

I Would Love It If Prayer Was Seldom Mentioned!



It's true. I long for a day when prayer seldom will be mentioned in church. Now before you report me to the heresy watchdogs, or drop your membership to the Church Prayer Leaders Network, let me explain.

My dream is to see churches so committed to prayer that it is just done! It is so much a part of the spiritual DNA of a congregation that no one has to beg "please come to this prayer gathering." People just come to pray.

Or the worship leader or prayer leader doesn't have to fight for space to get some prayer times in the morning worship service . . . it is expected. Or people naturally participate in group prayer and get excited about what God is going to do in response. Or before or after a service you see pairs of people with heads bowed, praying for each other . . . spontaneously. Or when a decision is hard to come by in a board meeting, everyone realizes that they need to spend some time in prayer . . . and someone just starts praying!

Wow! Wouldn't that be something.

So why isn't that the DNA of most western churches? There are lots of possible reasons. Of course Satan hates to see a praying church, so he is working mightily against that happening. But I suspect there is another reason that is pretty prevalent in churches.

Prayer and its results cannot be controlled. And we like

control.

In our western society today, rare is the church that does not adhere to a tried and true order of a service . . . and a pretty set time that the service should take (an hour, an hour and 15 minutes and so on). So because that is what the people want, and what seems to work the smoothest, we time everything (there is even program software to help us do it!), and schedule everything to make sure it fits the popular timeframe. So even if a pastor, as he prepares his message "gets something from the Lord," it has to fit in 25 minutes . . . or he can beg the worship leader to remove a song or two, but that could be dicey. Easier just to shorten the message.

In that kind of a setting prayer is pretty much a perfunctory thing that we control. No one is really encouraged to pray, "in the spirit," sensing what the Holy Spirit would have them pray. Instead, the pray-er knows to keep it short and to stick to the purpose—is the prayer a welcome, a bridge to something else, etc. Heaven forbid if the person praying starts to get moved and prays too long. That would really muck up the plan.

Any church elder's meeting or board meeting begins with prayer—usually one or two people, asking God for wisdom and to bless the meeting. A smaller number of boards might spend 15-30 minutes or more in prayer, but that is rare. And very few boards indeed would think to break into the meeting with prayer at a crucial roadblock moment. Why? Perhaps the reason is as sadly innocent as no one thinks enough of the importance of prayer to remember to do so . . . but I think the underlying issue of giving up control is at work here too. You see when we actually use prayer as a way to seek real direction from God—to hear His heart on a matter—we give up control. We have to obey what we hear. And that is often too uncomfortable for boards and leaders to do because the status quo may change.

Years ago I was in a very uncomfortable situation at a ministry where I worked. A core of us had heard God say to do

something differently. We had worked through it and discussed it, feeling this was of God. But when push came to shove with obedience, neither the individual who would have to incorporate this change nor our leadership would do it. It was not what conventional wisdom said to do . . . and what the industry typically did. It is much easier not to seek God!

Prayer cannot be controlled. Prayer opens the door to change, to rearrangement, to going off bulletin, to seeing the power of God displayed in the midst of His people. Prayer gives the Spirit "permission" to respond in whatever way He wants to respond. And deep down, our western, gotta-be-in-control mindset does not want to go there.

A recent news story in the premiere issue of Prayer Connect, "Mercy Drops of Revival" tells what happened when a pastor listened to God and threw away his comfortable plan. Prayer took over, and a mini revival that lasted several months profoundly altered his ministry. (You can read this article in the free pdf of the issue. Click on Prayer Connect Premier Issue.)

For many, sadly, that is too dangerous, and unconsciously prayer is kept in a safe, perfunctory, filler role in the life of a church. As a prayer leader or church leader, I encourage you to pray that God will open the eyes and hearts of your church leadership to realize that they must give up control . . . and pray.

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