

Men at Prayer: Not an Oxymoron

By Mark S. Mirza



A friend of mine recently described a typical men's prayer gathering as food and fellowship for 30 minutes, a ten-minute devotional, 15 minutes to gather prayer requests, and then a closing prayer by one person.

If that is your perception, you're not alone. But I think you'll be pleasantly surprised to learn there is hope in mobilizing the men in your church toward greater—and even enjoyable—prayer!

You see, getting men together the first time, even the second and third times, isn't the problem. Just offer breakfast and assure them of the maximum time commitment. They'll show up, at least a few times anyway. The real challenge is keeping their interest. What kinds of things hinder a sustained commitment to praying together? Here are three factors to address in your planning:

1. Fear

Many men fear praying aloud! Pastors often tell me that unless they have heard a man pray in front of others, they always speak to a man privately about his comfort level in leading in public prayer.

The first time my friend Carrey [names changed] went to a

men's prayer group, he was scared to death. He had never prayed out loud. So the first few times he attended, he didn't pray at all. When he finally did, his prayers were short. But because there were several men in his group, he didn't feel pressure about the length or quality of his prayer. Carrey eventually became a leader in this group.

2. Prayer idolatry

Most wives know some of the idols their husbands have—sports, jobs, their yards. But it's also possible to make prayer an idol if humility is not the focus.

Gary always looked up to and even idolized men with money. When he started participating in prayer with other men, he began to see that these men had something he also wanted—a prayer relationship with God! Interestingly, Gary's predisposition to idolizing transferred to his desire to have a strong prayer life.

With help from his Bible study friends, he has learned the difference between prayer idolatry and an unconditional love relationship with his Lord in prayer. Gary is now on the phone every week with men—both leading them in prayer and simply praying with them.

3. Lack of loving relationships

One particular shortcoming of the typical men's prayer gathering is the lack of relationship-building. And one benefit of a commitment to pray together regularly that always catches me off guard is the love factor! I'm greatly encouraged when I see men crying with one another over issues in their lives—and hugging each other after doing battle in prayer.

Two older men friends of mine, both in their 70s, have the exact same reaction every time I see them. Tears form in their eyes, and we don't say anything until we hug each other. Then

we simply say, "I miss you, man!"

On the other end of the age spectrum, Henry, a young father, has become a special friend to me although I only see him a few times a year. Recently he walked up to me with his four-year-old daughter in hand. He turned and introduced her. "This is Mr. Mark," Henry said. "He prays for Daddy every week."

You see, four years ago, when his first child was born, I stood him in front of all the men and promised to pray for him, once a week, for the rest of my life. I then challenged him to commit to lifting up his child's name to the Lord, out loud, for her to hear every night as she lay in her bed.

Coming together to pray—in relationship—has a wonderful magnetism that keeps drawing men back.

The Essential Ingredient

So how can we structure a prayer gathering with the essential ingredient of relationship? Here is a recipe to help you get there.

1. Start your prayer meeting with breakfast, music, and a short devotional—all lasting about an hour.
2. Split into groups (no smaller than three or four) to pray. Let the groups form organically. Don't force them.
3. Pass out a list of things to pray for related to the needs of the church, such as pastor(s), staff, ministries, and missionaries. Avoid requests unrelated to the men or ministry.
4. Use a bell or soft music to tell the men when their small-group time is over—and encourage them to pray until they hear the closing signal.

If you work hard to keep a men's group organized, nonthreatening, and focused on relationship, you can keep men coming back again and again to pray together!

MARK MIRZA is the founder of Common Thread Ministries, which helps churches and individuals grow in prayer. He is willing to coach men in starting prayer groups. This article appeared in *Prayer Connect*, a subscription-based magazine entirely on prayer.