

Watch Your Prayer Protocol

Are Prayer Leaders Their Own Worst Enemies?

By Jonathan Graf



I have recently been struck by the fact that those who are most passionate about something, often find it hard to help others get involved with what they are so passionate about. The same can be true for many of our CPLN network members or prayer leaders. You are passionate about prayer. You want to see prayer grow in your church. You want to see a dynamic prayer meeting established in your church. But I wonder how many of us are our own worst enemies where prayer growth is concerned.

More and more I am hearing from pastors who believe one of the problems with growing prayer in their churches is the people most passionate about prayer—possibly even the prayer team. As prayer leaders we would be aghast to learn that we might be a hindrance to prayer in our church! But we sometimes are. How?

Often, those of us who are zealots about prayer cannot relate practically. We love prayer, but our views of what to shoot for are sometimes impractical. Let me give some examples.

I was recently in a church where the pastor hesitated to promote the prayer gathering (it met Wednesday nights along with several other functions for adults that evening). This was not due to his fear of promoting one thing over another that night. It had more to do with the focus and format of the meeting. The prayer meeting was characterized by a few people praying very long prayers. The result was that they intimidated other people. The pastor did not want to encourage people to attend a meeting where they would feel they couldn't participate—and perhaps where they might actually be stunted in their prayer growth because of that intimidation.

Following a session I taught in that church on discovering your prayer personality, a woman came up to me and told me that she went to the prayer meeting but never prayed. Why? "Because," she told me, "I cannot pray like the people there."

Many of us who want to see prayer grow in our churches fail because we do not nurture the prayer level of the average believer. Take corporate or public prayer for instance. What protocol do you follow? Many mature pray-ers forget how to pray in public prayer gatherings. They do what I call "pray personal prayers in a group setting." In other words they pray exactly how they would pray if they were alone. They go on and on—passionately—while others are left to listen, and unfortunately, to think I can't pray that way, so this is not for me.

Jesus often went away to pray by Himself—and He prayed all night on many occasions. But when others were around, His prayers were short. His model prayer, which used plural pronouns, (a corporate prayer), including pauses for effect probably took no more than a minute. The longest prayer we see of His—John 17—maybe took four or five minutes. His public

prayer in John 11:41-43 took only seconds, yet raised a man from the dead!

There is a protocol that needs to be followed in public prayer meetings. Many mature pray-ers ignore it—to the prayer meetings' detriment. If your church wants to see more people—average believers—come out to prayer gatherings than you need to be sensitive to those just beginning to venture into corporate prayer. Keep your prayers short and simple. Save your deepest, most passionate prayers for your prayer closet. If struggling pray-ers realize that prayer meeting is a safe place to practice their praying, they will come.

Getting mature prayer people to understand the need to change may be difficult. Perhaps you can remind them that even Jesus' last recorded time of praying with others—in the Garden—resulted in people falling asleep.

There is another way we prayer zealots can be a detriment to the prayer growth in our congregation. It's the all or nothing syndrome. We get a vision for what we would like to see in a prayer ministry or for prayer to move forward. But it may be too much for a church to accept. We may need to be content with baby steps toward it. Don't have the attitude if I can't get this then I won't be happy. You need to be content with small beginnings and small victories.

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