



THE PRAYER CLOSET

Encouraging & Equipping Believers in Prayer

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WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE PRAY TOGETHER

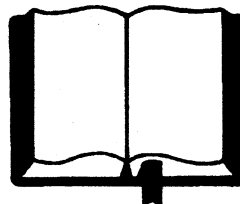
Prayer is the gift of God to every believer. God has given the individual believer access through Jesus, "For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18). Through faith in Jesus, the believer can enter the presence of God through prayer. The believer has an open door to God. He can speak and listen to God personally. This is a remarkable privilege that each believer needs to take advantage of daily.

Yet, the Word of God reveals that God calls His people to pray together, "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2). This call to pray is aimed at the church – the whole body. When Paul says that they are to continue earnestly in prayer, he is calling on the whole church to pray. It is a call for the body to continue in intense prayer.

An essential part of every believer's prayer life is corporate prayer – praying with other believers. Every believer needs personal times of prayer. Every believer must get alone and get with God individually. However, every believer must also spend time in prayer with the people of God. A healthy, mature prayer life has both the private and corporate elements. For a believer to grow and mature in prayer, he has to have both.

There has been much emphasis on the need to pray in churches. Most of this emphasis has been aimed at the individual. While this is important, there must also be an emphasis on believers praying together – whether at a prayer meeting, a prayer group, or a part of the prayer ministry. There is no substitute for corporate prayer. It is absolutely crucial and necessary to the church. If a church is going to carry out God's will and have profound spiritual impact, believers must pray together.

This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will focus on corporate prayer – when God's people pray together. We will examine the biblical basis for this. We will also look at some hindrances to corporate prayer. There will also be suggestions on how to enrich and enliven your times of corporate prayer. This is a crucial subject that cannot be ignored. It is my hope and prayer that God will unleash a spirit of corporate prayer in your church.



**The Biblical Basis
For
Corporate Prayer**

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The Word of God is explicitly clear – believers must pray together. It is crucial to the life and ministry of your church. Why should believers pray together? The following are some biblical reasons for corporate prayer.

The basic reason for corporate prayer is that prayer is God's gift to the church. Prayer is a blessing that God has bestowed on the church. He has given the church this gift that it might seek Him. The Model Prayer in **Matthew 6** reveals this truth. Have you ever noticed that this prayer calls for corporate prayer – for believers to pray together? Listen to Jesus' words:

"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give **us** this day **our** daily bread. And forgive **us our** debts, as we forgive **our** debtors. And do not lead **us** into temptation, but deliver **us** from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (**Matthew 6:9-13, emphasis mine**).

Do you see the emphasis on "we," "our," and "us"? Jesus didn't say to pray, "Give *me* this day *my* daily bread." He didn't teach us to pray, "And forgive *me my* debts, as I forgive *my* debtors." The text does not say "And do not lead *me* into temptation, but deliver *me* from the evil one." The emphasis in the Model Prayer is on the church seeking the Father through prayer. It is a call to corporate prayer!

Obviously the Model Prayer can apply to the individual believer. The believer can and should use it in his praying. It provides the individual believer with a basic and rich outline to seek God. Yet, the primary emphasis of the Model Prayer is on believers praying together – corporate prayer. God desires that His people pray together. In teaching us how to pray, Jesus emphasizes that the church is to seek the Father corporately, as a body. He teaches us that we are to call on our Father as a body. Prayer is a gift to the church. We have a Father that wants us to seek Him as a body.

The example of the early church reveals that believers are to pray together. Throughout the book of Acts, believers pray together. They

joined their hearts and voices in fervent prayer to the Father:

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers" (**Acts 1:14**).

"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" (**Acts 2:1**).

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (**Acts 2:42**).

"So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: 'Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them'" (**Acts 4:24**).

"And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness" (**Acts 4:31**).

"And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch" (**Acts 5:12**).

"Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church . . . So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying" (**Acts 12:5, 12**).

Other relevant texts are **Acts 1:24, 3:1, 6:4, 9:40, 10:9, 13:1-3, Colossians 4:12, and James 5:13-18**. All of these passages are explicitly clear – the early church prayed together. They sought God corporately.

The example of the early church should stir us today. It reveals God's desire that the church pray corporately. It also gives us insight into the life-transforming power of the early church. Their powerful influence and witness resulted from their praying together.

We cannot dismiss the example of the early church.

The promise of praying in agreement calls for corporate prayer. Jesus gives an amazing promise for those who will pray in agreement, "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven (**Matthew 18:19**). God does hear and answer the prayers of the individual believer. Yet, when God's people pray in agreement, it moves the heart and the hand of God. There is something about believers praying together in agreement that delights and stirs the heart of God. This promise should motivate us to pray together.

The promise of Jesus' presence is given to believers who pray together. Jesus provides this powerful promise in **Matthew 18:20**, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." When believers join together for prayer, Jesus is in their midst. This means much more than Jesus is present when you pray. It means that Jesus is present to touch and change lives. Jesus Christ is in the business of touching and transforming lives and circumstances. Whether in the Old Testament as the Angel of the Lord or in the New Testament as the incarnate Son of God, Jesus changes and blesses lives. When believers pray together, Jesus is present to change, bless, and meet the needs of people. If we want the life-transforming power of Jesus in our churches, we must pray together.

The foundation for effective ministry is prayer. This is revealed in **2 Thessalonians 3:1-2**, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith." Paul asks them to pray for his ministry in Corinth. He knew that the only way that he could be effective in proclaiming the gospel in Corinth was through the prayers of the church. He asks the whole church to pray about his ministry in this wicked, hardened city. He understood that this was his only hope of reaching Corinth.

This text shows that a church must pray if it is going to be effective in ministry. Any

type of ministry that is going to touch people and affect eternity has to be saturated in prayer. Prayer unleashes God's power and blessing into our minister efforts. It is His power and blessing that makes the difference in lives and situations. The church that desires to have genuine impact must seek Him for His power and blessing.

The Word of God lays the foundation for believers praying together – prayer is the gift of God to the church, the example of the early church, the promise of Jesus to believers who pray in agreement, and its necessity to powerful ministry. It is important for the individual believer to seek God. Yet, it is just as crucial for the church to seek Him – to seek Him as a body. This is God's desire and He will honor and bless the church that seeks Him. God will hear and respond mightily!



The Roadblocks To Corporate Prayer

There are some roadblocks to corporate prayer. These are hindrances that make it difficult to lead a church to pray as a body. The following are some of the major roadblocks and some suggestions on facing them.

A lack of understanding

For many believers, the emphasis on prayer has been for their individual lives. They have been taught and encouraged to seek God in their personal lives. Many believers don't understand God's desire and call for believers to pray together. They are not aware of the importance and necessity of this part of prayer.

- ✓ *Preach and teach on the necessity and importance of corporate prayer.* Use the Word of God to show that this is God's desire and calling for the church.
- ✓ *Emphasize and magnify 1 Timothy 2:1-2.* These verses reveal that it is God's will for the church to be a house of prayer. This is

first and primary calling of the church. It is the key to everything else in the life and ministry of the church.

Dull And Predictable

One of the main hindrances to corporate prayer is that the prayer meetings are often dull and routine. On many occasions, it is going over the same prayer list with the same names with the same people praying. It is lifeless and predictable. Members aren't interested in attending because it is dull and predictable.

- ✓ *Pray for the work of the Holy Spirit.* Prayer is dull and predictable apart from the power of the Spirit of God. In our flesh, we are incapable of bringing the necessary energy to prayer. But, the Holy Spirit can give us the power, the fervor, and the energy that we need to pray. He is the indwelling Teacher of prayer. Ask God to help believers to rely on the Spirit in their praying.
- ✓ *Emphasize that prayer meeting is an encounter with God.* Prayer meeting is a time of coming before God. It is a vivid encounter in which we speak to God and He speaks to us.
- ✓ *Prayerfully plan your prayer meetings.* It is crucial to plan the focus and the direction of your prayer meetings. Preparation and depending on the Spirit are not contradictory; they go hand-in-hand. Have a clear focus of what you are going to seek God for in the prayer meetings. You might consider preparing prayer meeting guides that will guide the congregation. You might also consider using virtual prayerwalks of your community in prayer meeting. There are a host of ideas that you can use. The key is to have a focus and a direction for your prayer meetings. One principle to keep in mind is that the more immature the congregation is in prayer, the clearer you need to be in your focus and your direction. By prayerfully planning your prayer meetings, it will help you to move away from the dull and predictable to the powerful and supernatural.
- ✓ *Pray over a wide variety of issues.* There are a variety of issues that you can cover

in your prayer meetings – your church, your staff, the lost, the schools, missionaries, state and national leaders, and nations. These are just some examples. Prayer meeting will be dull and routine if you have a narrow, continuous focus.

Lack Of Faith

The corporate prayer of many churches is hindered by a lack of faith. Members do not feel that the prayer meetings will have no effect. They do not see them as a priority for the church.

- ✓ *Emphasize the importance of praying in faith.* Without active faith, our prayer meetings are simply a routine, a going through the motions of prayer. The Word of God is clear – we must believe in order to receive, "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (**Matthew 21:22**).
- ✓ *Focus on thanksgiving.* In the Word of God, we find believers thanking God as an incentive for present and future faith in Him, "I will praise You forever, because You have done it; and in the presence of Your saints I will wait on Your name, for it is good" (**Psalms 52:9**). Thank God for the answers to prayer. Make known how God is moving in response to your prayers. As you thank Him, it will increase the faith of the people to pray.
- ✓ *Teach people to pray the Word of God.* The Word of God is the Spirit's tool for increasing our faith. As you saturate your praying with God's Word, you will have the confidence to expect God to answer. When you pray the Word, you are praying God's heart and will. This should stir within believers the confidence and expectation that He is going to hear and respond.
- ✓ *Ask God to increase the faith of the congregation.* If the congregation needs greater faith, ask God for this (**Matthew 7:7**).

Lack Of Faithfulness

Prayer meeting is often the least attended service of the church. Many times only a small