

Learning to Pray Together

By Douglas Kamstra



“Before we leave, let’s spend a few moments in prayer. . . .” As a specialized transition pastor and denominational prayer leader, I’ve spent a lot of time in church meetings. It’s encouraging that leaders are pausing to pray during these meetings; it’s discouraging that for so many leaders, prayer is simply an add-on to their work and ministry.

“Bob, if you would begin, I’ll finish after we’ve all prayed.”

The opening pray-er provides the initial address to God, then passes the “baton” to his right. The next pray-er prays through his list of five or six requests. The third pray-er now mentally crosses off three of her items that the previous pray-er mentioned, and she mentions five more. Eight or nine minutes later, the seventh pray-er concludes the prayer.

“Amen.”

“All right, everyone. Thanks for coming. See you next month!”

Changing the DNA Prayer, as has often been said, is the work of the church. The correlation between praying churches and healthy growing churches has been proven. But the prayer level of a congregation seldom rises above the passion level in the prayers of its leadership.

We need to learn to pray. But, even more importantly, we need to learn to pray together. Most of the group praying I’ve observed is actually little more than a string of individual prayers spliced together.

Changing the DNA of prayer in our churches requires a great deal of fortitude and perseverance. The early Church learned how to pray together, and they set the world aflame with the gospel. Although some training and education are always helpful, little will change until we actually start praying together.

So at the next church meeting, small group, or prayer group you attend, suggest and integrate one or two of the following (recognizing change takes time):

1. Pray together at the beginning of the meeting. “Praying first” underscores the importance of prayer and sets the context for the meeting. When prayer is relegated to the end of the meeting, participants are looking at their watches, focused on getting home. Set aside a block of 30 minutes minimum at the top of the agenda.

2. Begin with silence. Most of those in attendance have had busy days. People need some silence to reset their souls.

3. Remind everyone to pray throughout the entire prayer time. By encouraging participants to also pray silently and continuously, you remove the expectation that everyone pray aloud. Typically in group prayer, participants are only half listening to what others are praying because they are thinking about what they are going to pray when their turn comes.

Silence is always acceptable. It doesn't necessarily mean we can't think of anything else to pray for. Silence is an opportunity for the Spirit to work in our hearts.

4. Pray aloud only when prompted by the Spirit. When you feel the Holy Spirit's encouragement, pray aloud. Focus on praying what you sense the Spirit is inviting you to pray. That is, pray God's agenda—often a continuation of what is currently being prayed.

5. Pray one praise, one confession, or one intercession at a

time. Praying one item at a time allows others to participate in praying for that same need. When that need has been saturated with prayer, the Spirit will provide another praise, confession, or need for prayer.

6. Pray in agreement. When you pray aloud, you are articulating the Spirit-directed prayer on behalf of the community of Christ, so use plural pronouns: “Our Father . . . give us our daily bread, deliver us from evil. . . .”

7. Pray Scripture. When we pray Scripture, we are praying God’s will. Praying Scripture assures us we are praying together.

8. Pray Kingdom prayers. The focus of many prayer gatherings is on us—our personal needs or items on our prayer list. Encourage broader prayers, such as prayers for the protection of believers, for unity among Christ-followers, for revival in the nation, for global evangelization, for growing awareness of God’s presence. Kingdom prayers are prayers we can all pray together.

By beginning in prayer, you will lay the foundation to return to praying at any time and for any reason the Spirit might provide. “These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer. . . .” (Acts 1:14, nasb).

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