and He will provide. There were leaders on both sides of which piece to purchase. We started praying together. We even called a corporate prayer meeting on one of the pieces of property. As we did that, God began to put a vision of the ministry we could have on the \$450,000 piece of property into those of us who wanted the other property. That is what God will do when we pray together—agreement comes so we can pray His will with confidence.

People who are disgruntled with decisions a church has made usually have not prayed with the body over that issue. Pray together and watch unity grow.

THE CHALLENGE

Jeremiah 29:11-13 is a powerful promise written to a corporate body of people. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to

prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” The “all” there is numeric—God is saying if all of you would seek me, you will find the plans I have for you. If we want to see God’s blessing in our churches, if we want to see Jesus’ transforming power, the dynamic ministry of the Holy Spirit in our midst, then we need to pray together.

In this day and age, it is very difficult to get people to commit to more nights at a church. Many churches have stopped holding weekly prayer meetings. But these benefits suggest that churches need to reconsider providing opportunities for corporate prayer.

As leaders, seek the Lord as to what to tweak to make more praying together happen in your church. If you already have a weekly prayer meeting with more than a few attending, perhaps some tweaks to make it more dynamic will help. Then promote the meeting. There are people in most congregations who would attend a midweek prayer meeting if they were taught why it was important to the life of a church, and if they were regularly encouraged to go.

But, if you do not have something you can tweak—or if the prayer meeting is beyond tweaking—I encourage you to consider where you can add prayer to existing gatherings where most of your people already are. The worship service is a primary place to include more dynamic times of prayer. See Chapter 3, “Prayer in the Worship Service” for ideas. If you have a strong adult Sunday school program or a very active small group ministry, this can work too—though in small groups, because of their nature, it is very difficult to move people to pray beyond the needs of just the people in the group.

Also, remember that you can have powerful corporate prayer on a smaller corporate level. What do I mean by that? When all your elders meet, their prayers for church-related issues are powerful because of their authority over the church. If all your Sunday school teachers meet together and

pray over the ministry of the Sunday school, there is a powerful corporate nature to that. By encouraging additional “Spirit-empowering prayer” among the leaders of different areas of ministry, powerful things will happen as a result.

5 BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF CORPORATE PRAYER

A number of years ago, I was preparing to go to California to facilitate a prayer weekend in a Presbyterian church there. I had been planning the event with their prayer leader and his committee. As we planned, the committee felt that it would be great to have me lead a prayer time in the two morning worship services. They had never really experienced a time where anyone other than a person from the platform would pray in the service.

This would be an event where I would guide people to pray on a theme in groups. It would be a stretch for their staid people. They presented the idea to their pastor. He balked. We can't make people feel uncomfortable like that, he surmised. He and I talked through what I would do. No one would be forced to pray; I would put some prayer points and a sample prayer on a power point screen; it would only go 3-4 minutes. He finally allowed it.

Even though we were nervous as to how people would respond. It went off fabulously well. People prayed. I remember standing on the platform in each service (with about 400 people or so in each) and listening to a glorious din of voices rising out of that beautiful sanctuary. During the second service I even had a vision while they were praying (something that had only happened to me once prior in my life). I told the congregation later that I saw their new multi-purpose building filled with people and many people responding to the gospel in there. I said I don't know what that means, but watch.

The pastor got nothing but positive comments afterward, comments like,

“that was so dynamic,” “I have never prayed in public before,” and “we have to do that again.” They started regularly doing prayer times like that in their services in the future. And the vision? The prayer leader emailed me about 9 months later. They had planned to do an outreach event with a Christian magician in their multi-purpose building. So many people bought tickets that they had to schedule a second “show.” Dozens responded to the gospel that weekend through the events.

Why was the response so significant? Because the prayer time was not the typical prayer most of us are used to—focused on fix-it needs that have little relation to God’s kingdom purposes. If you develop prayer that focuses outward, and that utilizes scriptural principles of corporate prayer, you will see your people get on board.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF CORPORATE PRAYER

There are five biblical principles of powerful corporate prayer. The more these elements are present in our prayer times (during worship or other times), the more powerful the prayer.

1. Desperation

Ezra records a time of corporate prayer surrounding a three-day fast. The priest Ezra was taking a group of Jews back to repopulate Israel. They were going to cross dangerous terrain and needed protection.

There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, “The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is

against all who forsake him.” So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer. (Ezra 8:21-23)

They prayed out of desperation. They were in trouble if God did not come through. The interesting thing here, however, is that Ezra had a solution. Ask the King for soldiers to go along. From the pages of Ezra we see he had a good relationship with the King. The king had given them permission to go. But Ezra refused to take that option. He refused to do the obvious thing in favor of relying on God.

We need to learn from that. The more desperate we are about something, the more vibrant our prayers. When going to prayer corporately, look for ways to impress a sense of desperation in your people. Remember what happened in churches following 9/11? Prayer meetings were full for several weeks. Why?

We will see corporate prayer become more dynamic—and have greater participation—if our focus is about something with a measure of desperation in it. When you plan the focus about which to pray, figure out a way to build in desperation. Is there something happening on the world front or in your city that has people’s attention? Pray about that. When you can pray in a sense, “we can’t solve this, God; we need You,” you will see more people participate and their prayers will be filled with greater passion.

2. One Focus

Powerful prayer is focused prayer. It is not a shotgun approach—giving prayer requests and praying for ten different things. Effective corporate prayer is topical. The leader explains, “now we are going to pray for . . .” We see this played out in the story of Peter’s imprisonment (Acts 12). Verse 5 tells us “so Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.” This obviously was a very focused prayer meeting! They did not take requests and pray for everything under the sun. No, “Martha,

how is that back of yours? How can we pray?” and then “Oh yeah, don’t forget Peter. Who’s got an update on Peter? He’s still in prison isn’t he? Let’s remember Peter.”

One of the ways over the years that the church has severely weakened corporate prayer is that we let prayer be about the people there, rather than about God. We allowed prayer to focus on every little fix-it need of those in attendance, and ignored the kingdom advance of God. As Daniel Henderson describes, we made prayer horizontal rather than vertical.

That kind of prayer is dull and no one really wants to be there. In any prayer gathering it is far more dynamic to let a leader pick a focus and stick to it. As soon as you give up leadership to everyone’s agenda, you lose the dynamic nature of corporate prayer.

Especially if you are having a prayer time in the morning worship service, you need to pick one subject for which to pray. That will be far more powerful than opening it up to requests.

3. One Voice

Another powerful principle about corporate prayer is the One Voice principle. And that is a numerical principle. As was mentioned above, the same story of Peter in Acts tells us that the church was earnestly and constantly praying to God. Everyone. Not five people in a little room on Wednesday night. A powerful dynamic occurs when an entire congregation prays on the same theme.

That principle is why all-church prayer initiatives are a great practice. A prayer initiative is where the entire church prays on one theme for a set period of time—usually a week or 30 or 40 days. Usually they use prayer guides that get everyone praying on the same page.

If you want to have the One Voice principle in your church, you need to make prayer accessible in those places where you have the most people gathered. The primary place you will have the entire congregation together is Sunday morning worship. While I think the morning worship service is the most significant place to develop times of corporate prayer, there are other ways to see the One Voice principle at work.

Look for places where everyone in a given ministry is gathered. A church board meeting, an elders meeting, a Sunday school teachers meeting, youth ministry leaders, worship participants gathering, etc. In any one of these gatherings One Voice prayer can take place. If that group prays for the kingdom purposes of that group—what ministry areas are under its authority—than they are calling out with one voice for those areas of ministry. But alas, even when those groups get together, when they add a prayer time to their meeting, it is usually focused on the needs of those in the ministry. If that would stop, and they would focus on the kingdom purposes of that ministry, something very dynamic would happen!

4. Invoking the Presence

In 2 Chronicles 6-7 at the dedication of Solomon's Temple, we see God's glory indwelling His temple so much that everyone fell with their faces to the ground. No one went inside. In Solomon's dedication prayer, he invited God to come and dwell:

“Now, my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

“Now arise, LORD God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.

May your priests, LORD God, be clothed with salvation, may your faithful people rejoice in your goodness.” (2 Chronicles 6:40-41)

When we think of the presence of God we often just take comfort in the presence spoken of in Matthew 18:20: “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” But there is another presence of God—what old time Puritans used to call, “His manifest presence.” That is a presence you can literally sense. It is a transforming presence.

That is the presence Solomon invoked to come into the Temple. We need to look for ways to encourage that presence of God into our midst as well. He comes by invitation and He comes through praise. Psalm 22:3 tells us that God inhabits the praises of His people.

There is no better place to regularly experience the manifest presence of God than the worship service. When we pray in the middle of, or following a time of intense worship—worship that is entirely focused upward, on Jesus Christ rather than on us—we more readily sense His presence and our prayers become more kingdom focused. Why? Because when we see God for who He really is, our needs pale in comparison. We become inspired to focus on His purposes and kingdom.

By the same principle, if you want to make weekly prayer gatherings that are held outside the morning worship service, any time you can add worship that is focused on Jesus Christ, you will see the passion and intensity of the prayers increase.

5. Agreement

The last element of powerful corporate prayer is praying in agreement. Agreement is different than focus. It is where everyone knows and agrees with what they are asking God. Often when a congregation prays about an issue in a church there is not agreement. We all have a different idea of what should be done. So when we pray, we often just pray our own agendas.

In a leader-directed prayer time during a morning worship service, it is easier to be in agreement. The leader simply gives direction as to what they will ask God to do. He might say something like this, “After seeking God, the leaders of our church feel that God is moving us to look for a piece of property on which to build. Let’s ask God to reveal that piece of land to us.”

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

So how do all of these work in a prayer gathering? Let’s say you have a situation where God is really blessing your congregation with growth. More and more people are coming to church; you are starting to pack your facilities out. Your leadership knows that you need to do something to allow for this growth, but what? You decide to seek the Lord for His direction. In fact you decide we need to get everyone praying about this issue. So you call for special times of prayer, including an all-church prayer meeting.

At that prayer meeting you have your sense of desperation because you have acknowledged you do not know what to do. You need God’s wisdom and direction. You will have your one focus. The prayer meeting you call everyone to, will not be open to requests or other prayer needs. You will only focus on direction. You will have your one voice. Because of the nature of the subject, I suspect most of your congregation will come out—many not because they want to pray, but because they are curious about what others think. You have a time of worship and you invite the Holy Spirit to come in, to guide and direct your prayers, to reveal His will.

But you won’t have your agreement—at least not at the start. Why? Because many will come already knowing what you should do. Some think you should go to two services; others, plant a daughter church; others, rent the Kmart building that is empty down the street. But here is what will happen: Agreement will come in any issue if people pray together. As we pray with others, we become more open to God’s agenda and we let go of our own.

People at that prayer meeting will begin to let go of their idea as they pray and start sensing what God truly wants to do.

Agreement will come as you pray. By the same token, if you have an intense issue in your church you are praying about, and you reach a decision, I can just about guarantee that those who criticize the decision did not pray with the body about it!

Remember my illustration from page 7 when I was involved in a church plant in Colorado Springs and we came to the point where we wanted to buy our own facility? God brought us to complete unity as a church over what we should do. This happened because we prayed together. God moved some of us to drop our agenda and wholeheartedly desire His!

WORK AT IT

Having dynamic prayer times that focus on kingdom advancement will revolutionize your congregation. People will feel more passion and a stronger desire to pray if you work at developing these spiritual principles of corporate prayer. Fringe people and those who don't view the Christian life much beyond what's in it for me, will be impacted spiritually. And you will begin to see greater and greater areas of transformation in people's lives, in your church and the community around.

PRAYER IN THE WORSHIP SERVICE

A number of years ago, I was doing a prayer weekend in a church in Pennsylvania. I was doing a Friday night and Saturday seminar event for its people and preaching on Sunday morning. The pastor and I had talked about me leading a 5-minute prayer time in the service where we would get people praying in groups (something new for the church). I planned for an outreach type prayer agenda focusing on the community.

But something happened. On Saturday night the pastor called me and told me of a tragedy that would affect his people. This church had a ministry to their local neighborhood police station. They prayed for the officers and their families, gave gifts and did acts of kindness for them as well. One of the officers there had been killed in the line of duty.

I told the pastor that we needed to change the focus of our prayer time to that, and that he needed to lead it. We talked about some prayer points and came up with the new plan.

The next morning when the prayer time came, that church just exploded in voices raised to the heavenlies. I was in the front row, but I turned and prayed with an older couple, probably in their 70s. Both of them prayed out loud, multiple times in the “expanded to almost 10-minute prayer time.” Later the pastor told me that he had never known either of the two individuals I prayed with to pray out loud in church! They overcame their fear and prayed because they were engaged with the topic!

ENGAGING YOUR CONGREGATION

The early church in Acts did four things when it gathered together. “They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). I don’t think that means 25 percent of the time was given to each, but it clearly shows a significant importance was put on each element. If our church gatherings were measured against those four things, where would we stand?

Clearly corporate prayer was given a significant place in early church meetings. In our day, most churches relegate prayer to a pastor or leader praying once or twice in a service, maybe a worship leader offering a simple prayer amid a song set, perhaps there is a time for people to come forward and be prayed for. While these are important expressions of prayer, they do not usually constitute powerful, corporate prayer.

Instead, corporate prayer has been relegated to the weekly prayer meeting, certainly an important service and event for a church. Unfortunately many churches have disbanded these due to lack of interest or sheer boredom. Most prayer meetings have become a few sitting around in a circle, taking requests about all the physical and personal needs of the church’s members, then praying until each one has been mentioned. It is hardly a dynamic time of powerful corporate prayer.

Congregations need to experience powerful, dynamic, earth-changing corporate prayer. And the best place to experience it is in the Sunday morning worship service. Why? Three reasons:

1. Prayer is not truly corporate unless it is done with all your people.

The morning worship is the only place where you have most of your people each week. Acts 12:5 tells us that “Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.” We can have

good times of people praying together at other moments, but the value of an entire congregation calling out to God in agreement is extremely powerful. When a congregation agrees on something and prays, it is effective!

2. It teaches your people how to pray.

These days, a majority of believers never participates in times of praying with others. They may observe prayer a few times in a worship service, but they are never required to try it. As a result, many believers do not have any confidence to pray. When they can see and hear others pray, that can grow their own prayer lives as well.

3. It is easier to have a leader-led prayer time in the morning worship service than at a less formal weeknight meeting.

This is important for prayer to be truly effective. In the midweek service, often times well-meaning pray-ers will take the prayer meeting away from a leader to pray about their own agendas. This will not happen in a worship service.

As a result you can better “manipulate” prayer to operate with the biblical principles of corporate prayer. In a leader-directed prayer time during a morning worship service it is easier to be in agreement. The leader simply gives direction as to what they will ask God to do. He might say something like this, “After seeking God, the leaders of our church feel that God is moving us to look for a piece of property on which to build. Let’s ask God to reveal that piece of land to us.”

WAYS TO INCORPORATE PRAYER IN THE SERVICE

When incorporating group prayer into the morning worship service several

principles are important.

First until your people are used to it, keep it fairly short. Never let them go more than five minutes in a prayer group on one topic. Two to three minutes is plenty.

Second, put prayer points and even a simple prayer on power point or in the bulletin. Instruct those who are nervous about joining in that they are not being forced to pray, but if they would like to, here is a prayer or some thoughts to use when they pray.

Third, when you start doing this, and perhaps a few times afterward, give them some prayer protocol instructions. Remind them that they should not pray like they do when they are by themselves. All prayers should be short, 30-45 seconds maximum, to give everyone a chance to participate and so no one is intimidated. People can pray multiple times in a group.

Some of you pastors may be thinking, *Our church has lots of visitors, many of who are not yet believers. I can't make people pray in groups in that setting.* Sorry pastor, but you are completely wrong. I had a mega church pastor, who regularly did times of prayer in his morning services tell me, "unbelievers who come to church know churches pray. They expect it. If you make it easy for them, they are not put out if you ask them to participate."

Also, a few years ago I was leading a prayer gathering in a small church, where an unsaved friend of one of the teens in the church came with her friend. She was so touched by the presence of God during a prayer time that the believing friend and her mother led this girl to Christ right during the prayer time. Provide people the opportunity to participate in times of connecting with God in a service and you will be amazed at the results.

Here are some practical ways to incorporate prayer in a worship service setting.

Pray the Thoughts of a Song

Many songs—especially contemporary ones—are prayers themselves, focused on Christ. If we mean what we are singing, then we are praying when we sing. But, another benefit is that songs can be catalysts to dynamic prayer. For example, a song like “Touching Heaven, Changing Earth” can foster in a time of prayer for revival. A song like “Breathe” can generate prayer for spiritual hunger in each other. A song like “Crown Him with Many Crowns” or “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” can move into times of corporate praise where we spontaneously shout out praises to God. A song like “God of This City” can move into a powerful time of praying for your community.

To do it, a worship leader simply guides the people into groups of three to six and instructs them on what to pray. The musicians keep playing to provide some background music. After two to three minutes end the time by moving into the next song.

If a worship leader struggles to know what to do, you can teach him or her how. Perhaps suggest a prayer topic that some songs you regularly do might lend themselves to. If the worship leader is uncomfortable the first time or two, plan to have the pastor or a prayer leader who is comfortable quietly come up on stage as you near the point in the song when you will do it, and have them lead the congregation.

Set Aside a 3 to 5 Minute Prayer Time

Pick a topic of importance to your church or leaders. An upcoming outreach event, a special program, a deep need in the church, the nation, etc. The more the topic relates to something your congregation is concerned with (such as the sudden death of the police officer), the more dynamic the time will be. Have people pray in groups over this topic. But again, offer clear direction and ideas of things to pray. Don't leave your people to scramble for thoughts to pray. Mature pray-ers will expand on the prayer points you give them, and less confident people will happily stick to the prayer points

you provide.

As your people get used to praying in the service, you can expand the time if a special topic calls for that to happen, or if it is apparent that your people are very engaged in the prayer time.

Open Microphone Praying

Another possible prayer opportunity is to place a live microphone down on the floor in front of the stage. At a point in the service you can use it in one of two ways. Have two to four people selected to pray from the mic on a given topic. Let people know that your selected people and the microphone is not open for anyone. This is a powerful way for your congregation to hear how different people pray over the same issue.

If you get brave enough, you might have a time where the microphone is open to anyone who wants to pray. A worship leader can set that up by giving some instructions. (A worship leader can also end it quickly if it gets a little off target, by simply leading the congregation into the next song!)

Pray the Sermon Application

A pastor often has something in the sermon that needs to sink in to the people's hearts. Why not have a time (two to three minutes) where people get into groups of three or four and pray that application into each other. The pastor needs to give specific instructions so they understand what they are to pray. A bulletin insert or power point slide with the important points are all that is needed.

Pastor Guided Prayer

Another excellent way to incorporate prayer is to have the people pray a prayer in unison at the end of the message. The pastor can put a prayer together that reflects exactly the truths and applications with which the people are to walk away. Instruct them to pray out loud after you. You say a phrase and give them time to repeat it. Not only will this do something powerful by praying the application into them, but people learn to pray. They hear their pastor pray and they begin to understand the kinds of spiritual things they can ask God for in prayer.

A Time to Pray for Needs

While this is not corporate prayer in the truest sense, it can be a wonderful time of blessing for your people. Simply put, you set aside time in the service where people can pray for others. It can be done a number of ways. During worship or at the end of a service have prayer teams (teams of two or three people—a husband/wife team or two males, two females) come forward or line up around the church. As you sing, people can come forward, walk up to a team and be prayed for.

In a smaller congregation it can be meaningful to have people with a need stand where they are. Then have groups gather around them to pray for their need. The congregation keeps worshipping while this is going on.

A note of caution with needs praying: While these are great and meaningful things to do, do not do this type of praying every week if there are no other regular times of visible prayer in your service where you are focused on God's kingdom agenda. Why? Because you will be perpetuating the false view of prayer that is so prevalent in the western church: prayer is for me and my needs. Offering loving prayer for people's needs is important, but it should not be the most significant prayer focus in a church that wants to be kingdom-minded!

CONCLUSION

I consult with a lot of church leadership teams on making prayer more foundational to the ministry of their church. Almost every church I work with recognizes that in today's world, it will be almost impossible to start up a weekly prayer meeting if one is not already in place. I always challenge them, if your people won't come to prayer meeting, take prayer meeting to the people. Having times of corporate prayer in the morning worship service can have a profound effect on your people and church. People learn to pray and develop a heart to pray what is on God's heart.

One of the reasons, I suspect that many churches do not experiment with doing some of these dynamic prayer experiences in a service is the "getting away from us" factor. In this era of services being programmed down to the minute, and churches having multiple services so they have to get people in and out quickly, prayer that is not fully controlled is a dangerous proposition. What happens if someone prays too long, or lots of people come up to the mic to pray?

Most of the suggestions this chapter offers can be easily controlled in how much time is allotted. The open microphone is the only one that really might cause a time issue, but even that can be controlled if a leader says "we have time for three or four people" or something like that.

You can also be prepared to cut something else if the prayer time is dynamic and ends up taking longer than expected. If your people who are leading the service understand that you want to offer people meaningful connections to God, and that is happening through this prayer time, then they should—hopefully—be willing to give up the last song, or—gasp—maybe pastor, you'll have to give up a little of your message time.

And what is the worst that can happen? God shows up, meets His people, and you all spend the service in His presence on the floor?

HINDRANCES TO CORPORATE PRAYER

A few years ago, I was leading a prayer weekend in a megachurch. It was the third time I had been to that church over a three-year period, so I had built solid trust relationships with the pastoral staff. The church's prayer coordinator and I had talked months prior about holding a five-minute corporate prayer time within the morning worship service (6,000 attendees in two services).

We both sensed the congregation was ready for such an event. She was excited, but when we approached the senior pastor about the idea, he was very reluctant to allow it. He believed too many people would be uncomfortable with the thought of praying in groups with others. Even after explaining how I would facilitate the time so that no one felt awkward, he said no.

Though corporate prayer was clearly practiced in the early church (Acts 1-13), very few Western churches these days practice it. Why? Why do we allow our comfort to override a clear practice of the New Testament Church (Acts 2:42)?

God has given us two stilts in the Christian life to allow us to rise above the world and walk the Christian life in vibrancy and power. But most churches today—and our people—only hop on one stilt. What are the stilts? The Word and prayer.

In Acts, the two were given equal emphasis. Today in most evangelical churches the Word is taught, but prayer is more assumed than taught and

practiced. We need to change that if we want to see spiritual power return to our churches.

Few pastors will argue against the need for praying together in a corporate way. No one can argue from Scripture that it is not important or that the early church did not pray together. But few pastors and churches today make an effort to develop this style of prayer. Why?

I think it stems from the extreme difficulty in overcoming all the hindrances. To make praying together a natural part of the spiritual dynamic of a congregation takes work. But if a church wants to be New Testament-like, spiritually healthy, and truly Kingdom-minded, it must pray corporately.

Based on what I have observed throughout my years in prayer ministry, beyond the obvious—that the enemy does not want to see churches pray and therefore opposes it—here are some hindrances to corporate prayer in a local church, and some potential cures.

Hindrance #1: No Personal Prayer Life

By far the biggest hindrance to corporate prayer is individuals within a church who have weak or no personal prayer lives. The believer who doesn't pray when alone is not going to get excited about being asked to pray with others. Most churches fail to recognize that many of their people do not have healthy prayer habits. In fact, statistics indicate that in most churches more than 80 percent of a congregation admits to poor prayer lives.

Cure: Don't give up on corporate prayer because nonpraying believers won't come to a prayer meeting or will be uncomfortable if asked to pray together in a worship service. Instead, raise the level of prayer discipleship in your church. Teach people to pray and give them experiences and opportunities to practice. With all the excellent resources on prayer available today, believers have no excuse for not praying. Look for strategic ways to teach

prayer—through small groups, men’s ministry, Sunday school classes, and the pulpit.

Hindrance #2: Poor Past Prayer Experiences

People may not like to pray together because they have experienced poor, dull, corporate prayer in the past. Their picture of corporate prayer or the typical “prayer meeting” is negatively skewed. Many people’s image of “praying together” is six seasoned saints in a room each praying for 15 minutes, all fully covering the church’s prayer list of everyone’s ailments. That is not corporate prayer. That is simply personal prayer practiced in a group.

Cure: Cast a different vision of corporate prayer for your people. Offer them a more dynamic model, where a leader directs the prayers on one theme, not a hodgepodge of prayers based on everyone’s individual agendas. Don’t let your times of prayer be about them, but rather about Him.

Hindrance #3: No Expectations

One of the most significant reasons people do not pray with others is that they have no expectation that anything will happen when they pray. While most will never say that they don’t believe “prayer works,” they often pray with a sense of “wish or hope” more than faith. We know God is big enough and we hope He will do something, but we do not really believe He will.

Cure: This will only change from the top down. Leaders need to model expectancy. If the elders and pastor don’t believe anything will happen, nothing will! In order for the people to glimpse a vision of a God who moves when we pray, the church leaders need to demonstrate that vision from the pulpit and publicize testimonies of answered prayer within the church.

Hindrance #4: Fear of Complaints and Discomfort

Many church leaders are like my pastor friend who did not allow a corporate prayer time in his morning worship service. They restrict corporate prayer within a service to one leader praying from the platform. That way, those who do not like to pray out loud won't feel uncomfortable. These leaders also fear complaints from congregation members if they encourage group prayer experiences.

Cure: Corporate prayer times can be made easy and nonthreatening. Keep them within two to five minutes. Always direct the prayer by giving people topics to pray about. Put prayer points and a prayer on the screen. Let people know that they may pray multiple times within the group, but challenge them not to pray longer than 30-45 seconds at any one time. Tell people that if they are uncomfortable praying out loud, no one will force them to do so. They can simply pray in their hearts.

If there are unbelievers present, they are not generally the ones bothered by this practice. Non-believers know Christians are supposed to pray and that prayer happens in churches. Typically, when they witness it, they are not turned off—even if requested to be a part of it.

A few years ago, I was speaking in a church in California, and their prayer leader wanted a time of prayer in the worship service. The senior pastor, though reluctant because of the comfort level of his people, allowed it. The prayer time became so dynamic and powerful that people came to him for weeks afterward, asking to do it again. They now pray corporately on a regular basis!

Hindrance #5: Staying in Control

Church services today are typically well planned out (even to the minute with event-planning software), full of “stuff” and often with no margin

available at the end due to another service or planned event. Even if prayer is incorporated into the plan, it must adhere to the schedule: “2.5 minutes and no more.”

I was recently in a church where, before I got up to preach, the pastor told me I had to be done at a certain time or he would come up to get me. He said it with a smile, but he got his point across. I understand that there is usually no need to speak beyond a certain amount of time, but what’s wrong with this picture—so typical in the Western church? What if God actually moved in a service?

If prayer is to be effective, it does not fit into this time-constraint mold. Prayer is giving up control. What happens if one of the pray-ers, suddenly empowered by the Spirit, becomes impassioned and goes over the time limit?

Most leaders understand it is difficult to control prayer’s length, so it becomes easier to leave out any opportunity for corporate prayer in a worship setting.

Cure: If your church has no margin, then conduct a prayer time in which people organize into groups and pray briefly about one topic at a time. The time length can easily be controlled from the platform. The leader simply prays a short closing prayer to wrap it up. Or if the prayer time is during the musical worship portion of the service, the worship team starts singing again to bring prayer to a close.

Hindrance #6: Church Is for Me

Another major hindrance to corporate prayer is the individualistic attitudes of many congregants. Many believers look at their church with a consumer mentality. If their needs aren’t met, they look for a place that will meet those needs. This mentality highly affects corporate prayer. It is hard to get

people to want to pray for anything but their own needs.

We unknowingly perpetuate this problem when most visible prayer is about people's needs, rather than outreach and the move of the Spirit among us.

Cure: Administer a healthy dose of outreach praying. For several months, focus entirely on praying for the lost, for your community, the nation, the world. Focus any prayer from the pulpit on those things. In a prayer meeting, don't take requests. Instead, focus your time with prayer guides, a topic, or other tools.

A CLEAR CALL

Effective corporate prayer, especially dynamic prayer within corporate worship services, can happen in any church—but it takes effort, prodding, and equipping. Any pastor or leader who tries is in good company.

The Book of Acts provides proof of the powerful role that praying together had on the early church. However, within 20 to 30 years church leaders already had to challenge believers to pray. By the time the epistles were written, Paul and James needed to remind those under their care to pray. Paul asked people to join his missionary endeavors by praying. He also challenged people to pray continually, pray when they had anxiety, and pray for those in authority.

James had to write a lengthy passage, in chapter 5 of his epistle, encouraging people to pray more often. I suspect Paul and James made these challenges because they saw the people slacking off where prayer was concerned.

Don't give up calling your people and church to prayer. Show them how by offering easy and manageable ways to do it. It is biblically right to do so—and so spiritually powerful!

THE PURPOSE OF YOUR PRAYER MEETING

IT IS IMPORTANT TO DESIGN PRAYER MEETINGS
WITH PARTICIPANTS IN MIND

A while ago, I was engaged as a consultant by a mega-church that wanted to improve as a praying church. In the course of our discussion, the senior pastor shocked me when he said, “I can’t recommend our weekly prayer meeting to many believers.”

Why?

About 8-10 people attended the meeting (in this church of 6,000). They were sincere people. But they were all seasoned intercessors who did not know what it meant to pray in a public gathering. They all prayed exactly as they would have in their own prayer closet. They practiced personal prayer in a group setting.

Each one who prayed, would pray for 10-20 minutes at a time, covering everything they could think to cover. And some would do so with emotion that was a little “over the top” for those around them. Tears and loud sobbing were a part of it. For the normal individual, it was downright uncomfortable.

This pastor felt—and rightly so—that the prayer meeting would set less mature pray-ers back, rather than teach and encourage them to participate.

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE?

Asking “What is the purpose of your prayer meeting?” may seem like a silly question. You want to seek God. You want His power, and direction, His will to be released through your prayers. You want to see your church become more dependent on Him. What do you mean, “What’s the purpose of our prayer meeting?”

Recently, I participated in leading an evening of prayer at a church. It was the culminating event to a conference that had several speakers. The pastor wanted all of us—him, me and the other leader—to each feel free to step to the microphone and lead a section of the prayer time. We had a little planning for direction ahead of time, but not a lot.

The prayer meeting was fine as prayer meetings go, but something happened that got me thinking about the purpose of a prayer meeting.

At one point in the service, the microphone was opened to individuals to come up and pray. At first, instruction was given as to some general topics (schools in the area, etc.), but as was typical at prayer meetings, it became a mix of topics that were on the hearts of the pray-ers. What struck me was that the intensity of the praying increased. So much so, that soon the prayer meeting became not participatory for all, but it became a spectator event where the congregation watched as only intense intercessors prayed. After a while we got them back into groups to pray on a selected topic and the meeting was participatory for everyone again.

When I go into a church and lead a prayer meeting, I have two primary purposes in mind—and neither one has anything to do with seeking God or power, though those are important. I want to show a more dynamic way to conduct a prayer meeting, and I want to do so in a way that will draw in the weakest and most immature pray-er. I do not want to intimidate anyone. Not all prayer meetings need to have that purpose. Mine do because of what I have been brought in to accomplish in a church when I speak there.

I am trying to get the average pew sitter engaged in prayer.

My point is that a good prayer meeting leader should think about purpose when he or she plans the meeting. What do you want to accomplish with this prayer meeting? Do you want it to be accessible to all, or should it be an outlet for the strongest intercessors to go after God's heart? If the former, then you have to watch format and passion. If the latter then you can't worry that you only have five people coming to the prayer meeting.

If you are calling the meeting in order to "storm the gates of heaven" over a specific situation, than there is no problem with intercessors "cutting loose" and praying strong, bold, emotional, and even long prayers. But if you want to have a prayer gathering that is accessible to every maturity-level believer in your church, then it needs to be formatted in a way where even the weakest pray-er would feel comfortable there, and can see how to participate. That probably means restricting the length of individual prayers and having more prayer in smaller groups.

Many churches try to design their primary prayer meeting so it can be a place where any believer can learn, participate and experience prayer. This means you use a variety of prayer methods, not sticking to the same format week after week. You make sure that people understand proper protocol when praying in a group: short prayers on one topic, have a leader give the prayer subjects, break up how you pray—sometimes in small groups, sometimes as a large group. If you allow the seasoned intercessors to "cut loose" in this format, soon it will only be them praying at these gatherings.

But churches also recognize the need to have a seasoned team of prayer warriors whom it can call on to pray fervently, with no restrictions, over important issues of deep need. Kind of like a prayer SWAT team! There are times to free those people to pray anyway they want. But in most churches, that place is not the weekly prayer meeting that is available to all believers. There might be some times when a subject comes up at a regular all-church prayer gathering where you want these warriors to intercede. That's

okay. Let them know ahead of time if you can. But if that is not possible, in the midst of the meeting, you could say, “We need our prayer warriors freely to press in on this issue.” They will.

Even the Apostle Paul recognized different purposes for prayer and levels of intercession. In Colossians, he told the believers, “Epaphras . . . is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured” (Colossians 4:12). Here, he referenced an intense level of prayer. But in writing to Timothy, he reminded him that “petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving [should] be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-4). All levels of prayer, different types of prayer should be used in praying for the salvation of people. Different types of prayer for different purposes.

WHAT ABOUT MULTI-CHURCH PRAYER?

Understanding a prayer meeting’s purpose is also important when you try to bring churches in a community together to pray. If you have multiple theological streams of intercessors together, you should still clarify your primary purpose. If it is unity, then you want to do everything you can to assure that it is formatted to appeal to the most conservative church that was invited. Unity is more important than allowing prayer practices that might make some uncomfortable. You want to bring everyone in.

But if your purpose is something else (and it is perfectly fine to have a different purpose)—say to bring intercessors together to do spiritual warfare over your community—then you may not need to worry about making the meeting “comfortable” for every possible participant.

Don’t forget to consider these things when you plan your prayer times.

Recognize that if the prayer time is geared toward one purpose, then you may not see something you want to see—more people, deeper intercession, etc. Also recognize that your prayer meeting will be more effective if you format it with a purpose in mind. Remember that if others don't understand or share your purpose, they can work against you. It might be important to explain your purpose with the group so they can understand what you are trying to accomplish, and what might be appropriate within that purpose.

CONCLUSION

While some of you may be sighing, “I just want to get people to come out to a prayer meeting. Now I have to think about purpose, too?” Don't feel stress. It really is not that hard. If you want a gathering accessible to all believers, then a few simple principles need to be put in place.

If it is not important to accommodate the less mature pray-er, that is perfectly okay. But remember that, like my opening illustration, the gathering will eventually reflect the prayer styles of the most dominant intercessors. There is lots of value in all kinds of prayer and with all kinds of purposes. Lots of spiritual power can come out of that for your church . . . and that is good.

SOME IDEAS FOR FURTHER ENCOURAGEMENT

I hope what you have read has given you plenty to think and pray about as you consider corporate prayer in your church.

In closing here are a few other resources I highly recommend to you.

JOIN THE CPLN

Above all, please seriously consider joining the Church Prayer Leaders Network.

To see its benefits and to join, go to <https://prayerleader.com/membership>

The following books will also be a blessing to you.

52 Creative Ways to Pray by Paul Covert. It is filled with prayer for individuals, small groups and larger group gatherings.

Forgotten Power: A Simple Theology for a Praying Church by Dr. David Butts. Explains from Scripture why pursuing a praying church is so important to God.

Fresh Encounters: Experiencing Transformation through United Worship-Based Prayer by Daniel Henderson. Presents a model for prayer gatherings that is transforming the prayer life of churches across the nation.

Giving Ourselves to Prayer: An Acts 6:4 Primer for Ministry compiled by Dr. Dan R. Crawford. An 80-chapter, 584-page textbook for a pastor or pastoral major student that covers the gamut of prayer in the local church.

Living in the Upper Room: Permeate Your Church with a Culture of Prayer Compiled by *Prayer Connect* magazine. A 48-page booklet for leadership teams that looks at what a praying church really looks like.

Restored Power: Becoming a Praying Church One Tweak at a Time by Jonathan Graf. The sequel to *Forgotten Power*, *Restored Power* is a “how to” book on growing prayer throughout all areas of your church life.

With One Accord in One Place: The Role of Prayer in the Early Church by Armin Gesswein. Explores the role and power of prayer in the book of Acts.

All of these books are available at prayershop.org. If you join the CPLN, you can purchase them at a cheaper discounted price.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Graf is the president of the Church Prayer Leaders Network and the publisher of both *Pray* magazine and PrayerShop Publishing. He is the author or compiling editor of seven books, including *Praying Like Paul* (PrayerShop), *The Power of Personal Prayer* (NavPress), and *My House Shall Be a House of Prayer* (Pray! Books/NavPress).

A gifted motivator, Jon regularly speaks in churches and to pastors' gatherings on the subject of prayer. To contact, email him at jong@harvestprayer.com.