

THE CHURCH AT PRAYER (3)

Let us pray...

A. Introduction

1. A 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 New Testament church, are devoted to praying together.

2. When it comes to praying together, the weekly prayer meeting is dying or has died in many churches in the UK.

Weekly prayer meetings have become monthly or not at all.

Attendance is poor.

Alternatives to prayer meetings, like home groups, are more popular.

The days when 'many' were gathered to pray have passed.

"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)

3. How can prayer meetings become unmissable again?

"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)

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 in 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.

4. One more challenging verse found in the Bible.

"You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:2-3)

You do not have because you do not ask.

The prayer meeting is an asking meeting of the church.

B. The Prayer Meeting

1. The prayer meeting that is popular today.

It opens with a hymn, Bible reading, and short exposition/encouragement to pray.

A list of prayer requests is given.

People pray as they feel led with no-one sure what is going to be prayed for or how long the awkward silence will be between prayers will be.

Leader then brings the meeting to a close.

2. The prayer meeting that traditionally took place.

Historically, believers who gathered to pray, prayed by listening to the ministers' prayers, silently making them their own.

The test of a good prayer meeting then, was not how many people prayed, but whether the prayers were in line with God's Word.

We know in the days when Charles Spurgeon was pastor, the Metropolitan Tabernacle had a thriving prayer meeting where many gathered to pray.

In *Only a Prayer Meeting*, Spurgeon describes the Monday night prayer meeting that took place each week.

It began with a *"warm hearted address of 10 minutes."*

People would then be invited to pray for a variety of subjects, with *"a few lively words interposed between the prayers"* or *"one verse between prayers."* Although it is *"not at all amiss to let two or even three competent brethren succeed other without pause."*

Special requests for prayer were sent in by attendants in advance. *"These little scraps of paper... may be used as kindling to the fire in the whole assembly."*

No prayer will exceed ten minutes [at a time when 20 minutes was not uncommon] but under five *"will exhibit the more fervour and life."*

"Persuade all the brethren to pray aloud." For those that *"shrink from the privilege... assure them that it does us all good to hear their groans and ineffectual attempts at utterance."*

"When we have had ten prayers in the hour, varied with the singing of single verses, we have far oftener been in the Spirit, than when only four persons have engaged in supplication."

3. The New Testament does not lay down any rules for a prayer meeting.

It does not tell us how long they should be.

It does not tell us how many subjects should be prayed for in one meeting.

It does not tell us how many prayers need to be prayed.

It does not tell us who needs to pray aloud.

4. In praise of directed prayer meetings (where the leader announces and assigns each point for prayer).

It gives direction to the meeting.

It ensures variety of prayers.

It removes awkward silences.

It encourages more participation.

5. In praise of Zoom prayer meetings.

Increased accessibility – Zoom prayer meetings are easier to attend for parents, children, workers, and older folk.

Increased willingness to pray – Zoom prayer meetings are less pressure for those who find public speaking/praying difficult.

Increased connectivity – Zoom prayer meetings make it easier to have joint prayer meetings with other churches or invite non-local guests to join in. They also reduce costs for mission speakers.

Increased audibility – Zoom prayer meetings remove the problem of inaudible prayers caused by poor acoustics in the room, too quiet voices, bowed heads.

Increased meetings – Zoom prayer meetings are easier to add to the church week.

C. The Pray-ers

1. Unlike preaching, praying is for all.

Both men and women prayed in the New Testament church.

“Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument.” (1 Timothy 2:8)

“Every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head, since that is one and the same as having her head shaved.” (1 Corinthians 11:5)

2. Everyone is welcome to participate, including children, by praying aloud.

Advance assigning of prayers is possible.

Written and prepared prayers are as valid as extemporaneous (said without prepared words) prayers.

3. Just because you are not praying aloud doesn't mean you are not praying.

Remember the prayers of those praying are your prayers.

D. The Prayers

1. All kinds of prayers.

“Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

“Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.” (Ephesians 6:18)

Long and short prayers.

Wide and narrow prayers.

Different types of prayers – praise, lament, thanksgiving, confidence, remembrance, desire to obey, confession, petition, intercession, cries for justice.

Single issue prayers in response to a crisis.

2. Prayers to our Father about our Father.

“Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honoured as holy. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:9-10)

For God to be glorified through the multiplication and maturation of His people.

Give thanks to God for one another, for saving faith, active faith, and growing faith.

Pray that we would know God better and live godly lives.

Pray for the preaching of the Word.

Pray for lost people to be saved.

Pray for the spread of the gospel to all nations.

3. Prayers to our Father about our family.

"Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." (Matthew 6:11-13)

For daily provision, daily pardon, and daily protection.

Pray that God would give us what we need to run with perseverance the race marked out for us (knowledge, strength, hope, unity).

Pray for ministry opportunities (to evangelise and to encourage) and ministry success.

Pray for the civil authorities.

Pray for the sick, afflicted and persecuted.

4. Prayers directed by the Word of God.

Pray to our Father about our Father and our family in response to and guided by God's Word.

Pray the whole Bible.

5. Prayers prayed with expectancy.

We are asking for what we do not have.

"You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4:2-3)

We are asking a God who is willing and able to answer our prayers.

"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— to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

"For two decades at our church, at every one of our monthly "central prayer meetings", we have finished our time of prayer by reading out loud these words from verses 20-21. We use them to remind each other of the greatness of the One to whom we have prayed." (Richard Coekin)

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