

Better Prayer Meetings and Prayer Groups: Less Confusion, More Communion

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Most of us have experienced both “good” and “bad” prayer meetings. Eventually we may find out that the “good prayer meeting” which seemed to go very well was actually tainted. Those who prayed sounded spiritual, but they were full of pride. And Peter tells us, “God is opposed to the proud” (1 Pet. 5:5). Alternatively, a seemingly “bad prayer meeting” which felt totally flat might one day be revealed as the time when God heard the prayers of a meek people. Again, Peter writes, “God . . . gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5).

Nonetheless, from a logistical standpoint, there are certain ideas we can implement in order to enjoy better prayer gatherings. The Apostle Paul *did* say to the Corinthians, “But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner” (1 Cor. 14:40). Consider these five ways to bolster group prayer:

1. **Plan to pray.** We have all been involved in prayer meetings *when hardly anybody prayed*. Why? Maybe those in attendance were tired. Whatever the reason, we miss God’s blessings and power when we fail to pray. Jesus promised, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matt. 7:7).

Too many prayer meetings are dominated by the study of the Bible. Learning Scripture *is* an essential part of the life of a church, but never at the expense of prayer. Only praying churches are strong in the Lord. Make prayer a priority, and when it is time to pray, pray! This is not a call for “many words” without substance or heart (Matt. 6:7), but fervent, sincere, Christ-dependent, Scripture-directed prayers.

2. **Listen to the prayers of others instead of planning what you are going to pray next.** Praying “with one mind” (Acts 1:14), like the early followers of Christ, is impossible if we do not listen closely to what each person says. What is the benefit of listening to and agreeing with others who are publicly praying? God seems to have a propensity to answer the prayers of gathered *and united* Christians, both in the Bible (cf. Acts 12:5, 12) and throughout church history. In fact, He has probably answered many prayers of groups in which you have participated!
3. **Don’t monopolize the prayer time.** If a one-hour meeting is designed for many people to participate in the praying, it is unhelpful for one person to

pray on and on and on and on and on . . . Those of us who tend to dominate the prayer time are probably not doing it to “be seen by men” (Matt. 6:5). We just like to pray! But droning on might actually stifle group prayer, hindering other Christians from voicing their prayers and experiencing the joy of having others hear and agree with their words. Charles Spurgeon once stated, “It is dreadful to hear a brother or sister pray us into a good frame of mind and heart, and then, by their long prayer, pray us out of it again.” Sadly, lengthy praying often turns into the “meaningless repetition” that Jesus warned against (Matt. 6:7).

4. **When leading group prayer, be sure the people know what to expect.** In other words, make the pattern of praying clear. You have probably been in a prayer meeting when the leader said, “Let’s pray together,” and *you* thought that he meant that only he would pray, and actually *he* desired for several people to pray out loud. The “dead air” is painful. We’ve all known such confusion, but with a little bit of communication, we can almost always avoid it.

Even when praying with just two or three other people, establish a pattern before you begin praying. For example, “Let’s only pray one item or praise at a time, and therefore each of us will pray multiple times. And once it seems like everyone is done praying, would you mind closing out our prayer time, Bill?”

5. **If you break down into small groups, somebody might need to take the lead of each group.** There is a tendency in prayer meetings to spend more time talking about what we need to pray about than actually praying. This might especially be the case when you break down into small groups. But this is not the time to discuss last night’s game or desert plans. Chat with one another little, and speak to the Lord much. Perhaps the leader of the whole gathering will want to designate one person to guide each group. If that doesn’t happen, be the one who kindly says to your group, “Let’s pray.”

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