

What's Your Outward Praying Like?

Many, many churches focus the entirety of their prayer efforts on their own people's health and other personal needs. While the Bible says to cast all our anxiety on Jesus, and I am sure the early Church did pray for each other, that does not appear to be the main focus of their prayers. And it probably should not be the main focus of your church's prayers either.

In Acts 4, following the first major threat to the early Church—Peter and John being threatened and “commanded . . . not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus” again (4:18)—the Church goes to prayer. But they do not at all focus on praying for Peter's and John's safety! Instead, they focus on Kingdom expansion: “Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (4:30-31).

I believe when a church focuses more prayer on the ease and good life of its members than on God empowering it to reach the lost, to grow the Kingdom, or to take its people deeper in their relationship with Jesus, than that is a weak, out-of-balance church where prayer is concerned.

If you want your church to count for the Kingdom, you must, must, must develop prayer that is outward focused! How can you do that?

First, remember that believers will not naturally sustain prayer for a topic over the long haul without help and encouragement to do so. You will need to regularly put reminders in front of your congregation to keep them praying.

Here are four areas for prayer where you can engage your people. The first two are easier to engage your entire

congregation than the last two, but all are important outward-focused prayer topics.

Pray for the Lost.

Develop a focus on praying for lost people, especially local lost people! While we all have relatives for whom we are praying for salvation, when we focus on local lost people an interesting thing happens. As we pray, we get God's heart for that person. The more that happens, the more likely we are to share Christ with the people for whom we are praying! Praying for local lost people will turn your people into evangelists, too!

There are lots of prayer guides and prayer initiatives available to equip your people to pray for the lost. PrayerShop.org has two prayer guides available: Five Blessings Brochure and Praying for Your Unsaved Family and Friends. While not specifically about praying for lost people, our prayer initiatives *Revolution on Our Knees* and *Be Jesus in Your Neighborhood* are both very outreach-focused. Also, check out the website Bless Every Home for a great way to help your church pray for their neighbors.

Pray for Your Community.

Most people have an affinity or love for the city in which they live. If equipped, they will pray for the transformation of their community. Check out America Prays and the City Prayer Movements section of our website for ideas on how to pray, how to equip and motivate your people to pray.

We highly recommend the resource *City of Prayer* and its sequel 40-day devotional prayer guide *Praying God's Word Over Your City* as a great method to fuel ongoing prayer for your community.

Pray for Your Nation.

Your people are obviously concerned about what is happening in our nation these days. Having a focus that helps them pray on target can be very successful. Your entire congregation can be engaged with a prayer initiative like *Desperate for Change: 40 Days of Prayer for America*, or you can develop a weekly prayer meeting to pray for the nation that will be attended by those few most interested. Either offers an outlet for outward praying!

Pray for Missionaries and the Nations.

If your church has a strong missions ministry where missionaries you support regularly have contact with your people, developing stronger prayer for missions and the world can be very beneficial as well. Perhaps develop a special prayer group that focuses on the needs of your missionaries would be a good starting point. Put some prayer guides—either with general topics or with requests from your supported missionaries—into your people’s hands. We have two prayer guides that might help: “Effective Biblical Prayers for Missionaries” and “B-L-E-S-S Your Missionaries with Prayer.”

If you desire to be a well-balanced church where prayer is concerned, I encourage you to make some efforts to shore up your outward praying. You will see your congregation becoming more Kingdom-minded as you do!

—Jonathan Graf is the president of Church Prayer Leaders Network. To join the CPLN, [click here](#).