

Encouraging Reluctant Prayers

By Paul Covert



One of our men recently wrote these words, “I wish my writing could reflect the passion and deep feelings I have experienced since I have become involved in the prayer ministry. My eyes have been opened and God has allowed me to see His world in a whole new way and to experience prayer to a much different level than I ever felt was possible.”

We hear this kind of positive report fairly often, but it wasn't always this way. Many people were not raised in a home where prayer was practiced, so they are uncomfortable praying out loud. Add to that the evil intent of our enemy who will do all he can to cause people to feel awkward in prayer—and you have the perfect storm. But you can build your ministry around figuring out how to help people break through and get comfortable with prayer.

Core Belief in People's Desire

It is important to believe that people would love to pray if they were just coached and had someone walk beside them for a while. We schedule events, trainings, schools of prayer, and small groups that are at the basic level for anyone who wants to grow in his or her prayer life.

One of our prayer partners, who couldn't imagine ever praying in public, learned to love prayer ministry through the help of a mentor:

Well, I haven't been around this prayer ministry that long, and it sure wasn't at the top of my list of things I ever felt God calling me to do. My mentor and I had been talking regularly and he just threw it out as a suggestion, something for me to try out, and at first I thought he was joking. Me? Pray in public? No, I think you have the wrong guy.

But I stepped out in faith, and with my mentor literally holding my hand in the beginning, something inside me soon clicked. All of the stories I'd read in the Bible about God using ordinary, weak people suddenly came alive. It felt like I was one of them almost. I have never looked back.

Ways to Encourage New Prayers

We believe prayer ministry is as important as any work in the church, so we challenge the best leaders to join our team. These exceptional people make it work and help us weave these prayer principles throughout our ministry:

Offer easy entry points. We try to have places where people can begin praying that are easy entry points. For example, we hold an annual prayer conference designed to inspire people to get stronger in their prayer lives. We also offer a school of prayer each quarter that is four hours on a Sunday afternoon. We always include introductory topics such as, "How do I pray out loud?" We also add some meatier subjects—for instance, "Learning to pray for wisdom for life."

Gear toward men. I never recruit women to pray. They will come and they will pray! But men will not if the room is all women or if it is too "fluffy." We go to great lengths to make it male friendly.

Build relationships. I make sure I go to all the men's retreats and the other events, looking for places I can develop men in prayer. Cathy, our associate prayer ministry director, does the same at all the women's events. We connect with people and invite them to the prayer room to experience

strategic, measured prayer—and they get hooked. Most of the people on our prayer teams have been recruited by someone and joined out of a trusted relationship.

Make the prayer experience relevant and inspirational. One of the reasons people don't attend prayer events is because they grow tired of praying for sick people. We intentionally don't take prayer requests at many of our events. This approach helps people to realize that the focus in times of corporate prayer is not on them.

One of our major initiatives is helping the other ministries of the church build prayer into their lives, events, and departments. We do our best to be in the planning stages of new campuses or major events so that prayer is part of the DNA of the event—and eventually our church. It takes only a time or two before people begin to see the difference prayer makes in their ministries.

Communicate often and well. We produce a monthly newsletter to more than 2,000 people to inform them about the latest things happening in the prayer world. Most people find out about prayer events through this newsletter—or through Facebook or Twitter.

The truth is we have a long way to go in the area of prayer. We are not a house of prayer yet in the sense Jesus had in mind. But thankfully we have several wonderful servant ministers who will “not rest until this thing rocks.”

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