

# CREATING A CULTURE OF PRAYER



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## INTRODUCTION

*Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking. The only way to trouble God is not to come at all. - D.L. Moody<sup>1</sup>*

For many years I had the great privilege and joy of serving as a youth pastor in three wonderful congregations. Throughout my years of youth ministry, I believed in the power of prayer, no question. I believed that we need the power of God to move in the hearts of people—young and old—to see lives truly transformed for His glory. But it wasn't until the Lord called me to help revitalize a dying church that I truly became desperate for God in prayer.

For a while in ministry, you and I might be able to lean on our own gifting, passion, and zeal. But when you're looking at a situation where God must show up in power or "this isn't going to go"—as is the case in church revitalization—you don't understand just how deep your dependence on prayer must be. Over the years, the Lord has deepened my conviction that surrendered, desperate, persistent prayer is essential. This is His grace at work. I'm convinced more than ever that persistent prayer has been—and always will

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<sup>1</sup> Dwight L. Moody, *Prevailing Prayer — What Hinders It?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1884).

be—the most important discipline for pastors, leaders, and congregations involved in revitalization.

I often think of a story about Charles Spurgeon. A group of American pastors traveled to London because they had heard of Spurgeon’s remarkable ministry and how his church was reaching thousands with the gospel. Eager to learn his “secret,” they visited Spurgeon and the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

Spurgeon walked them through the building on a Sunday morning while the worship service was going on. While the congregation is singing in the sanctuary, he led them deep into the basement—to the boiler room. When he opened the door, the pastors saw several hundred believers on their knees, praying—for the service, for God to move in power, and for Spurgeon as a preacher. Spurgeon turned to the men and said,

There, gentlemen, there is the secret for God’s blessing His work here.<sup>2</sup>

I remember hearing that story and thinking, “Our church *must* have prayer like that—because we *need* God to move like that!” It is through prayer that the power of God moves in and transforms the hearts of His people. For this reason, one of the first things that we must prioritize in our lives and in our churches is this kind of devoted, dependent, persistent prayer.

When we go to the Scriptures, one example of a pastor and leader who believed in the power of prayer was the Apostle Paul. His letters show a persistent passion for prayer:

In Romans 15:30, he writes:

I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf..

This “striving carries the sense of fighting together in prayer! Paul understood the battle he was in. “Oh, I need your prayers! Strive together with me, fight together with me in prayer—for this ministry, for this church, for this community, for these people!”

In Ephesians 6:18-20, Paul urges the Christians in Ephesus to pray for himself and other believers:

...at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to

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<sup>2</sup> Multiple outlets reproduce the story and credit *Our Daily Bread*, April 24 (no year).

proclaim the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

With Paul, if we want to see God move in power—especially in church revitalization—we must pray. But how does this happen? How do our churches grow in humble, dependent prayer together? How can we as leaders help to create a culture of prayer in our churches?

## GETTING PRACTICAL

### 1. LEAD BY EXAMPLE.

If you want your church to pray, it starts with you as a pastor or leader. In the Gospels we see that Jesus often slipped away to pray, modeling dependence on the Father. When your people see you passionately seeking God in prayer, they'll be inspired and encouraged to do the same.

Think of a fireplace in the middle of winter. If there's no fire in it, the whole house grows cold. God will use our commitment to prayer as leaders to be like a first spark that lights the fire. As you stoke it, over time, others will gather around and catch the warmth.

Daniel Henderson writes,

Prayerlessness is our declaration of independence from God.

Lead and pastor in such a way that your congregation understands that we are declaring our absolute dependence on the Lord through prayer. When you start your meetings, begin with dependent prayer. When you meet with a parent who is struggling with a wayward child, be intentional to seek the Lord in prayer together. When you meet with a couple whose marriage is falling apart, demonstrate the need for desperate prayer. Before you preach and teach the Word, model heart-felt, faith-filled prayer. Your example as a leader will set the tone for prayer in your church.

### 2. MAKE PRAYER CENTRAL IN WORSHIP.

Don't let prayer become just a transition moment in your worship service. Dedicate intentional time each week to pray for missionaries, your community, your members, and the lost. Acts 4:31 says,

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken.

When a church prays together, God works in powerful ways.

### **3. TEACH ON PRAYER.**

The reality is that many people in our congregations don't pray simply because they don't know how. Use passages like Matthew 6:9-13 (the Lord's Prayer) and Philippians 4:6-7 to teach your congregation how to pray. Maybe preach a short sermon series on prayer, or teach and practice prayer together in another environment. Begin a discussion group focused on the book, *The Praying Church* by Paul Miller, or *Praying the Bible* by Donald Whitney (see Recommended Resources at the end of this article). As people grow in both their understanding and practice of prayer, prayer will naturally become part of your church culture.

### **4. CREATE WAYS TO SHARE REQUESTS.**

To pray for one another, your people need to know what to pray for and to be encouraged by their leaders to do so. Good communication is key in this, and there are many ways you can do this effectively. Consider:

- Weekly prayer request cards
- A website page that lists prayer needs
- A physical prayer wall where requests can be posted
- Small group prayer lists that are shared with the congregation

Of course, be mindful of confidentiality. Provide a clear way to designate what can be shared with the entire church or just the pastors and other leaders. However you choose to do it, develop a simple and clear system for your people to share and respond to prayer requests of the church.

### **5. CELEBRATE ANSWERED PRAYER.**

When God answers prayer, celebrate it! Praise Him for His kindness and faithfulness together as a congregation. This builds faith and fuels excitement and eagerness to pray more. Psalm 118:23 reminds us

    | This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

Keep a list of answered prayers and share stories in the worship service. This reminds everyone that prayer really does matter, and the Lord often uses our prayers to carry out His purposes in our lives and in this world.

## **6. SET ASIDE TIME FOR LEADERS TO PRAY.**

Depending on your context, gather your pastors, your deacons, your church staff, or invested volunteers weekly just to pray together. You might meet morning, noon, or evening. You might meet at the church or in someone's home. Whatever it looks like, the goal is to meet consistently (preferably weekly) to pray for your congregation, your community, and the world.

The bottom line is this: If your church is to become a praying church, it will begin with praying leaders. That's where it always starts. Don't just talk about the importance of prayer. Actually pray.

## **7. LAUNCH A CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER MEETING.**

Sadly, I've noticed that one of the first changes made in many church revitalization efforts is to get rid of the prayer meeting—if one exists. This is one of the most unwise and unbiblical things a shepherd pastor can do.

In our dying churches, we need God to move. We need Him to bring this church back to life. And according to Scripture, God moves in response to our humble, heartfelt prayers. We might be able to come up with a host of reasons not to have a prayer meeting, but I believe there is something powerful about gathering to seek the Lord's face together in prayer—to say, “Lord, we are here, and we are Yours. Have Your way with us. This is Your church, not ours. God, may Your will be done in and through us for Your glory!”

Depending on your context, you may choose to meet weekly, bi-weekly, or once a month. You might meet in person or find that hosting it online is more effective. What is most important is designating a regularly scheduled time for your congregation to pray—to gather and call out to the Lord together as a church family; to pray for your congregation, for the lost in your community, for your families, for missionaries you support, for the poor, hurting and broken. Even if it's just you and a handful of others who show up at first, you're making a statement. You are showing that prayer will indeed be a top priority for this congregation, and you will lead the way in this.

## PRAYER MEETING "GROUND RULES"

Each time you gather for the prayer meeting, remind those who have come that:

1. Prayer is simply having a conversation with God, bringing your joys and concerns to Him.
2. Silence is okay, even if it feels awkward at first.
3. People should not feel pressured to pray out loud but to pray as they feel comfortable.
4. Shorter prayers allow many voices to pray as they feel led.
5. Designate someone to open and close the time

Of course, there are many other strategies to help your church grow in prayer for and with one another. But these seven will help you get started on the journey. I've visited with too many leaders who *talk* a big game when it comes to prioritizing prayer but never implement change. I know this because I've been there!

**Here's my encouragement:** Don't be the pastor who repeatedly says to himself, "Someday we'll get serious about prayer as a church," but never begins. Start now. Start small. Start simple. Start with a plan that is sustainable. And look with faith toward the incredible ways God will use the prayers of His people for His purposes and the advancement of His Kingdom!

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

- Miller, Paul E. *A Praying Church: Becoming a People of Hope in a Discouraging World*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World*. Rev. ed. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2017.
- Whitney, Donald S. *Praying the Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Spurgeon, Charles Haddon. *Only a Prayer Meeting: Forty Addresses at Metropolitan Tabernacle and Other Prayer-Meetings*. London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1901.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. While prayer is foundational in all of ministry, what specific aspects of church revitalization make prayer a critical foundation?
2. What risks are involved in leading a church revitalization that is not founded upon humble, dependent prayer?
3. What are some common barriers to establishing a healthy prayer life in and for a local congregation?
4. How would you rate your church's corporate prayer life currently, and what steps might you need to take to improve it?



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