

The Benefits of Praying Together



By Jonathan Graf

I was recently in a small church that for years has struggled to grow beyond sixty people. They are dear, sincere people who want to trust God to use them in greater ways in their community. I challenged them to focus more on Kingdom issues in their prayers (as opposed to just the needs of the congregation).

In a Facebook chat a few weeks later, the pastor's wife commented that they had tweaked the way they were praying, and a neighbor had prayed to receive Christ that week. A month after this they saw six women pray to receive Christ at a women's event. I will continue to pray for a renewed passion to seek the kingdom as they pray together.

Despite the fact that many churches do not have significant corporate prayer expressions, most prayer leaders and pastors believe praying together is important. But what are the benefits? There are many benefits, but here are three significant ones.

1. Praying together invites the presence and power

of the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Chronicles 6-7, we see the dedication of Solomon's Temple. While "the whole assembly of Israel was standing there" (2 Chron. 6:3), Solomon prays a dedicatory prayer in which he invokes the presence of God. "Now, my God, may your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. Now arise, O Lord God, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. May your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, may your saints rejoice in your goodness" (6:40-41). Of course the presence of God entered with dynamic power!

There is a different atmosphere in churches that pray together and who have praying people. Worship seems more powerful. There is a sense of connection with God that is not there in non-praying churches.

A few years ago, I held a conference at a church in Michigan. The church had invited many other churches to attend the conference and they had responded—more than 300 were in attendance. As these people (hungry people who wanted to grow closer to God through prayer) worshiped and prayed together, something happened. God showed up! There were multiple times where we so sensed His presence that we had to just be silent for seemingly long stretches of time (up to five minutes).

A number of years ago at our prayer leaders' convention, Dr. Tommy Barnett, pastor of First Assembly of God Church in Phoenix, Arizona, said, "The presence of God in the midst of a church is directly proportional to the amount of prayer that takes place there."

When the Spirit of God is manifestly present, other things happen. People hear Him speak, giving direction and encouragement. The church in Antioch saw this truth in action: "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work

to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2-3). During a normal time of prayer and worship, the Holy Spirit gave crucial direction that forever changed the world—Saul (Paul) began his missionary work.

As you pray together as a congregation, God will begin to "show up" more and more.

2. Praying together increases the faith of a congregation to believe God for the miraculous.

Matthew 17 and Mark 9 tell the story of a father who brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples. They could not cast the demon out. The boy was taken to Jesus, who issued a simple command and the demon left. Later, the disciples came to Jesus and they were baffled. Why? Because they knew how to cast out demons. (The story takes place after they had been sent two by two into villages casting out demons and healing the sick.) They asked Jesus why they couldn't do it.

Jesus said two things: "because you have so little faith" (Matthew 17:20), and "this kind can come out only by prayer" (Mark 9:29).

I wonder if the disciples attacked this demon issue cavalierly or routinely. They knew the words to say, the steps to take. But nothing worked because they were not prayed up enough. Their faith was not there as a result. There is a clear connection between prayer and faith (beyond the fact that we are supposed to pray in faith).

I believe the most significant thing that is lost in a church that does not have corporate prayer is faith. There is simply no expectation that God will do the miraculous. One of the main reasons most churches are stagnant and do not see God at work in miraculous ways in their midst is that most churches and individuals do not know what it is to pray in faith anymore. But faith grows as we pray together.

Here's how it works: Maybe I personally am going through a tough time. In the midst of it, I try to pray with trust and faith, but it is difficult because I only see the issue. If I go and pray with others, however, what happens? As I listen to others pray with more faith than I have, my faith grows. Here's how it works in a corporate situation. Let's say our church is planning to build a new facility, and we feel it is God's will for us to do so. But I'm an elder who is skeptical of the plans because they are beyond what we can afford to do. I begin to pray with others regarding this. God can now put a heart of trust in me, He can bring me to unity with others, He can give me the faith to believe Him for the miraculous—His vision and plan for my church. When I only pray by myself, that is less likely to happen.

Churches that do not pray together still minister in whatever ways they can, given their resources, abilities, and sacrifices. But churches that pray together begin to see the miraculous power of God at work in their midst. It goes beyond what they can and should do into what God wants to do through them.

A few years ago, our ministry's founder, Dave Butts, shared on becoming a praying church at a pastor and elder gathering at Lincoln College in Illinois. A number of leaders from Northpoint Church near St. Louis were there. A year or so after his presentation, Dave received an email from its prayer leader. In it, he shared what God had been doing in their church since the gathering. In March of 2009, Northpoint was not growing and its budget was \$40,000 in the red. Dave's message inspired these leaders to encourage and challenge their people to come out to their Sunday morning prayer times. The prayer meeting grew in number of attendees. They focused prayer on God's blessing, asking that His transformational power would once again move Northpoint forward. They put forth a prayer challenge called "750 in the Black," meaning they wanted to grow to more than 750 attendees and be financially

in the black. Less than a year after increasing the prayers, they were well in the black and more than 700 were coming to services each week.

If you increase the level of praying together among your congregation, you will see more miracles happen as your faith rises.

3. Praying together moves people from seeking their own purposes to desiring God's purposes.

Most people's prayers seek the best fix for a situation. We typically pray whatever we are told to pray for a situation, with no real thought of "What does God want to do here?" Something happens to that dynamic, however, when people pray together. They start to let go of their desires to see their purposes fulfilled and start to open themselves up to what God wants.

The value of this to a church is huge when it comes to ministry and decision making. If people pray together over an issue, even if people come to prayer thinking they know what the church should do, praying together opens them up to God's desire.

Years ago, I was a part of a church plant in Colorado Springs that was meeting in a school. We felt the Lord leading us to purchase land. We found two pieces of property—one was very close to the school and forty-two of our families, the other was three to four miles away. That distance was not a big deal, but it was not in the neighborhood we had been ministering in for the past five years. The property close to us cost 1.5 million, the other \$450,000. Many of us felt the issue was not the difference in price, but where God wanted us. Pray, figure that out, and He will provide. There were leaders on both sides of which piece to purchase. We started praying together. We even called a corporate prayer meeting on one of the pieces of property. As we did that, God began to

put a vision of the ministry we could have on the \$450,000 piece of property into those of us who wanted the other property. That is what God will do when we pray together—agreement comes so we can pray His will with confidence.

People who are disgruntled with decisions a church has made usually have not prayed with the body over that issue. Pray together and watch unity grow.

The Challenge

Jeremiah 29:11-13 is a powerful promise written to a corporate body of people. “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.’”

The “all” there is numeric—God is saying if all of you would seek me, you will find the plans I have for you. If we want to see God’s blessing in our churches, if we want to see Jesus’ transforming power, the dynamic ministry of the Holy Spirit in our midst, then we need to pray together.

In this day and age, it is very difficult to get people to commit to more nights at a church. Many churches have stopped holding weekly prayer meetings. But these benefits suggest that churches need to reconsider providing opportunities for corporate prayer.

As leaders, seek the Lord as to what to tweak to make more praying together happen in your church. If you already have a weekly prayer meeting with more than a few attending, perhaps some tweaks to make it more dynamic will help. Then promote the meeting. There are people in most congregations who would attend a midweek prayer meeting if they were taught why it was important to the life of a church, and if they were regularly encouraged to go.

But, if you do not have something you can tweak—or if the prayer meeting is beyond tweaking—I encourage you to consider where you can add prayer to existing gatherings where most of your people already are. The worship service is a primary place to include more dynamic times of prayer. See Chapter 6, “Prayer in the Worship Service” for ideas. If you have a strong adult Sunday school program or a very active small group ministry, this can work too—though in small groups, because of their nature, it is very difficult to move people to pray beyond the needs of just the people in the group.

Also, remember that you can have powerful corporate prayer on a smaller corporate level. What do I mean by that? When all your elders meet, their prayers for church-related issues are powerful because of their authority over the church. If all your Sunday school teachers meet together and pray over the ministry of the Sunday school, there is a powerful corporate nature to that. By encouraging additional “Spirit-empowering prayer” among the leaders of different areas of ministry, powerful things will happen as a result.



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A Short Video of Jon Teaching on This Topic

