Creating a Culture of Prayer in Yourself & Your Church



CHUCK LAWLESS

**CA CHURCH ANSWERS** 

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### INTRODUCTION

#### **SECTION I: FOUNDATIONS FOR PRAYER**

### **CHAPTER 1**

Understanding and Prioritizing Prayer

### **CHAPTER 2**

Being Good Stewards of Our Time

#### **SECTION II: IDEAS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER**

### **CHAPTER 3**

Praying Proactively or Reactively?

### **CHAPTER 4**

Praying Strategically—and Continually

### **CHAPTER 5**

Praying for Yourself and Your Family

### **SECTION III: IDEAS FOR CORPORATE PRAYER**

### **CHAPTER 6**

Testing Your Church's Prayer Level

### **CHAPTER 7**

Leading Your Church to Pray

### CONCLUSION

A Final Challenge



# INTRODUCTION

It's one of the most convicting Bible texts I've ever read. I had been a pastor for a number of years, and I'd taught about prayer many times—but never before had these verses so captured my heart:

"But the news about him spread even more, and large crowds would come together to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. Yet he often withdrew to deserted places and prayed." (Luke 5:15-16)

I can just imagine the scene. The crowds had gathered, perhaps some from great distances, to hear the Master teach. Sure, they'd heard about Him, but now they could hear *from* Him. They waited with anticipation for His message.

At the same time, the sick were at His feet. Maybe a blind man had fumbled his way to Jesus, slowly working through the crowd as best he could. Another man—a lame man—was there only because a friend had carried him to where Jesus would be. A deaf man could hear nothing despite the din of the crowd, but still he somehow had "heard" that Jesus was coming to town. My guess is that moaning from pain and odors from infection hung in the air. Combined with the waiting crowd, this bunch was a needy one.

Still, Luke 5:16 tells us something quite fascinating. Jesus at times actually pushed away from the crowds to pray. He walked away from the masses and turned to His Father. Apparently, prayer time meant much to the Son of God.



"If we love people and have the power to help, then we are going to be busy. Learning to pray doesn't offer us a less busy life; it offers us a less busy heart." Here's why these verses are so convicting to me. I'm a pastor at heart. I pastored two churches in Ohio prior to joining a seminary faculty, and I've served as associate pastor and interim pastor in several churches since then. What I love about pastoring is preaching to the same people every week and shepherding them through crises and struggles. And, if crowds gathered to hear me preach, I'd want to preach; if I could heal the sick in front of me, I'd want to do that, too.

My fear, though, is that I'd do ministry first and pray only if I had leftover time. I'm afraid I would say only a perfunctory prayer at the beginning of the ministry activities, do the ministry, and then ask God to bless what I'd already done.

I'm concerned I wouldn't push away from the crowds enough to pray.

I'm learning about prayer now 40+ years into my Christian journey, but I still have a long way to go. And, unless I uniquely struggle here, I suspect I'm not the only pastor who needs to keep learning to pray. We're busy. We never finish our work. Another counseling session, another hospital visit, another committee meeting, another emergency need requires our time—and we pray too little even though we know better.



"He was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John also taught his disciples." – Luke 11:1

Thus, here's the goal of this book: to help you to pray as a pastor and your church to pray as a congregation. Ultimately, I want us to learn to pray at the feet of the Master.

Maybe some of the lessons I've learned will help you as a pastor. In addition to new thoughts and ideas interspersed throughout this

book, I've included some of the material first posted at my website (**www.chucklawless.com**). The first section focuses on the foundations for praying. The second section offers practical ideas for personal prayer, and the third section provides ideas for corporate prayer. My prayer for me as I write this book and for you as you read it is that the Lord would teach us to pray.

We simply cannot make an eternal difference in our work apart from a strong prayer life.

### **SECTION I: FOUNDATIONS FOR PRAYER**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### UNDERSTANDING AND PRIORITIZING PRAYER

I suppose I could begin this book by offering a deeply theological, necessarily complex definition of prayer, but doing so would hinder reaching one goal I want to accomplish with this book: to help us see the simplicity and majesty of prayer, and therefore want to spend more time with the Father. So, here's how I define prayer:

#### Prayer is communicating with God.

That's simple, I know. Nevertheless, there's much there to consider. First, prayer assumes a relationship with God. The God we serve is the eternal Creator who welcomes us into His presence. He wants us to come before Him boldly because we're His children.

Second, prayer assumes we get to talk to God. It's amazing, actually. We're privileged to speak to Him, and He listens to us. Our God is not some manmade idol with ears but cannot hear; instead, He's the listening One who delights in the prayers of the righteous (Prov 15:8).



Third, prayer assumes a two-way conversation. Prayer is dialogical—that is, it assumes we also listen to God through His Word, the means by which He communicates to us through His Spirit. Hence, we cannot pray well apart from hearing and obeying God's Word before, during, and after we pray.

Stories of praying leaders echo throughout the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, for example, Abraham prayed for Lot in Sodom (Gen 18:16-33). Moses prayed for the Israelites (Exo 32:9-14). David prayed a prayer of repentance (Psa 51). Solomon prayed for wisdom (1 Kgs 3:7-9). Elijah prayed for God to make His name known (1 Kgs 18:36-37). Hezekiah prayed for deliverance (2 Kgs 19:14-19). Jehoshaphat also prayed for God's intervention (2 Chron 20: 5-12). Jonah prayed from the belly of a fish (Jonah 2:1-9).

Jesus was, of course, the perfect example of a prayer warrior. If you want to study His prayer life, pay close attention to the Gospel of Luke. That book gives us many examples to consider as we strive to pray as Jesus did:

- Pray as you commit yourself to God's work: "when Jesus also was baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened" (3:21).
- 2 Start the day with prayer: "And when it was day, he departed and went to a desolate place" (4:42). Mark 1:35 tells us Jesus went to this place to pray.
- Push away from the crowds to pray: "Great crowds gathered to hear him . . . but he would withdraw to desolate places and pray" (5:15-16).
- Pray for people to invest in, just as Jesus did before calling His disciples: "he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God" (6:12).

- Pray thanksgiving for food: "And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing over them" (9:16).
- **Spend time praying alone**: "Now it happened that as he was praying alone. . . " (9:18).
- Take others with you on a prayer retreat: "he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray" (9:28).
- **Simply rejoice in prayer**: "In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, 'I thank you, Father" (10:21).
- Pray, and then teach others how to pray: "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place . . . And he said to them, 'When you pray, say . . .'" (11:1-2).
- Pray for others under spiritual attack: "Simon, Simon, Satan demanded to have you . . . but I have prayed for you" (22:31-32).
- Cry out to God in your grief: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me" (22:42).
- Pray for God's will to be done: "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (22:42).
- Pray for your enemies: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (23:34).
- Pray when you face death: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (23:46).
- Pray blessings over Jesus' followers: "Then he led them as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them" (24:50).

The early followers of Jesus also followed His lead in prayer. They met in Acts 1 in a time of prayer (Acts 1:14), and they devoted themselves to praying (Acts 2:42, 6:4). They prayed with such power that the place where they were meeting was shaken (Acts 4:31). Stephen prayed as he died (Acts 7:60), and Peter had gone to pray when the Lord showed him a magnificent vision (Acts 10:9-16). The believers prayed for Peter to be released from prison (Acts 12:5), and they prayed before sending out Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3). Prayer was simply in their DNA.

Communicating with God is what Christian leaders must do if we want to follow the examples of Christ and the early Church. We might praise God in prayer (adoration), admit our sin (confession), express gratitude (thanksgiving), or pray for ourselves and others (supplication)—but we must pray.

If that's the case, why do we need this book? Why don't we pray like we should?

1

We can do too much ministry in our own power. This reason may be, in fact, our biggest problem. If we can do our work without God's help, we don't need to pray much.

**We're "fixers" by nature.** We are typically problem solvers who seek solutions, attempt answers, and try again if the first answer doesn't work. Our persistence and tenacity to do so - both good traits in themselves - sometimes push prayer to a last resort option.

2

3

We never learned how to pray. Churches make this mistake with most spiritual disciplines: we *tell* believers what to do, but don't *teach* them how to do it. When we tell but don't teach, though, we set believers up for discouragement and failure.

**Prayer has become more about ritual than about relationship.** We know we should pray, even if we don't know how, so we go through the motions of prayer. It is not a relation-ship with a living Lord that calls us to prayer; it is instead only religious ritual. Because this problem is so common, we'll look at it more in the next chapter.

4

5

**Prayerlessness can be hidden.** We can talk about prayer, teach about prayer, write about prayer, and even lead corporately in prayer - all without anyone knowing that our personal prayer is sporadic at best. This kind of hiddenness is an enemy of heartfelt prayer.

We don't really believe prayer works. Sure, we teach differently about prayer. Nevertheless, our prayer life often suggests otherwise. Sometimes we don't pray at all. When we do pray, we're too often surprised when God does respond.

6

7

We've never been broken under God's hand. Faced with a thorn in the flesh, the apostle Paul pleaded with God to remove it (2 Cor. 12:7-10). God instead sovereignly used the thorn to weaken the apostle, who experienced God's strength at his weakest moments. It is in our weakness that we learn how to pray, but leaders naturally fight against weakness.

We read the Word in a one-sided way. Leaders are often teachers who read the Word for information transmission more than life transformation. When we approach the Word that way, we miss the opportunity to be in dialogue with God. Our Bible reading – even when preparing for teaching or preaching – should bring us to praise, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and obedience. It should lead us into prayerful conversation with God.

8



9

**Some pastors have simply lost hope.** It happens. Church leaders who prayed more consistently in the past sometimes lose hope under the weight of church conflict, family struggles, or health concerns. Unanswered prayer leads to faithlessness, which leads to prayerlessness. If this is your case, I'm praying this book will encourage you to turn to God again.

We're not very good at time management. Spending time with God requires intentionality and priority—but many of us are poor time managers. This issue is so real, in fact, that I've devoted the next chapter to basic time management principles.

10

As you finish this chapter, do some self-evaluation. What most keeps you from communicating with God? How might you address this issue?

# **CHAPTER 2**

### BEING GOOD STEWARDS OF OUR TIME

When I consult with churches, I can usually determine their priorities by looking at two things: their calendar and their budget. That's actually the same case with our personal priorities as well. In this chapter, we'll focus not so much on the *calendar* but on the *clock*; that is, we'll think about how we use our time each day. Many of us struggle with a consistent devotion and prayer life because we simply don't make time for it.

At the same time, we live in the tension of knowing we need to spend time with God, but we also need to do the work of ministry. And, the people we serve often expect us to be publicly, personally, and pastorally present in everything the church does; that is, they don't always think much about our need for time with God. The tension is real for most of us called to be pastors.

So, how do we live in this tension? **FIRST**, we must decide that prayer really does matter. I hope chapter 1 of this book has helped you reach that conclusion. **SECOND**, we must teach our church the importance of prayer. We can't expect them to understand our priority if we've never really taught them much about prayer. **THIRD**, we not only must make time for prayer, but we also need to tell our congregation about our plans to do so. Keeping them informed about our strategy holds us accountable to them while also helping them understand why we may not be readily available at times. **FOURTH**, we should

"We talk of no time, lack of time, not enough time, or being out of time. Trying to get more time, we borrow time only to incur a time debt and end up with even less time. . . . Ideally, you see, our time should all be God's time, directed by Him and used for His purposes. It is not right that progress has tyrannized us so."

always be equipping others to pray. When we're discipling others by modeling prayer and teaching them to pray, we're more effectively tying our own prayer to our ministry. **FINALLY**, we need to steward our time well to pray. Maybe one of these ideas will help you as you plan time for prayer:

1)

**Get up earlier each day.** Even if you don't use that extra time for a focused prayer time, use it wisely to free time later in the day for prayer. When you get up, I encourage you to pray at least this prayer: "Lord, thank You for this day. Deliver me from the evil one today, and help me to serve You fully."

2>

Plan a brief time of prayer at morning, noon, and night. That's the way the psalmist prayed, especially in a time of anguish (Psa 55:17). Simply taking a few minutes to pray three times a day is a step in the right direction.



Plan a time each evening to pray through your next day's calendar. Pray about each meeting, each opportunity, and each responsibility. You can do that in 5-10 minutes each night, and the next day will be even more God-glorifying.

4>

Take advantage of your 10-minute segments throughout the day. It's great when we have a full hour to pray, but there's another way to reach that hour: find six 10-minute segments throughout the day, and pray. We're going to use those "breaks" for something—so why not use at least some of them to speak to the Father?



Pray as you begin each task, and thank God when you finish it. If you do that throughout the day, prayer will become a more natural part of your life. You'll pray almost without ceasing within the regular rhythm of your day.

These additional time management tips aren't directly tied to prayer, but maybe they'll help you find more time for prayer:

- 1. Do less exciting tasks first. If you do the tedious stuff first, you can always look forward to doing something more enjoyable. Plus, it's just good to get the less exciting things off the "to do" list.
- 2. Move papers one time. Of course, we're moving away from using paper, but the principle's the same: deal with something as soon as you can, and don't let it stack up.
- **3.** Schedule time to check email. Check your email 2-3 scheduled times per day and use an "auto-response" that lets folks know when you'll respond.
- **4. Take regular breaks.** The break need not be long, but even a few minutes can help you re-focus your efforts. Take five minutes, and do something that re-energizes you for the rest of the day.

- 5. Close your office door when needed. Give yourself permission to close the door occasionally and concentrate on a task. You'll be more comfortable with unexpected visits if you're not behind in your work.
- 6. Limit the duration of drop-by visits by standing. Remaining standing - even going to the door and standing in the office doorway - is a simple way

to say, "I'm happy to visit, but I have only a few moments."

7. Limit the duration of meetings with good scheduling. Plan meetings back-to-back, and be clear about your time limitations. A simple, "Glad to see you. I have only thirty minutes before my next appointment" can quickly establish your boundaries.

"Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk-not as unwise people but as wise making the most of the time, because the days are evil."

- Ephesians 5:15-16

- 8. Use the telephone to talk to people. We spend too many hours clarifying emails or texts, explaining our words, or denying perceived emotions behind a message. Most of the time, a simple phone call would have saved time.
- **9.** Complete at least one task per day. Finish something. Doing so releases some pressure, and we're usually more prepared then to face the next task.
- 10. Clean your desk every day before you leave. Finish a task, and get the work off your desk. Beginning the day with work already on your desk implies you're behind before you get started.

How we use our time is a reflection of our priorities. Even as I'm writing this chapter, I'm praying for you as a reader. I pray you'll do what it takes to make prayer a priority in your life!

# SECTION II: IDEAS FOR PERSONAL PRAYER

# **CHAPTER 3**

#### PRAYING PROACTIVELY OR REACTIVELY?

I wish we could just snap our fingers and become great prayer warriors, but praying isn't that easy. I suspect you're reading this book because your story is like mine: you've tried multiple methods to grow in prayer, but it's still a battle to find a method that works consistently. You know you need to pray, though—so, you're here seeking another approach.

My initial thoughts in this chapter might disappoint you, however: all of us must work at growing in prayer. Because we don't default into dependence on God, we also don't readily turn to Him in prayer. Our prayer becomes more reactive ritual than personal relationship.

As you begin this chapter, take this short quiz to evaluate whether your prayer life is more ritual or relationship:



- Do you pray because you have to or because you want to? If you talk to God only because "that's what a Christian is supposed to do," you're likely treating prayer as a ritual. Praying because "I have to" is ritual; praying because "I get to" is more relationship.
- Are you comfortable praying wherever you are, or must you pray only in a certain place at a certain time? It's fine important even, for some believers to have a set time and place to pray each day. But, your prayer life might be ritualistic if you pray *only* in that place and time.
- Do you ever just talk to God about your day, or do you turn to Him only when you have a need? Praying only when a need arises makes prayer a ritual of response. True relationship means you want to talk often with God, even if you



seemingly have nothing important to say. **Does your language style change when you pray?** We've all heard that leader whose accent disappears and whose words change to KJV English when he prays. That's ritual. We might even call that "fake."

- Can you make it through the day without praying? If so, that's not a very strong relationship. When you do pray, I'd not be surprised if it's only a ritual someone else expects you to follow.
- **Do your prayers sound alike all the time?** That's one way I realize when I've shifted more into ritual. When my prayers sound remarkably alike sometimes *word-for-word* in a given setting, like praying with my wife in the morning or saying grace over a meal I've moved in the wrong direction.
- Do you just know your prayers are more a Christian ritual than an expression of relationship? I think we do know, unless we've allowed our heart to deceive us. Be honest. Trust your Holy Spirit-directed gut.

Our prayer is not only sometimes ritual more than relationship, but it's also often more reactive than proactive. Much praying, of course, must be reactive, simply because we don't know about needs until they're present. On the other hand, praying only reactively is problematic. Think about these examples of our praying reactively rather than proactively:

- If your church has a prayer list, something bad typically has to happen to get your name on the list (e.g., sickness, death, job loss, etc.); we start praying only after we hear about the problem.
- We usually begin praying for families in our churches only after we hear they're in trouble.
- We pray for young people only after they're wandering into sin.

- We pray for other churches—including churches whose buildings we pass on the way to the office—only after we learn about their internal struggles.
- We pray for other pastors only after we hear about their needs.

We even pray this way about temptation, despite how Jesus taught us to pray. His words in the model prayer were clear: we are to pray to the Father, "And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt 6:13). Jesus later echoed similar words to His disciples as He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane: "Pray that you may not fall into temptation" (Luke 22:40). His disciples slept instead, however, and Jesus gave them the same command a second time (Luke 22:48).



Church Answers is a community of Church Leaders that pray for each other regularly. Click here to share a specific prayer request

We are often just as guilty as the disciples were. Jesus taught us to pray before temptation happens, and our prayer should be that God would protect us from the evil one. I hope we would pray at least during the temptation, but that seldom happens, either. Rather, our prayer is usually after the temptation—and it shouldn't surprise us these prayers sound repetitively alike. When we don't pray the way Jesus taught us—proactively—our reactive prayers will sound like, "God, please forgive

me *again.*"

"Prayer is the surest remedy against the devil and besetting sins. That sin will never stand firm which is heartily prayed against. That devil will never long keep dominion over us which we beseech the Lord to cast forth."

Here's my point: when we pray only after the enemy seems to be winning, we let the devil set the agenda for our prayer list. Maybe families would be healthier, young people would remain more faithful, churches would be more united, and we would all walk more obediently to Christ if we prayed for each other *proactively*. We would win more battles if we sought the Father's presence and power before the temptation ever occurs.

Consider these questions about your own practice of prayer:



- Do you pray more proactively or reactively?
- If you pray more reactively, what have been some of the consequences in your life and ministry?
- What steps will you take personally to pray more proactively?
- Who might hold you accountable to praying more intentionally and strategically?
- How might you lead your church to pray more proactively?

By definition, praying proactively means we take the initiative to pray. That's not always easy, but we must start somewhere. I trust the next chapter will help think proactively.

# **CHAPTER 4**

### PRAYING STRATEGICALLY—AND CONTINUALLY

In many cases, we have to first build the habit of prayer into our lives so it becomes part of our spiritual DNA; that is, our *obedience* in prayer leads to *joy* in prayer. The goal of this chapter is to offer some addi-

tional simple ways to begin building prayer into your life—trusting that the joy of prayer will come.

My primary prayer time is usually in the evening when I spend the most devoted

"One prayer does not a prayer life make. Prayers without variety eventually become words without meaning." IV time in the Word, but I pray throughout the day. I've found it helpful to use multiple ways to pray. In fact, I've often used more than one method in the same week. Maybe one of these strategies for increasing your prayer will be helpful to you:



**Develop your own prayer calendar.** Each day, determine the focus of your praying. Allow that focus to guide you through the day. Pray about other matters as needed, but strive to maintain a single focus in your praying that day. Here's an example from one of my weeks:

Monday pray for my extended family
Tuesday pray for non-believing friends
Wednesday pray for missionaries around the world
Thursday pray for the leadership of Southeastern Seminary (where I teach)
Friday pray for my wife
Saturday pray for my church's leaders
Sunday pray for particular pastors preaching the Word



**Establish some prayer "triggers."** Associate prayer with some daily activities, and then develop prayer patterns. For example, you might pray before you turn the ignition on your car. Pray as you cook a meal, clean a room, walk on the treadmill. Pray every time you hear a siren or see someone who seems to be hurting. Let the "trigger" do what it's intended to do: direct you toward prayer.



**Use the church calendar as a prayer guide**. Find the list of scheduled events for the week, and pray for each day's activities. If the young people are meeting on Tuesday night, pray for them. If the praise team practices on Monday, intercede for them that night. Let the calendar be more than information; let it become a prayer burden.



**Develop a "Family Focus" prayer strategy**. Each week, focus on a different family in the church. Find out what prayer needs they have, and pray for them. Your small

group might use this strategy to make certain every family receives prayer throughout the year. If so, be sure to pray for inactive families as well - after all, only through prayer might they return. Don't forget to include your own family as recipients of this praying.





Follow the ACTS paradigm. Build a prayer list based on Adoration (praising God for who He is), Confession (admitting sin), Thanksgiving (expressing gratitude) and Supplication (praying for others). The intentionality of this strategy will help you stay focused during prayer.

"Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way." –I Sam 12:23



Use a "Focused ACTS" strategy for one week. Use ACTS on Monday, but then focus daily on only one component during the rest of the week. On Tuesday, adore God throughout the day. On Wednesday, ask God to bring to light all your sin so you might confess it (and be prepared—this day can be a tough and long one!). Thursday is for offering thanksgiving all day long, and Friday is for praying for others.



Do "drive by" praying. Use your time in the car to pray. Watch for church buildings, and pray for the pastors of those congregations. Intercede for children and teachers as you drive past a school. Pray for your coworkers as you park each morning. Pray when you see a "for sale" sign in the area, both that the family leaving would know Christ and those moving in would hear the gospel through you.



"Pray constantly." –1 Thessalonians 5:17



**Set some "prayer power points."** A prayer power point is a set time each day when you stop to pray. I find it best to set the alarm on my phone, and that reminder calls me to pray. Just a few minutes set aside for prayer help me to re-focus for the rest of the day.



**Pray the "Model Prayer" of Matthew 6:9-13**. I would not want this strategy to become routine and repetitious, but Jesus taught us to pray this prayer. I often start the day with this prayer. Pause long enough to meditate on each phrase. Let the words become a genuine conversation with God.



**Pray as you read the news**. Whether you read the newspaper or read online, use the news to direct your praying. Intercede for countries in war. Pray for families affected by crime or natural disasters. Ask God to guide government leaders. Pray for missionaries in each country in the news.



**Send an email or text prayer to someone each day**. Take ten minutes, pray for someone else, and send a written prayer to that person. This strategy doesn't take long, and just a few sentences of prayer will encourage somebody unexpectedly.



**Do prayer surveys.** Ask your neighbors, your friends, the store clerk, and the restaurant server, "How may I pray for you?" Write down the request, pray, and then follow up with a note if possible.



**Keep a prayer in your pocket (or on your phone).** Write out a daily prayer that reflects your heart. You might even write a prayer of one of your spiritual heroes. Keep the prayer with you at all times, and pull it out to read it when you need it. Literally, pray without ceasing.



**Pray daily with somebody.** Don't let a day go by without praying with somebody. Do it on the phone, in person, or via some electronic means - but pray. Hold with great responsibility your call to intercede for others.



Let the Scriptures guide your praying. As I've said before, our Bible reading ought to be dialogical; that is, you listen to God through the Word and respond to Him in prayer. If the text convicts you of sin, confess it. If you read a promise, thank God for it. If you learn about God's greatness, praise Him. If you see yourself not following God like the early believers did, be honest with Him. This is the primary method I use in the evenings—and I look forward every day to the conversation.

Before you leave this chapter, think about which of these ideas you might adopt in your prayer life. Which might you most easily accomplish? Remember, we have to start somewhere if we want to grow in prayer.

## **CHAPTER 5**

# PRAYING FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

I'm grateful for my pastoral mentor, Tom Elliff. I met him when his son was one of my students, and I've come to know him as the godliest, most prayerful man I know. He and



his wife, Diana, pray for Pam and me—in addition to praying by name for their six children and their spouses, 33 grandchildren, and 10 great grandchildren every day. I love Tom's book, A Passion for Prayer, not only because it's a good book, but even more because I know the author practices what he preaches. That's the kind of praying pastor I want to be.

Tom admits, though, that he hasn't always prayed this way. In fact, his confession about his prayerless life prior to God's reigniting his passion for prayer is both honest and convicting:

It was not that I did not appear to be a man of prayer. A few well-chosen words were available for any occasion. I preached about prayer, conducted prayer meetings and always responded in the affirmative to those who asked, "Pastor, will you pray for me?" "I'll be praying for you" were the last words of every pastoral visit. Each letter closed with the assurance, "You can count on our continued prayers." But in reality, my personal prayer altar was in ruins. Except for spasmodic periods of renewed effort, I just did not pray."

God revived his heart for prayer, though, as Tom studied the teachings of Scripture and the lives of great prayer warriors. Today, he prays seven prayers for himself each day as well. Because I know the depth and the witness of this man who pastored churches for decades, I want you to hear his daily prayer requests in his own words:

1>

For a looming sense of the presence of God in my life throughout the day. As a believer, I know Christ is in me, with me, and desires to live His life through me. I want to live with a constant and humbling awareness of that truth. King Asa's downfall was attended with his rejection of the simple reality that the Lord is searching to prove Himself strong on behalf of "those whose heart is blameless toward [God]" (2 Chron 16:9). Solomon's sad ending was apparently attended by his forgetfulness that "a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his paths" (Prov 5:21).

2>

**For a pure heart.** Deliberate retention of unconfessed sin immediately blocks the path to intimacy with God. "Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psa 24:3-4). I aim to be a "quick confessor."

3>

For the fullness of the Spirit. Living in the fullness of the Holy Spirit is not only possible; it's commanded (Eph 5:18). This is truly the only way others will see Christ in me!

4>

For the gifts and graces of the Spirit. As we live in the full-ness of the Holy Spirit, He both *gifts* us for service (1 Cor 12) and *graces* our lives with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Both are necessary if I am to be a faithful reflection of Christ.

5>

That I would do nothing that would give the Adversary an opportunity to mock my Lord. Satan is the "accuser," constantly seeking to discredit us in the eyes of God and thus discredit God who calls us His own (Job 2:1-6, Zech 3:1-2, Rev 12:10). I do not want to do, say, or even think anything that would lend support to Satan's accusations.

6>

For my immediate family serving God around the world. In a sense, my family is a "trust" from God, and thus a stewardship for which I must give an account. If Samuel saw the necessity of prayer and instruction for a nation (1 Sam 12:23), I certainly should provide the same for my earthly family. 7>

That the Lord would keep me true to the vision. Some years ago, I adopted the International Mission Board's vision as my own: "A multitude from every language, tribe and nation knowing and worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ." An additional personal purpose statement for me is to be a "living illustration of the faithfulness of God to any person who will take Him at His Word." These are the two "visions" that serve as both a reference and a motivation for life.

Praying for ourselves as Tom does, however, is just the beginning. If our families are, as he says, a "trust" from God, we need to be praying with them and for them. We need to model prayer for them beyond the prayer of grace we pray at each meal.

Your family's prayer ministry should begin with you and your spouse praying together regularly. I encourage couples, in fact, to agree on, sign, and carry with them a "Spouse Prayer Covenant" like the example below:

#### SPOUSE PRAYER COVENANT VI

We,\_\_\_\_and\_\_\_\_, recognize that God has brought us together and that our marriage is to be a testimony to his love for us. We hereby commit to:

- talk openly together about our prayer concerns and needs
- pray for each other daily during our individual times with God
- pray with each other daily at a set time
- hold each other accountable to this commitment
- enlist another couple who will also hold us accountable to this commitment.

My wife, Pam, and I have been married for almost 30 years. She's an incredible helpmate who deserves to know her pastor husband is praying for her. Here are some ways I pray for her today:

- That she would simply walk with the Lord and live out His love. Pam's the kindest, godliest person I've ever met, and my role is to prayerfully encourage her to continue to be this person.
- That God would provide her opportunities and wisdom to reach the lost and invest in young ladies. Pam may not be a Bible scholar or trained counselor, but she leans into the Word, listens to others for wisdom, and trusts the Spirit.
- That she would be comfortable in who she is as a pastor's wife. She is, so this is not a prayer to change her. It's a prayer to encourage her.
- That she would never hesitate to speak truth to me. I've never known that to happen, but I always want her to know I welcome her thoughts.



- That God would maximize Pam's incredible gift of hospitality—and that I would be fully supportive. I add that latter phrase because I'm an introvert while Pam's an extrovert. I love seeing Pam's joy when she serves others. I just need to love it more....
- That He would keep her healthy. I confess that the COVID-19 crisis has led me to pray much more in this direction.
- That she would know how grateful I am for her. I cannot imagine life or ministry without her.
- That she would always have laughter in her life. Her sense of humor caught my attention when I first met her, and I never want her to lose her laughter.

Frankly, husbands sometimes struggle with taking the lead in praying with their spouse. There's something uniquely vulnerable in praying with your spouse, and the spiritual intimacy of prayer is much deeper intimacy than any other kind your relationship might have. That makes

some men—including pastors—uncomfortable enough they don't build prayer into their marriage. I challenge you not to let that be the case in your life, as praying couples can be potent instruments for God's work.

Praying daily with your children ought to be equally important to you. I realize preschoolers may give you only 30 seconds of attention (if that much), but take that time each day. Individually let your children hear you pray for them – and don't stop just because your kids become teens. They, too, might want the prayer to be short, but they need to hear your praying voice. By the way, so do your adult children; there's just something about hearing your dad pray over you, no matter how old you get.



"Prayerwalking is a big help for the challenge of praying as a family. Family prayerwalking takes a literal step toward involving kids in advancing the kingdom of God."

You might even build "family prayerwalks" into your family's routine. Plan a weekly walk through your neighborhood. Pray aloud for your neighbors. Pray for families in the midst of a move. View toys as a trigger to pray for children. Teach your children to say those prayers, and you'll give them a life-changing foundation of prayer.

Then, broaden your children's perspective by teaching them to pray for the nations. Get a family globe or a map, and introduce your family to another part of the world. Do some research, and tell them about the people there—including whether they've heard of Jesus. Be certain to pray for missionaries who may be serving there.

Take some time now to make whatever commitment you need to make to pray more for yourself and your family. Do what this book is about: pray for the Lord's conviction and direction.

# SECTION III: IDEAS FOR CORPORATE PRAYER

# **CHAPTER 6**

### TESTING YOUR CHURCH'S PRAYER LEVEL

Some years ago, a missionary friend invited me to Moscow, Russia, to lead a conference on prayer in the local church. I prepared for months, and I was incredibly excited to teach the Russian believers what the Lord had been teaching me about prayer.

On the first day of the conference, the leader called us to a time of prayer as the meeting began. The Russians typically stand as they pray, so I stood with them as they began to pray aloud. I understood their words only through a translator, but their fervor for seeking God was obvious. They prayed . . . and prayed . . . and prayed some more. TWO hours into the meeting, in fact, the believers then said "Amen" to their prayers.

About an hour into the praying, I thought to myself, "What am I doing here trying to teach these people how to pray?" And, I wondered whether my own church was really a praying church. Compared to other churches in North America, perhaps we were; compared to churches around the world, however, I began to doubt it. That assessment led to my increasing prayer in our church when I returned.

Let's do some evaluation now of your church. Many churches, as I've noted before, talk about



"If someone asks you to tell them about your church, what is the first thing you bring up? ... Yours would have to be an extraordinary church for you to mention that it is a praying church, or even have prayer be a third or fourth thing that came to your mind."

prayer more than they really pray. What about your church? Which of these categories most describes your church?



Churches that only talk about prayer <i>tell</i> people to pray	Churches that really pray <b>teach</b> people to pray
Churches that only talk about prayer <i>schedule prayer meetings</i>	Churches that really pray genuinely pray at prayer meetings
Churches that only talk about prayer <i>preach about prayer</i>	Churches that really pray preach about prayer and pray during preaching
Churches that only talk about prayer may have <b>a prayer list</b>	Churches that really pray use that list <b>every day</b> and report God's answers
Churches that only talk about prayer may have <i>a prayer ministry among others</i>	Churches that really pray have a prayer ministry that covers every other ministry
Churches that only talk about prayer have leaders who themselves <i>talk about prayer</i>	Churches that really pray have leaders who <b>model prayer</b>
Churches that only talk about prayer usually only <b>respond to the enemy's attacks</b>	Churches that really pray do so <b>before</b> the attacks ever occur
Churches that only talk about prayer <i>hope</i> God will do great things	Churches that really pray <b>expect</b> God to do something great
Churches that talk about prayer don't threaten the enemy	Churches that really pray make him shake

If your church tends to talk more about prayer than pray, the good news is that you and your leaders can turn the ship around. It won't happen, though, without intentionality that includes continuing assessment of your church. You've begun that process with the evaluation above, but here are some other questions to determine if your church is a praying church. Within the questions are also some practical hints for increasing prayer in your church.



As a leader, are you personally a prayer warrior? This conversation really does begin here, as praying churches are led by praying leaders. **HINT:** You must lead.

Does the church have a recognized prayer leader in addition to you as pastor? Sometimes it's a layperson, and sometimes it's a staff member—but the strongest praying churches I've seen have somebody leading that charge. HINT: Get another leader to assist you.



3

Based on the worship service, would I recognize the church as a praying church? Is prayer central to your worship, or is it perfunctory and routine? HINT: Make prayer in your worship service intentional and personal.

**Does each small group have a designated prayer leader?** Small groups can be prayer powerhouses for the congregation. If no one promotes prayer in the group, though, it's not likely they'll be that powerhouse. **HINT:** Make sure each small group has a designated prayer leader.



5

When was the last time the church offered intentional prayer training? A lack of training will result in a lack of strong praying members. HINT: Provide ongoing training —at least once each year—if you want members to pray.

**Does your church pray more proactively or reactively?** This question, of course, isn't surprising to you since we've addressed it at a personal level earlier in this book. **HINT:** Lead your congregation to think and pray proactively.



7

**Are new believers taught to pray?** My church when I was a new believer was one of those churches who *told* people they needed to pray but didn't *teach* anyone how to do it. That approach almost always results in weak prayer. **HINT:** Make prayer training part of your church's new believers and membership class.

Does the staff pray together on a regular basis? I am continually struck by how seldom church leaders actually pray together. If leaders don't as a unified team seek God's face regularly, why should they expect the members to do so? HINT: Lead your staff to set the example: pray together.

8

9

**Does your church share and celebrate answered prayer?** Believers will likely pray more when they regularly hear more often about God's intervention. **HINT:** Don't forget to let folks know when God answers prayer.

If a member of the community needs prayer, would he/she turn to your church based on your church's reputation? Your members will spread the news if your church is a praying church that sees results, and the community will take note. HINT: Encourage your members to seek prayer requests from others in the community—and then pray as a church.

10

The real question here is whether you can say with confidence your church is a house of prayer. If you're not certain, perhaps your church is not yet a praying church. Or, maybe your leaders have not talked enough about prayer that is happening in your congregation—and the

passion for prayer has not spread beyond a select group. Either way, improvement is in order. The goal of the next chapter is to give you simple steps toward that improvement.



For more on corporate prayer, listen to the podcast episode, Five Highlight Effective Ways to Enhance Corporate Prayer in Your ChurchSunday.

### **CHAPTER 7**

#### **LEADING YOUR CHURCH TO PRAY**

After more than 20 years of church consulting, I can say with certainty I've never seen a praying church without a leader who was a prayer warrior. I have seen churches without a prayer warrior leader who are busy . . . and creative . . . and numerically growing . . . and well-known but I've not yet come across a praying church without this leader. This recognition challenges me every day to be a praying pastor.

I start this chapter there because I hesitate to offer corporate prayer strategies without first calling all of us again to do a heart check. Prayer strategies we apply only to others seldom lead to lasting change in the church. With that caveat in mind, here are suggestions for leading your church to pray, listed in no order of priority.

First, enlist some praying church members who will pray at least weekly for you, your family, your leadership, and your ministry. Ask them to pray specifically for your preaching and your praying, which are so centrally a part of a pastor's work. The great 19th century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, wrote that a

"None but praying leaders can apostles will beget praying saints. A praying pulpit will beget praying pews."X

have praying followers. Praying

minister who neglects to pray "limps in his life like the lame man in the Proverbs, whose legs were not equal, for his praying is shorter than his preaching"XI—and, I'm arguing we won't strengthen this area apart

from the intercession of our church members. Your elders or deacons might be the group you choose, but do choose **CLICK HERE** somebody. Don't just assume your church members are praying for you.

for more ways to pray for your pastor Second, preach regularly about prayer—at least twice a year, if not quarterly. Prayer reverberates throughout the scripture, so simply preaching through books of the Bible will lead you to the topic as long as you don't glance over the prayer texts. Another option is to plan "prayer Sundays" that include a sermon on prayer and an intentional churchwide prayer time later in the day. A third possibility is to

preach on prayer whenever church, community, national, or global crises call us to seek God. Let current events drive you and your church to the Scriptures and to your knees. To help you, Appendix A in this book includes texts about prayer you might consider in your sermon preparation.

Third, equip and guide at least your primary leaders—elders, deacons, small group leaders, etc.—to pray Ephesians 6:19-20 and Colossians 4:3-4 for each other regularly.

The first text is a request for boldness in sharing the gospel, and the second is an appeal for opportunity and clarity in the task. These requests are from Paul, the apostle extraordinaire who spoke to crowds and kings with great fervor; if he needed this kind of prayer support, surely we do, too. What might happen in your church if the leaders prayed these prayers and then held each other accountable to doing evangelism in your community?



"Pray also for me, that the message may be given to me when I open my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. For this I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might be bold enough to speak about it as I should."

–Eph 6:19-20

### Fourth, teach and challenge your members to pray for missionaries.

Many believers serve around the world, and they need our prayers. My friend, Will, is a cross-cultural worker in another part of the world, and I asked him to tell us how we might pray for missionaries. He writes from his experience, so I encourage you to hear him.

- Get to know us, and pray for our ministry. Get to know "real live" missionaries and ask us how you can be praying for us. Most of us compose a regular prayer newsletter that outlines specific and strategic prayer needs, so connect with one of us.
- Pray for our people group. Missionaries carry the enormous burden each day that their target people group would come to know Christ. If you want to pray for a missionary, ask about our people and then pray for them.
- Pray for our physical health. Missionaries sometimes serve in "hard places" with little clean water, few adequate medical facilities, unsanitary markets and restaurants, and heavy pollution. Pray for us to stay healthy so we continue to faithfully proclaim God's Word.
- Pray for our spiritual health. Since we are putting ourselves in spiritually dark locations, our walk with the Lord is critical. Pray for us to pursue holiness each day.
- Pray for our marriages. For some missionaries, extensive travel can strain a marriage. Language study and cultural adjustments also affect marriages. Pray that both husband and wife share a sense of purpose and fulfillment in their missionary calling.

"At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, so that I may make it known as I should." –Col 4:3-4

Pray for our families. Issues like whether our children adjust well to a new cultural setting or develop local friendships can affect the health of the family. Many missionaries also struggle to support and care for aging parents from a distance. Pray for wisdom as we lead our families.



**Pray for our ability to communicate.** Language learning is certainly a challenge for those new to the field, but maintaining and improving language ability can also be challenging. Pray we would love our target language and choose to be life-long learners.



**Pray for us to have boldness.** Missionaries sometimes fear that sharing too openly could draw the attention of authorities, lead to persecution, or cause a loss of visa. Like Paul, we need the Spirit to embolden us to faithfully share the Word with the lost around us.

Fifth, teach your church about the reality of spiritual warfare. Paul reminded us that we wrestle "not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens" (Eph 6:12). This battle is real, and it's intense. Paul, in fact, so recognized the ferocity of this battle that he challenged the Ephesians to pray with great urgency for other believers: "Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints" (Eph 6:18). Wise pastors teach their church about this war and challenge them to pray likewise.

### Finally, establish or re-establish the prayer meeting in your church.

It might be a weekly meeting, or it might be monthly or quarterly. It might be in-person or electronic. Don't worry about gathering a great crowd, as growing a praying church takes time and patience. Do be sure, though, to pray—and pray extensively—in this meeting. As my

friend John Franklin says, "The greatest workings of God come by corporate prayer, and we will not see the power of God in sufficient measure to transform the world around us until we pray together."XII



Listen to a podcast episode about prayer meetings

As you wrap up this chapter, what first steps might you take to lead your church to pray? The resources listed in Appendix B of this work might help you develop other strategies, but which of these strategies seems most workable in your setting?

# CONCLUSION

#### A FINAL CHALLENGE

Let's go back to where we started this book: with the prayer life of Jesus. If you want to follow His lead, prioritize your personal time with the Father, teach your congregation about prayer, model what you teach, equip believers to pray, and challenge them to teach others to pray as they make disciples.

Be persistent, too, recognizing that even Jesus had to encourage His own disciples to keep praying and not give up (Luke 18:1). He was the master teacher, but His students would sometimes falter in prayer. They tried to cast out a demon without praying (Mark 9:29), and they slept when they should have been praying (Luke 22:45-46). Still, Jesus patiently taught them to pray.

In chapter 1 of this book, we also looked briefly at some prayer episodes in the early Church. This more complete list now shows us again how much the Church obediently followed Jesus' example. They prayed as their Master prayed.

Acts 1:14	they were united in prayer
Acts 1:24	they prayed to determine Judas' replacement
Acts 2:42	they devoted themselves to prayer
Acts 4:29-31	they prayed for boldness in the midst of opposition
Acts 6:4-6	the apostles focused on prayer and then prayed for newly selected servants

Acts 7:54-60	Stephen prayed as he was martyred
Acts 8:15	they prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit
Acts 9:11	Saul was praying as he awaited Ananias
Acts 9:40	Peter prayed for Tabitha's resurrection
Acts 10:9	Peter was praying when he received his vision (and, Cornelius had been praying, too - 10:1-8)
Acts 12:5	the church prayed for Peter's release from prison
Acts 13:3	the Antioch church prayed for Paul and Barnabas as they sent them out
Acts 14:23	Paul and Barnabas prayed for elders they appointed
Acts 16:16	Paul and Silas met a demon-possessed girl on their way to prayer
Acts 16:25	Paul and Silas prayed in the Philippian jail
Acts 20:36	Paul prayed with the Ephesian elders as he left them
Acts 21:5	Paul and his team prayed for disciples in Tyre
Acts 22:17	Paul prayed in the temple
Acts 28:8	Paul prayed for Publius' father and healed him

So, we finish this book with this knowledge: prayer marked Jesus' life, and it marked the lives of His followers. May it also mark the lives of we who lead God's church today.

Indeed, may we pray every day, "Lord, teach us pastors to pray!"



The Church Answers team hopes this book was a blessing to you and your ministry. We believe in the power of prayer - to transform our lives and to transform our families, our churches, our communities, and the world. That's why we've built a complete toolkit to help churches unlock the power of prayer in their community.

Pray & Go: The Outreach Program for Everyone is a complete toolkit for reaching your community through prayer. It includes:

- 8 Videos Packed with Insights from Experienced Leaders
- Tips & Tricks to Launch and Maintain an Effective Program
- Downloadable Templates & Sample Prayers
- Clear Outline of Roles & Responsibilities
- & Much More!

**Learn More** 



# **APPENDIX A**

### **SAMPLE TEXTS FOR PREACHING ON PRAYER**

You've already seen throughout this book some examples of praying leaders in the Bible. Maybe these sample texts will give you other preaching ideas as well.

Genesis 18:16-33, 19:27-29	. Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Lot
Exodus 32:9-14	.Moses' prayer for the Israelites
Joshua 7:7-9	.Joshua's grief over military loss
Judges 6:36-40	.Gideon's prayer for a sign
1 Samuel 1:1-20	.Hannah's prayer for a child
1 Kings 18:36-39	.Elijah's prayer on Mount Carmel
2 Kings 19:15-19	.Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance
2 Chronicles 1:7-13	.Solomon's prayer for wisdom
2 Chronicles 6:12-42	.Solomon's prayer at the temple
2 Chronicles 20:5-12	.Jehoshaphat's pleading when facing three enemies
Psalm 51:1-19	.David's prayer of confession after his sin
Daniel 9:3-19	Daniel's prayer of confession on behalf of his people
Jonah 2:1-10	.Jonah's prayer in the belly of the fish
Matthew 6:9-13	.The Model Prayer
John 17:1-26	.Jesus' High Priestly prayer
2 Corinthians 12:7-10	.Paul's prayer about his thorn in the flesh
Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21	.Paul's prayers for the Ephesians



# **APPENDIX B**

### RESOURCES FOR STUDYING PRAYER

Beyond the resources listed in the end notes to this book, here are others you might find helpful as you lead your church to pray:

Pray & Go: The Outreach Program for Everyone

Alistair Begg, *Pray Big: Learn to Pray like an Apostle* 

E. M. Bounds, <u>Pastor and Prayer: Why and How Pastors</u> <u>Ought to Pray</u>

Carson, D. A. *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation* 

Tim Keller, **Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God** 

R. Albert Mohler, *The Prayer that Turns the World Upside Down: The Lord's Prayer as a Manifesto for Revolution* 

Andrew Murray, *The Prayer Life: Persevering in Prayer* 

John Onwuchekwa, *Prayer: How Praying Together Shapes the Church* 

J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, *Praying: Finding Our Way through Duty to Delight* 

John Piper, <u>A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting</u> and <u>Prayer</u>

#### **NOTES**

- Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (p. 11). The Navigators. Kindle Edition.
- Richard Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (p. 112). The Navigators. Kindle Edition.
- J.C. Ryle, *A Call to Prayer with Study Guide* (Chapel Library). Chapel Library. Kindle Edition.
- Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (p. 17). Crossway. Kindle Edition.
- Y Tom Elliff, A Passion for Prayer (pp. 19-20). CLC Publications. Kindle Edition.
- Chuck Lawless, *Serving in Your Church Prayer Ministry*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition.
- Steve Hawthorne and Graham Kendrick, *Prayer-walking* (Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1993), 102.
- For resources and information, check out <u>www.imb.org</u> and www.joshuaproject.net.
- Glen Martin & Dian Ginter, *PowerHouse* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 18.
- E.M. Bounds, *Preacher and Prayer* (p. 120). Kindle Edition.
- Charles H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (p. 48). Kindle Edition.
- John Franklin, *And the Place Was Shaken* (p. 4). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.