

Unity Around a Yearly Prayer Theme

Our prayer team didn't hesitate when I proposed our 2023 prayer theme. Normally we take a few months to pray, look at Scripture, and determine a yearly theme that rallies our church to pray in unity. We pray, banter around ideas, see what seems to resonate, pray some more, and then come to agreement before we introduce our theme in January.

But this time I felt such strong conviction from the Spirit that I boldly presented my thoughts to our team.

"We need to rally prayer around 'Reclaim a Generation,'" I implored. "And we can base it on Psalm 78:4 (esv): ' . . . tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.'"

I was partly inspired by Cheryl Sacks' prayer guide by that name; partly inspired by an urgency to raise up protection over our children.

The response was immediate and unanimous. Yes!

Even as we agreed on that theme, we had no idea how rapidly our society would continue to deteriorate in ungodly ideologies directed at children. We didn't anticipate the movie "Sound of Freedom" that would sweep the nation with alarming truths about sex trafficking of children.

We had only an inkling of the dark and demonic strategies facing us. But we knew it was critical to call our church to prayer on behalf of our next generation.

Prayer Themes Unite

Our yearly prayer themes are rallying cries that inspire hope

in our people.

Some of our past themes include “Steadfast Love,” “Yet, I Will Rejoice,” and “Cry Out to the God Who Hears.” We always add a scripture passage to tie with the theme.

Our congregation anticipates the revealing of the prayer theme each year. We introduce it in advance of our annual week of prayer in January. We include graphics—and it almost becomes a “drumroll moment.” People often express how the theme resonates with what they sense will be important in the coming year.

During our January week of prayer, we develop daily prayer points around that theme and invite our church to pray in unity. We keep the theme before our weekly House of Prayer throughout the year. We develop a month of theme-related prayer points for our July prayer and fasting.

By keeping the prayer theme before our congregation, we create a common vision for prayer that can be revisited many times. Praying in agreement is powerful (Matt. 18:19).

Takes Advanced Planning

Here are some suggestions in planning a yearly theme:

- Pray and invite the Spirit to give insight about what the coming year might bring. You may not know specifics, but you can get a sense of the spiritual temperature of your church or our nation.
- Ask your prayer team about the passages of Scripture they have been drawn to in their quiet times. Our “Yet, I Will Rejoice” theme came into focus because one of our team members was spending quite a bit of time in the Book of Habakkuk. As we each read and prayed through the three chapters, we quickly landed on the hope of Habakkuk 3:18.

- Pay attention to the news. I've heard it said that we should "pray with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other." Or for me, that means pray with my Twitter app in one hand! What's happening in our world matters to your congregation—and it matters to God.
- If an idea doesn't resonate with your team, keep praying and processing. We find that God often redirects us toward a theme that everyone embraces with enthusiasm.
- Include your pastor in the discussions of the theme. Your pastor may embrace whatever you as a prayer leader determine, but you want to be sure that your leadership is also enthusiastic about the theme and will call the congregation to pray in unity.
- Explain the theme to your congregation as you introduce it. Let them know that you believe it represents what God wants to do in answer to their prayers.

Repeat, Repeat

Bring up the theme in a variety of venues and prayer opportunities. If, by the end of the year, most of your congregation has no idea what the prayer theme is, you didn't talk about it enough!

Inspire your people with ways to pray into that theme—and watch the unity grow in hopeful prayer.

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