

PLANNING AND LEADING PRAYER MEETINGS
Prayer and Intercession
Resource Ministries
By Jim and Jean Stephens

"And when you come before God, don't turn that into a theatrical production either. All these people making a regular show out of their prayers, hoping for stardom! Do you think God sits in a box seat?"

"Here's what I want you to do: find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense His grace."

"The world is full of so-called prayer warriors who are prayer-ignorant. They're full of formulas and programs and advice, peddling techniques for getting what you want from God. Don't fall for that nonsense. This is your Father you are dealing with, and He knows better than you what you need. With a God like this loving you, you can pray very simply." Matthew 6:5-8 (The Message)

Prayer Meetings in the Book of Acts:

Acts 1:14,24 The believers before Pentecost

Acts 2:1-4 The day of Pentecost, probably a prayer meeting.

Acts 2:42 The early church

Acts 4:23-31 Prayer after Peter and John's release from jail.

Acts 6:1-6 Choosing the first deacons

Acts 12:5,12 Peter's miraculous release from prison.

Acts 13:1-3 The Antioch Church leaders' prayer meeting.

Acts 14:23 Choosing elders in the churches.

We know that prayer meetings are an important part of the life and ministry of any church. We also know that often, prayer meetings are the least attended meetings of any regularly held by the church. In this study we want to look at some of the reasons prayer meetings are often poorly attended and some practical steps we can take to increase the participation level, the enjoyment and satisfaction level, and the effectiveness of the prayer meeting.

Much of what we will be presenting in this study is directed at the planning and development of the regular weekly prayer meeting of the local church. The principles can be applied to any prayer group that meets for corporate prayer.

- I. COMMON COMPLAINTS ABOUT PRAYER MEETINGS: Reasons people give for not attending and participating in Corporate Prayer.
 - A. 'The meetings are boring'
 - B. 'I have no contribution to make'
 - C. 'My personal needs are not met'
 - D. 'I don't know how to pray in public'
 - E. 'The Holy Spirit doesn't show up'
 - F. 'We pray, but nothing happens'
 - G. 'Our prayer meeting is a gossip club'

- II. WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE IN AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER MEETING?
 - A. Maximum participation in attendance by members of the congregation or target group.
 - B. Maximum participation in actual prayer by those present in the meeting.
 - C. Awareness of needs, immediate and wider.
 - D. Increased, focused, and released faith.
 - E. Structured opportunities for effective and focused corporate prayer.
 - F. Answered prayer.
 - G. Desire by participants to return and encourage others to participate in corporate prayer.

- III. SOME ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER MEETING:
 - A. Thanksgiving - Praise - Worship
 - B. Brief exhortation from scripture relating to prayer or to the matters being prayed for.
 - C. Presentation of prayer requests: Present the need, suggest the desired outcome, focus faith (a scripture?), lead in prayer
 - D. Focused prayer.
 - E. Praise reports and testimonies.

IV. ELEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PLANNING A PRAYER MEETING:

- A. What is the group? Regular Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting; Youth Group Prayer; Women's Prayer Meeting; Other.
- B. What is the purpose? Is this a regular meeting of the church to pray; is there a special need for which the meeting is being called; why are we having this meeting?
- C. What is the setting? Where will the meeting be held? Is the room appropriate for the size of the group and the atmosphere you want to create? Is there adequate heating and ventilation? Will noise from the street or other activities be a distraction?
- D. Who will lead the meeting? Is the person who is to lead the meeting fully informed of the plans and purpose? Is the leader properly prepared?
- E. Has the meeting been thoroughly and effectively promoted in a positive way by the leadership of the church? Has it been promoted from the pulpit on Sunday, in the church newsletter, and by testimony of regular attenders of the prayer meeting?

V. Make people feel welcome. Sometimes it is helpful to have an honest look at how your prayer meeting feels to a visitor or a first-time attender. Do you really make people feel welcome? The issue is not whether you welcome the people, **but whether they feel welcome.**

- A. Greet newcomers to the prayer meeting. Show interest in them without being gushy or "nosy" or giving them the feeling that you are pressuring them to join. The key is LOVE, earnestness, and sincerity. Your ministry effectiveness is largely determined by your ability to relate to people on a one-to-one basis.
- B. Look at your meeting place to see if it is "visitor friendly". Are there signs indicating where the toilets are located? Is it clear where people are to go when they enter the building? Are child care facilities clearly marked and available to visitors?
- C. Think through how your prayer meetings are conducted. Do you have customs and traditions that are familiar to the regulars but need to be explained for visitors or newcomers?

VI. BEING AN EFFECTIVE LEADER BOTH IN AND OUT OF MEETINGS.

*if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; **if it is leadership, let him govern diligently**; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:8 NIV)*

- A. There must be some degree of order and structure for any type of gathering of people.
 - 1. Leaders must lead. This is true in all activities in the life of a church (prayer meetings, worship, social, athletic, etc.). People must be led; order is never incidental nor accidental!
 - 2. Leaders must be diligent in planning and carrying out the responsibilities of leadership.
 - 3. The leadership need to impart enthusiasm, interest, involvement, showing the right spirit and attitudes in every aspect of church life.
- B. The people must have confidence in their leaders. They will be insecure and unsettled if their leaders portray incompetence, uncertainty, and indecisiveness.
 - 1. The Bible clearly states that spiritual leaders should not be entirely inexperienced. (1Tim 3:6).
 - 2. If the leaders do not inspire confidence, they lose their effectiveness and ability to minister to the people.
- C. Meetings should be planned and coordinated so that they run as smoothly as possible.
- D. Lack of preparation accounts for much of what is wrong with prayer meetings.
- E. As a leader, you must be in your place! Leaders "stand before" the people. The word RULE (Romans 12:8; I Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24) means to "stand before" or "guide".
- F. Leaders should lead by example and participation. Saying "Amen" and vocally agreeing with prayers and statements.

VII. POSSIBLE THEMES FOR PRAYER MEETINGS:

- A. Missions
- B. Health and Healing
- C. Financial Breakthrough
- D. A Problem or Crisis
- E. The Salvation of the Lost
- F. Family Breakthrough

VIII. ELEMENTS OF FOCUSING FAITH FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER:

- A. Awareness of need
- B. Suggested desired outcomes
- C. Faith-building, Faith-releasing scriptures
- D. Stories and testimonies of answered prayer, especially in similar situations

IX. TOOLS FOR BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER MEETING:

- A. Prayer sheet or list to hand out.
- B. Overhead projector and prayer request acetates. Advance preparation determines the quality of your information and your presentation.
- C. Prayer calendars. These can be developed using commonly available computer software. See hand out.
- D. Prayer Map (Missions, Pray for the City, Crisis, War, Famine, etc.)
- E. Prayer Log Book: prayer request - date; prayers answered - date

NOTE: All the above tools require that you have some method for gathering prayer requests in a timely manner. You need to have accurate information concerning the requests and needs and enough information to pray intelligently. Don't over-inform with unnecessary detail or private and confidential information.

ALSO: Consider how you will follow-up on matters prayed for and gather and communicate information concerning answered prayer or the need to continue in prayer for requests.

X. SOME IDEAS FOR LEADING THE PRAYER MEETING:

- A. Have short presentations of listed requests by people who have been chosen and prepared before the meeting.
 - 1. Any exhortations should be brief; at the most a five-minute exhortation / faith builder on prayer or on the topic.
 - 2. Present the need, suggest the desired outcome, focus faith (a scripture?), lead in prayer

- B. List prayer requests on overhead projector (Requires advance preparation)
 - C. Ask for volunteer or appoint one person to present and lead in prayer for each request
 - D. As needs are presented have all the participants pray aloud together then ask one or two (by prior appointment) to focus the prayer.
 - E. If there are a number of requests to be dealt with, especially if there are several prayer topics, it might be good to sing, exhort, pray - sing, exhort, pray as each different topic is presented.
 - F. Missions Prayer Emphasis:
 - 1. Overhead projector (Map, missionary information, requests)
 - 2. Slides, Photos (display table, photo albums, artifacts from the country)
 - 3. Letter or audio or video tape from the missionary.
 - 4. Music from the country.
 - 5. Have someone in the national dress of the country present the requests.
 - 6. Needs - desired outcome - focus faith - pray.
- XI. THINGS THAT KILL A PRAYER MEETING: (Peter Wagner, "Churches That Pray")
- A. Allowing extended periods of silence. By "extended periods of silence" we mean anything over a few seconds. The more silence, the more people won't come back next week.
 - B. Sentence prayers or fill-in-the blank prayers. These methods of encouraging participation are so mechanical that people are put off by them.
 - C. Very long prayers by the "regular few" which wander from topic to topic. These create the feeling that prayer meetings are "religious" and for a select few rather than for everyone.
 - D. Prayers that are prayed too quietly so that not all the people present can hear and understand what is being prayed.

- E. Praying in groups of two or three. This can be too uncomfortable for some. A compromise could be to use groups of four to six rather than the two or three as it is less threatening to the loners.

XII. EFFECTIVE SPONTANEOUS CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER:

- A. Keep it brief, simple, focused.
- B. Encourage all present to participate. But don't pressure them or make them feel they MUST!
- C. Teach the people to pray on one theme or topic and then yield to someone else to pray. It is better to pray more than one brief prayer than one long rambling prayer.
- D. Insist that anyone who prays aloud MUST pray loud enough to be heard and understood by everyone in the room.
- E. Teach and encourage the participants to vocally express agreement with the one who is leading or verbalizing prayer at the moment. Saying "Amen" or "Yes Lord" or other expressions of agreement is important.
- F. It is good to lead the people in times of unified vocal prayer where the whole group prays aloud at the same time about a need and then have someone focus the prayer after an appropriate season. It's usually best to ask someone to prepare themselves to lead out in focusing the prayer before you begin praying aloud together. People need a little time to get their thoughts organized. Don't allow long silences to develop.
- G. Some consideration must be given to the size of the group, the size of the room, the arrangement of the seating. Use common sense in these matters!
- H. If the group is small and the room is large, rearrange the seating in a corner or in a circle. Or find a smaller room.
- I. Avoid seating the people in rows where they are facing the back of another person's head. Try using a circle or semi-circle.
- J. If the group is too large to accommodate all who want or need to participate in corporate prayer, consider other alternatives such as additional prayer meetings. Keep in mind the principle of "critical mass".

NOTE: How can you know if the group is too large?

1. Is there opportunity for everyone to participate in verbal corporate prayer?
2. Is the room or group too large for everyone to hear and understand those who are praying aloud?

XIII. SUMMARY

Effective corporate prayer meetings require as much planning, preparation, and leading as any other meeting of the church. If we will be creative and diligent in this important area of ministry, we will see much greater participation by the congregation, a much better attitude towards the prayer and intercession ministry of the church, and above all we will see prayers answered and needs met.