

Closing in Prayer or Devoted to Prayer?

Steve Burchett

All churches are different. I don't mean they are all *strange*, but each church has its own identity and unique ministries. For example, one church in my city ministers to men who were recently released from prison. I'm not aware of any other churches in town doing this. There may be others, but nobody would argue that every church should have this kind of ministry.



There are some activities that every church *must* do regularly. One of those is prayer. Paul told the Colossians, “Devote yourselves to prayer” (4:2).

The believers in the church in Jerusalem were committed to prayer. Acts 1:14 says, “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer” (see 2:42). Then, in Acts, various groups of believers prayed together:

- They prayed when needing to know who to appoint as an apostle in the place of Judas. (1:24)
- They prayed when persecuted, asking for strength to remain bold for the gospel. (4:23-31)
- They prayed when appointing men for ministry—deacons, missionaries, and elders. (6:6; 13:3, 14:23)
- They prayed when God added believers to the church. (8:15)
- They prayed when persecuted by a world ruler, presumably asking God to give Peter courage to preach the gospel in prison and also to be released. (12:5, 12)
- They prayed when those who started a church returned to strengthen the church. (14:23)
- They prayed when suffering in prison. (16:25)
- They prayed when departing from one another. (20:36, 21:5)

Could it be said that your church is devoted to praying together? Here are two ways to increase prayer in your church:

First, discipline yourself to pray with others throughout the week. Pray together with other believers more often than just before a meal. For instance, you might call each other just to pray. This may seem awkward at first, perhaps because it is so unusual in your experience. Ignore your feelings and do what is right and best.

Sometimes it's obvious when we should pray together, like when a church member shows up with distressing news that a lady in the church was just diagnosed with an aggressive cancer. Other times, it's not as clear when to stop

and pray, such as when your family and another family in the church are together on a Friday evening for a Bar-B-Q. Consider speaking up and saying, “Let's take some time to pray together.” You could start by praying for one another, but you also might pray for your pastor(s), missionaries, others in the church, and unbelieving neighbors.

Second, go to the prayer meeting and pray. If your church has a weekly gathering for prayer, don't miss out, and when the opportunity comes, pray out loud. Some people are terrified of praying in public. It's helpful to remember that we are praying in the name of Jesus to our Father who loves us. We don't have to be impressive or eloquent:

God looks not at the elegance of your prayers, to see how neat they are; nor yet at the geometry of your prayers, to see how long they are; nor yet at the arithmetic of your prayers, to see how many they are; nor yet at the music of your prayers, nor yet at the sweetness of your voice, nor yet at the logic of your prayers; but at the sincerity of your prayers, how hearty they are.¹

If you speak up and pray, you may also inspire more praying. Presbyterian pastor Theodore Cuyler, when writing about a model prayer meeting he attended, explained the importance of group participation:

As soon as a fitting passage of the Word had been read, each one present seemed ready to bear his part in giving life and interest to the occasion. Each one felt, “This is not the leader's meeting, nor the pastor's, but my meeting with my own spiritual family at the feet of my own Savior. Here I have a right to weep, and sing, and melt in spirit, and flow out in social communing with the brotherhood around me. If I am silent, then the meeting may prove dumb; and if I freeze up then my neighbor may chill through, until the place becomes an ice house.”²

We can't afford *not* to pray together often. If our churches fail in this vital discipline, we miss God's blessings and power. James reasoned, “You do not have, because you do not ask” (4:2).

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¹ Thomas Brooks, *Works*, Vol. 2 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1980), 256.

² This is taken from the supplementary material Kurt R. Linde provides in Dr. E. Porter, *Letters on Revival* (Brooklyn: Linde Publications, 1992), 176.