

THE CHURCH AT PRAYER (2)

The Death of the Prayer Meeting

A. Introduction

1. Would you be assumed dead if you missed a prayer meeting?

"I was sure she was dead, for if she had been alive she would have been certain to have been at the prayer meeting." (James Spurgeon)

Are you that devoted to praying with others?

2. One mark of a healthy church is that it is made up of individuals who are devoted to prayer.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

Individuals, who following Jesus' words and example, are devoted to praying privately.

Individuals, who following the commands to, and example of the church, are devoted to praying together.

3. Another challenging verse found in the Bible.

"As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was called Mark, where many had assembled and were praying." (Acts 12:12)

'Many' were gathered to pray.

4. Prayer meetings are dying or have died in the life of many churches.

Weekly prayer meetings have become monthly or not at all.

Attendance is poor.

More time is spent talking about praying than actually praying.

Alternatives to the prayer meeting, such as Bible study and prayer (with more Bible study than prayer) or home groups are more popular.

"The mid-week prayer meeting has largely been lost in the contest for a slot in the weekly schedule when people are free to attend. Everything else seems more important. The old time mid-weekly prayer routines are not sacred." (Robert Duncan Calver)

5. Our current situation.

More opportunities to pray together.

More people gathering to pray together.

More voices praying when we pray together.

More variety of prayers when we pray together.

6. We want this to continue!

So, we need to know what is causing the death of prayer meetings.

B. Why are prayer meetings dying?

1. The death of prayer meetings in church life might be caused by there being something wrong with one or more of the three parts that make up prayer.

For prayer to happen, three things need to take place.

"God, hear my prayer; listen to the words from my mouth." (Psalm 54:2)

There needs to be someone listening – God.

There needs to be someone speaking – us.

There needs to be words that are spoken.

2. Prayer meetings might be dying because of a problem with our view of God.

We don't see Him as a willing Father.

"Our Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:9)

"The LORD is my shepherd." (Psalm 23:1)

"Who among you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him." (Matthew 7:9-11)

We don't see Him as an able Lord.

"Our Father in heaven." (Matthew 6:9)

"The LORD is my shepherd." (Psalm 23:1)

"Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us." (Ephesians 3:20)

3. Prayer meetings might be dying because of a problem with us.

Busyness – we are too busy to attend and yet busy people usually always find time and a way to do what they want to do.

Pride – we don't think we need to pray or that prayer is important.

Lack of faith – we don't believe that prayer will make a difference or that God will answer our prayer.

Laziness – we don't feel like it.

Unholiness – sin hinders prayer and keeps us from drawing near to God.

"Husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker partner, showing them honour as coheirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered." (1 Peter 3:7)

Worldliness – dulls our senses towards spiritual things so we find prayer meetings boring.

4. Prayer meetings might be dying because of the words that are spoken or not being spoken.

It is true that some church prayer meetings have become dull, cold, formulaic, and lifeless.

Why?

Only 'shopping list' prayers – no variety in prayer.

Long prayers – *"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... A brother had been asked to pray, and he was going on and on. After a while, Moody stood and said, "Let us sing a hymn while our brother finishes his prayer."*

Sermon prayers – preaching at people in the prayer.

Lack of being direct in the prayers – failing to actually ask God for what is wanted.

More time spent sharing requests than praying for those requests.

Awkward silence between prayers.

No one has prepared to lead the meeting.

Too few people participate.

C. What can be done to prevent the death of prayer meetings?

1. How can prayer meetings be brought back to life?

"We shall never see much change for the better in our churches in general until the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians." (Charles Spurgeon)

"The old time mid-weekly prayer routines are not sacred... but proclamation and prayer are at the heart of the Saviour's program for His church. They dare not be laid aside. If we have scheduled them out we must schedule them in. The forms may change, but the essentials must not be neglected and lost." (Robert Duncan Calver)

2. Teach the church about the character of God.

The better we know God, the more we will love Him and depend upon Him.

Love for God will encourage us to draw near to God who is our Father and our Shepherd because He is willing to answer our prayers.

Dependence upon God will encourage us to draw near to God who is our Lord and in heaven because He is able to answer our prayers.

3. Regularly remind the church why the prayer meeting is important.

For bringing us together – as we come to God and pray for and with one another, our minds are taken off ourselves and our natural selfishness, and we focus on someone else and their needs.

For uniting us together – as we join together in praying for God's glory, the good of the church, and the salvation of the lost.

For reminding us together of our neediness.

"Unless the LORD builds a house, its builders labour over it in vain." (Psalm 127:1)

For helping us together to pray.

"Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. He asked Peter, "So, couldn't you stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray, so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matthew 26:40-41)

4. Make the prayer meeting unmissable.

"Will you not mark your church prayer meetings on your calendar as engagements of the highest priority for your entire family?" (Joel Beeke)

Prayer meetings that are well prepared and led.

Prayer meetings that are driven by Scripture.

Prayer meetings where praying to our Father about our Father and about our family as Jesus taught, does not mean praying for the same things in the same way every meeting.

Prayer meetings that find ways to encourage different people to pray and encourage those who don't feel comfortable praying aloud to say "Amen".

Prayer meetings that are at a consistent time and place.

Prayer meetings that are PRAYER meetings.