

PRAYING
BOLD
PRAYERS



By

J . D . G R E E A R





Praying Bold Prayers

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PRAYER CAN BE A STRUGGLE

JUST

Foreword by Paul E. Miller

J. D. GREAR

The Joy of Confident, Bold, Patient, Relentless, Shameless,
Dependent, Grateful, Powerful, Expectant **Prayer**

ASK

J.D. Greear shows us how prayer was a non-negotiable daily staple in Jesus' life, and therefore why we need to pray as well. He shows us how we can enjoy the same source of power as our Lord and the early church when we learn to "just ask" and depend on our heavenly Father as they did.

READ IT TODAY

INTRODUCTION

There's a famous story about Alexander the Great talking to one of his retiring generals. The general was older and on the brink of retirement. He approached the younger Alexander and said, "Hey, I've served you now for your entire career, and I've never asked for anything personal from you. I want to ask if you would pay for my daughter's wedding."

Alexander reflected for a moment and said, "You've been a faithful general, of course I'll pay for your daughter's wedding. Go talk to my treasurer, and he'll handle everything for you." The treasurer came back to Alexander the next day and said, "You need to discipline this general." "Why?" asked Alexander. The general said, "Because he asked for an exorbitant amount of money. It's going to be the largest wedding Greece has ever seen. I think he's invited everybody. He's gotten all the finest things to throw this wedding. He's taking advantage of your generosity."

Alexander thought for a moment and said, "Nope, give him everything he's asking for because my general is paying me two compliments. The first is that he thinks that I'm wealthy enough to afford this. The second is that he thinks I'm generous enough to actually give it."

This story illustrates the privilege of prayer. God's people have the ability to ask Him for big things, knowing He is in charge of everything and has the power and the love to bless people out of His abundance.

**"GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE THE ABILITY TO
ASK HIM FOR BIG THINGS"**



WHY DON'T WE PRAY

You might be like most Christians who fail to pray big prayers. Even pastors or church leaders are often guilty of wasting the privilege of prayer. If we have access to the all-powerful God of the Universe, then why don't we pray like we should? Probably there are a number of answers. I'll give you three that are particular to church planters and leaders.

“IF WE HAVE ACCESS TO THE ALL-POWERFUL GOD OF THE UNIVERSE, THEN WHY DON'T WE PRAY LIKE WE SHOULD?”



1. WE ARE TOO BUSY

Some struggle to pray because they are too busy doing things for God to slow down and talk with God. This contrast is beautifully illustrated in Jesus' description of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42). Martha was busy serving the Lord—busy showing hospitality and kindness. All good things, but she was “distracted with much serving” (v. 40). Mary, on the other hand, “chose the good portion” by simply sitting with Jesus and listening to Him speak (v. 39). Pastors, church planters, and Christians in general can be guilty of neglecting the good portion. After all, there are things to do—sermons to preach, people to counsel, gospel conversations to be had, logos and websites to design, emails waiting for our attention. There's plenty to keep us busy, and when that busyness is directed to honorable tasks, it's easy to justify our prayerlessness. We might even falsely assume that we will get around to prayer when the craziness associated with planting slows down and the church stabilizes. The reality is, things never slow down, and if we're not

disciplined to prayer at the outset of the journey, things are unlikely to change when we get a few years in. It only gets busier and crazier. Believe me. I know.

2. WE ARE TOO CONFIDENT

Closely related to the first, many of us are just far too confident in our ability to bring about spiritual good. We'd never say this, of course. But think about what a prayerless life actually communicates. It says I don't need God to handle the issues I'm facing because I am working hard enough and can figure out an answer myself. It says that I'd rather go it alone. Every parent has experienced this reality. The toddler tries to reach something or put on something or do something that is too difficult at that age. "I do it myself," the kid says, waving off a parent who's standing nearby and poised to help. We make the same mistake when we move through the complexity of following Jesus and leading a church in our own strength. I've been around enough church planters to know they are a super-talented group of humans. Many are quality leaders who could venture into many different domains of society and succeed. As a result, they have people around them who believe in them, follow them, and speak well of them. They work hard, and often that hard work produces fruitful results. None of this is bad, in and of itself, but it's disastrous when it trains our hearts toward self-reliance. We subtly believe we have what it takes without God, thus the impetus for prayer is non-existent. There's a big difference between good ideas and God ideas, and prayer bends our heart toward the latter and away from the former.

3. WE AREN'T ENGAGED IN THE MISSION

The third reason is perhaps the most convicting. After all, we are church planters, pastors, or leaders. Surely if anyone is on mission,

it's us, right? Sadly, this often is not the case, at least if we are talking about actually seeking to build relationships and share the gospel with the lost. We might start out this way when we first hit the field, but as soon as the demands of pastoral ministry start to pile up, it's easy for personal mission to move to the back burner. There's a lot to do, even when you are pastoring a church of a few dozen. And the fact you don't have any structures or facilities means that everything takes more time than you want it to. Soon, if we are not careful, our personal investment in the mission is non-existent.

We might exhort other people to engage in the mission, but we find it hard to name more than a couple of people who are far from God but close to us. As a result, we might pray for the functional needs of our church plant—things like finding a building or locating new volunteers, but we are not praying for God to save our friend, coworker, or neighbor. We subtly start praying inwardly focused prayers, rather than praying that God would work through us, and through our church, to see people come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Soon our prayer lives devolve into little more than perfunctory words to God about matters that have little eternal significance. I regularly ask our people: “If God were to answer all the prayers you prayed in the past week, what difference would those answers make for the kingdom?” This question forces people to wrestle with how much prayer we devote to things that really have little to do with eternal, kingdom-shaping realities. Think of the Lord's Prayer as a model: We pray first for the kingdom of God to come before we pray for our daily bread to be provided.

**“IF GOD WERE TO ANSWER ALL
THE PRAYERS YOU PRAYED IN THE PAST
WEEK, WHAT DIFFERENCE WOULD THOSE
ANSWERS MAKE FOR THE KINGDOM?”**



THE FIRST CHURCH'S DEVOTION TO PRAYER

It's unfortunate how quickly churches and church leaders can lose sight of the beauty and the necessity of prayer. Prayer is modeled for us in the opening chapters of the book of Acts. In Chapter 1, we find the apostles doing what Jesus said—they are waiting for the power of the Holy Spirit to send them out into the world on mission. They are surely scared and uncertain about what is to come. What did they do while they waited? Luke records, “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). They are devoted to prayer. You can imagine the scope of the task that lay before these early followers! They'd banked their existence on following this one who declared Himself to be the Messiah. Now He is gone and they are tasked with making disciples to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:18-20). They are beginning to understand what Jesus meant when He said they must abide in Him because “apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). This “nothing” certainly included reaching the world with the gospel. So they pray. And they didn't just pray, but they are “devoted” to prayer. This is a commitment on their part to keep praying as a regular, ongoing, vital part of their work.

Then, fast-forward to the end of Acts 2. God sends His Spirit, fulfilling His promise and confirming the message these early followers were proclaiming. God anoints Peter, who preaches a sermon that testifies that Jesus is, in fact, the long-awaited Savior. Peter concludes: “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). People respond to this message in faith and subsequently are baptized into the Church. At the close of Acts 2, Luke gives us a glimpse at the habits of this first church. In part,

he writes “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Once again, we see devotion to prayer as a defining mark of the first followers of Jesus.

Another passage in Acts sheds light on the habit of prayer among church leaders. In Acts 6, the church is growing and so are the needs faced by the church’s leaders. Some widows are being neglected, and the seeds of internal disunity are being sown in the church. Wisely, the apostles appoint a group of servants to meet this need. What’s interesting is their stated motive for commissioning these servants. They say, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2, 4). The apostles are not saying that waiting tables was beneath them, rather their far higher calling and responsibility is to pray and preach. They would not allow themselves to get distracted from this primary work, even to do good things like care for widows in the church.

Prayer continues to be a steady refrain throughout the spread of the early church. Luke regularly notes that the church, and her leaders, devote themselves to this work. One other passage is worth noting for our present discussion. In Acts 13, the church in Antioch is exploding with growth, and they take upon themselves the missionary task of deploying other leaders to take the gospel to new places and establish the church in those locales. Antioch becomes the first church-planting church. Notice the way Luke describes this sending: “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2-3). The first sending church continued the tradition of devotion to prayer, and it was in this act that they sensed the Spirit’s direction to appoint

and send Barnabas and Saul, who would plant churches throughout the known world of the day.

Prayer is a defining mark of the early church. For all of the talk in church-planting circles about planting New Testament churches, we must not miss this vital facet of what it means to be a New Testament church.

**“PRAYER IS A DEFINING MARK OF THE
EARLY CHURCH.”**



CHURCH PLANTERS AS LEAD PRAYERS

This concise summary leads to a number of conclusions about the work of church leadership and church planting.

FOLLOWERS OF JESUS PRAY

This should go without saying, but sadly we need to make the obvious point that prayer is a defining mark of Christian discipleship. Leaders don't pray because they are leaders. Leaders pray because they are Christians. We consistently see the Apostle Paul exhort young church leaders like Timothy and Titus to set an example for the church (for example, 1 Tim. 4:11-16). In other words, leaders in the church should be exemplary models of the practices common for all those who know and love Jesus. We can't expect to move the needle on the prayer lives of our people through sermons on prayer, seminars on the mechanisms of prayer, or retweeting quotes on prayer. Our people need to see that we actually think

prayer matters and that we are willing to devote time to this practice, even when devoting time to prayer means we don't have time to devote to other things.

**“PRAYER IS A DEFINING MARK OF
CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP.”**



Planters know a thing or two about devotion. You don't have to be a Greek scholar to understand the imagery at play here. We know the look of someone who is devoted to a task. We know what people are willing to do when they are devoted. We also know what things devotion will cause you to give up. Every good planter I've met has a life marked by devotion. We've just got to make sure we direct that devotion to the highest end. We would not want to be guilty of doggedly devoting ourselves to lesser tasks and missing out on the great privilege that is devotion in prayer.

CHURCH LEADERS PRAY

When we consider the commentary of Acts 6, one of the practices mentioned there usually shows up on the priority list for the average church leader. We know we have to devote time to preparing and preaching the Word of God. Many church planters are young and haven't had many reps in preaching regularly, which means they feel the weight of their inadequacy as a preacher and they strive to get better. Most understand that it takes time to improve as a preacher, so they know they have to delegate other activities so they have the time they need to preach well.

But what about prayer? Prayer is listed alongside preaching as a priority for church leaders. In fact, prayer and preaching the Word

are linked, suggesting that these disciplines are interdependent for a church leader. To improve as a preacher requires active time in prayer. Like preaching, we have to devote time to pray so we grow in our capacity to pray and pray well. No one naturally excels at prayer. The only way to improve is to pray and ask the Spirit to help you pray better—and then spend a ton of time in private on your face before God, learning the joy of simply talking with God. A cursory study of church history will prove that all truly great leaders of the faith were marked as men and women of prayer.

**“TO IMPROVE AS A PREACHER REQUIRES
ACTIVE TIME IN PRAYER.”**



CHURCHES PRAY

The people of God pray, and they pray together. Unfortunately, corporate prayer is neglected far too often. Yes, we might voice a prayer in our Sunday sermons or during our small group gatherings, but many times these prayers fall far short of the type of devotion to prayer we see as normative through the book of Acts. Corporate prayer is a vastly underused weapon in the mission arsenal of the average church.

**“CORPORATE PRAYER IS A VASTLY
UNDERUSED WEAPON IN THE MISSION
ARSENAL OF THE AVERAGE CHURCH.”**



Church planters understand the value of corporate prayer. Prayer unites the church around mission and it magnetizes the church's members to one another. We hear others voice truth about God and

pour out their hearts for God's salvation to come to their friends and family. We're reminded of God's power to save when we hear testimony of answered prayers in the lives of others in the church. And we are spurred on to personal faithfulness in prayer when we interact with those who have a vibrant prayer life.

When I consider the church planters that Summit Church has sent out through the years, I'm often reminded of the great victories that were forged in prayer with others. Sometimes it's been a sense of clarity about a church planting location. Other times, it's been with key Summit Church members who decide to give their lives to relocate and join one of our church plants. Sometimes it's a unique moment in prayer that seemingly solidifies a church plant core team to one another. The best are when we see God answer prayer to save someone that one of our teams has met in their new city. These moments, multiplied through the years, have reminded me of the central role prayer plays in the mission.

CHURCH PLANTERS PRAY

Those leading the missionary charge to engage the lost and start new churches should be setting the pace in prayer for the church at large. If any leaders should pray, it should be church planters. If any churches should be marked by prayer, it should be church plants. The culture of the churches we establish must have placed a high priority on prayer, and the only way this will happen is if the leaders who establish these churches are marked personally by prayer. And they must do the hard work of designing meetings, church services, and informal conversations in such a way that prayer is normative. This culture of prayer is exciting, because we are entrusting ourselves and our churches to the one who is "able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us" (Eph. 3:20). This affirmation of

trust in God is, not surprisingly, mentioned by Paul in his prayer for the church at Ephesus. He's praying that they would be a praying people. Church planters must be people who pray bold prayers.

**“IF ANY LEADERS SHOULD PRAY, IT
SHOULD BE CHURCH PLANTERS.”**



Imagine the fruit that would be borne if church planters excelled in this work! This not only would reshape the missionary landscape of our day, but it also would be a testimony to many existing churches about the great potential they are squandering because they have grown stagnant in prayer. Could a resurgence of church-planting prayer be a catalyst for awakening the sleeping giant that is the North American Church?

PRAYER AND PUBLIC THEOLOGY

Before we move on to some concerted ways you can lead your church to prayer, let's briefly note what we are doing when we pray. The term “theology” simply refers to the study of God. We are doing theology any time we think about God. We are doing theology any time we read our Bibles and learn about God. And we are doing theology any time we talk about God. There's a difference in thoughts about God and words about God. One is internal, the other external. One is private, the other public. When we preach and pray, we are speaking words about God in the public arena and giving witness to what we believe to be true of God.

When we pray, we are saying we believe God is the one who does the work. In spite of our inability to understand the intricacies of

how prayer works, any time we pray, we are saying that we trust God more than our human understanding and more than our ability to make something happen apart from Him. Your view of God's might is made public when you pray.

**“WE TRUST GOD MORE THAN OUR
HUMAN UNDERSTANDING AND ABILITY
TO MAKE SOMETHING HAPPEN APART
FROM HIM.”**



And we say even more when we pray bold prayers. When we pray bold prayers, we honor God because we are taking a dare on His ability and willingness to save. Minimalistic, internal prayers put a low view of God's character and power in public. Bold, extravagant prayers testify to just the opposite reality: They say we believe God can do anything He wants to do.

A lot of times, we feel like we're presuming upon God when we pray bold things. But it's not presuming upon God because He told us to ask Him anything. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore" (Matt. 28:18-19). And part of going is asking. Going places and saying, "God, do great things here. I believe You're compassionate enough. I believe You are powerful enough. I believe You can actually save people and establish a church here."

One of my favorite Bible stories about this bold kind of prayer is the story of the Syrophenician woman who comes up to Jesus because her daughter needs a miracle (Mark 7:24-30). Her daughter had a demon, so the mom says, "Jesus, heal my daughter." And Jesus' response might be the rudest statement in the Bible. He says,

“Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.”

Jesus called her a dog, and the woman, instead of being offended, persists. She realizes Jesus is not making a racial slur, nor is He making a statement about her worthiness. He’s testing her. And she says, “Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Her statement is public theology. She saying she’s not worthy to ask for a miracle, but she also believes that Jesus’ table is so full of grace that He’s got leftovers just falling off of the table. There’s so much of it that there’s even enough for a dog like her. And Jesus praised her and her faith and said in essence, “You will receive what you have asked because you took a dare. Because you believe, you asked boldly. And I’ll answer according to My generosity and My power.”

Like this woman, you can never go wrong when you place all your hope in Jesus’ willingness to answer prayer. Bold prayers say something important about what we truly believe about God’s character. When we pray little, bite-sized prayers, we actually are devaluing the character of God. When we don’t believe Jesus can act, He seems to respond in kind. One of the saddest verses in the Bible is Matthew 13:58, where Jesus does not do many mighty works in Nazareth because of the unbelief of the people there. That’s a big deal.

Think about Nazareth. That’s where Jesus grew up. That’s where He would’ve had natural relationships. It’s the most likely place for Him to act. He would have loved to do a ton of miracles there. The Bible doesn’t say that He didn’t do them because He didn’t care about those people or because He sovereignly determined not to. He did not act because of the unbelief of the people. Their theology limited His activity. Now obviously there’s some tension

in that statement and some nuance that we don't fully understand as finite humans. God can do what He wants when He wants. But God also has determined to act through the prayers of His people.

Jesus responds to belief, and one of the easiest ways to see if people believe Jesus is to note what they ask Him to do. When we don't pray or when we pray trivial prayers, we are parading our unbelief in public—and God is watching.

Devoted prayers. Big prayers. Bold prayers. Signs of belief and a conduit through which the power of God is manifest on this earth.

I don't want that verse from Matthew to ever be said about my community. I don't want that verse to ever be said about my family. I don't want it to be true of where I'm pastoring. I don't want to miss out on powerful things God wants to do in and around me because I don't believe God enough to ask. This means we pray bold prayers, taking audacious risks based on what we believe about the generosity of God. Yes, we pray in faith and we submit to His sovereignty, but we pray boldly by asking God to do amazing and incredible things.

**“I DON'T WANT TO MISS OUT ON
POWERFUL THINGS GOD WANTS TO DO
IN AND AROUND ME BECAUSE I DON'T
BELIEVE GOD ENOUGH TO ASK.”**



I remember when our church was just beginning. I actually didn't plant a church; I was revitalizing one. It was sort of a sleepy Baptist church that had been there for 40 years, and we had about 300 people attending at that time. We had a bold vision: we wanted to have 1,000 people attend our Easter service that year. So we started to ask God for that.

This vision sounded crazy to everybody. Not only did the church not know where 1,000 people would come from, but we also didn't know where we would put them if they showed up. We prayed. We fasted. We planned. We were trusting God for something that, quite honestly, seemed out of reach.

I can still remember one of the head ushers coming up to me at the end of that Sunday. He was one of the guys who had been most critical of all this new activity. He had big tears in his eyes and he pulled out a card that said 1,122. I still remember the number. Now, I know that numbers aren't everything. But I also know this number was a huge catalyst for my faith and for the faith of our church. We expected great things of God. We believed He wanted to reach our community. And then we attempted great things for God. People still talk about this Easter as a key building block for what is now Summit Church.

These bold prayers set a trajectory for our church. A few years later, we felt God gave us a burden to plant 1,000 churches. I can remember a mentor of mine, a mature Christian leader, asking, "What church plants a thousand churches?" I responded simply: "Our elders feel like God has put this vision in our heart." We didn't know churches that had planted 20 churches, much less 1,000. And, honestly, we had no baseline to assume that we could plant that many churches.

We've planted 492 churches since then. We asked God for a thousand churches in 40 years and we are at 492 in 11 years. It looks like we're going to be able to complete that journey in just 20 years—and that's actually probably a pretty conservative estimation! Our work here is public witness to the power of God to answer prayer.

Yes, there are times we pray things and God redirects us. There are times we ask God for things we think are in His will and He says, “Nope, I’ve got something different for you.” Sometimes we pray bold prayers and we struggle because we don’t get the outcome we wanted. Sometimes God glorifies Himself by faithfulness in the midst of what feels like a desert. But sometimes, God takes bold, audacious prayer and uses it just to unleash His power.

Let’s not get to heaven and look over the course of our lives and see all these things Jesus would have done but didn’t because of our unbelief. Through prayer we say, “Lord Jesus today I want You to pour out Your power, and I want You to send an awakening and revival in my community. I want You to do what You did in Jerusalem, in Acts 2, or in Nineveh in the book of Jonah. I believe You can do it again, and I’m asking You to do it.”

STEPS TO PLANTING PRAYING CHURCHES

In the space we have remaining, I want to consider some practical ways we can plant praying churches. This list will not contain every practice of praying churches, but hopefully can point us in a God-honoring direction for bold prayers in our church planting efforts.

COMMIT TO A SET TIME FOR PRAYER

As a church planter and pastor, you are going to need to discipline yourself to pray. You won’t be able to lead others to places you are unwilling to go yourself. It’s also vital that you develop good habits before you take your first pastorate or hit the ground to plant a church. The weight of responsibility and the pressures of pastoring will easily crowd out time you might otherwise devote to prayer.

I've found that the best way to establish this habit is to start your day with prayer. Before you look at your email or start checking off the to-do list, get in the habit of meeting with God in prayer. The spill-over effect often will be a pattern of prayer that will continue through the rest of the day. You also can start the day in prayer with others. Maybe not every day, but many days you can call someone on your way into the office for the sole purpose of prayer, or schedule a meeting with a few trusted friends to pray together.

“START YOUR DAY WITH PRAYER.”



As a pastor myself, I try to make a habit of praying for the nations using the [Operation World](#) guide each morning. I've found that my heart tends to drift to things right in front of my face, and, if I'm not careful, I lose sight of the world. Daily, consistent prayers for the nations is one way I force myself to look to the nations.

JOURNAL YOUR PRAYERS

I know, I know. You've probably tried to start journaling dozens of times in your life, and most of us fail to make it a habit. I'm not necessarily advocating that you record all of your thoughts in a journal—though that may be wise for some—but it's likely helpful for all of us to write down the prayers we pray. For me, I keep a running list of prayer needs in an Evernote file that provides an easy way for me to record prayer thoughts throughout the day.

We have at least two motives for this. First, when we write down our prayers, we are able to see a visible reflection of what's important to us. This serves as a mirror to our heart and can help us see if we are inwardly focused or praying prayers that are too small.

Second, when we write down our prayers, we have a reminder of God's faithfulness for the days ahead. Our minds are frail and forgetful, and it's common that we've moved on to some other concern in prayer when God is now answering something we asked Him for months ago. A written record of prayer allows us to look back and see how God was faithful to answer our prayers and how the things we thought were unanswered prayers actually were evidences of God's kindness or redirection. Church planters, of all people, will appreciate the value of such written reflection. You'll be surprised at how many things you think are important turn out to not matter, how many ways God astounds you with answers to prayer in ways you'd never anticipated. These written records will bolster your faith in the decades ahead.

FORM A PERSONAL PRAYER TEAM

It's common for church planters to have a board or sending church that provides some measure of directional oversight for the work. These aspects of partnership are vital, but so too is the role of outsiders in praying for the church planter and the church plant. It's one thing to know you have many unknown people who are praying for the work of the church plant, but it's another thing to know a few people, by name, who have committed to pray for you and your work. These prayer partners also should be the inside group that knows specifics of how they can support you in prayer. You might not tell everyone everything, but these men and women should be your closet circle that you trust with your more personal needs and concerns. To partner with them well, you will need to develop some mechanism for communicating with them regularly, and this likely will need to be more personal than merely an email newsletter or a few social media posts. As I look back on our journey as Summit Church, I would trace our growth and multiplication

through the prayers of saints who often are behind the scenes, unknown yet faithful.

DEVOTE TIME IN EVERY GATHERING TO PRAYER

Even before you are ready to gather as a church for Sunday services, you'll likely have time when you are meeting with core team members or a fellow pastor or leader. In these times, it's common to merely pray a perfunctory prayer before moving on to matters that seem more pressing. Often we're also guilty of talking about the things we should pray about, without actually praying or doing a Bible study or sermon on the role of prayer and then stopping to meet with God in prayer. We press against these temptations by allocating up-front time in our meetings, conversations, and gatherings to actually pray. Even if you run out of time on the agenda, it's better that your people know you value prayer so much that you are willing to make other things wait so you can pray.

You'll also need to think through how to devote time for prayer in weekly worship services, once you begin to gather regularly. No other context shapes the priorities of the church more than what people do when they are together in weekly worship. If prayer is non-existent, rushed, or thoughtless, then it will be clear to the church that prayer ranks far down on the priority list. In contrast, if people pray consistently and compellingly in the Sunday gathering, week in and week out, then it becomes apparent to the church that prayer is a vital part of the work you all are doing together. Planters would be wise to place public prayer in prominent places in the church gathering and strive to pray biblical, bold, beautiful prayers for all the church to hear.

**“NO OTHER CONTEXT SHAPES
THE PRIORITIES OF THE CHURCH MORE
THAN WHAT PEOPLE DO WHEN THEY ARE
TOGETHER IN WEEKLY WORSHIP.”**



I once had a pastor share with me that he thought the weekly moments of pastoral prayer shaped the life of his congregation more than his sermons on prayer because, as he prayed, he was modeling for them how they should pray as well. I remember my dad recounting a similar story about the pastor who led him to faith. Dad said that he listened to this pastor preach every week for 10 years and he could remember very few of those sermons. But what he did remember was praying with this pastor for one hour before the service each Sunday morning. Dad told me, “I can remember how much God disciplined me through just hearing that man pray, how he talked to God and how he talked about people and how he just prayed back the truths of the gospel.” And he said, “That had a profound, shaping influence on me.”

PRAY WITH PEOPLE

One of the best ways to create a culture of prayer is to be known as a person who prays with others when they share a request or a need. If you are a church leader or pastor, people share needs with you multiple times each day. Someone shares something that is concerning, making them anxious, or causing them distress. Many times even total strangers will do this when they learn you are a pastor.

We all are prone to listen to these needs, reassure others of our concern and prayers, then walk away without actually praying

with the person when they are right there. Why not take an extra minute to ask the person if you could pray for them and then do just that? You'd be surprised how encouraging it is for people to not simply be told someone else is praying for them but to have someone pray for them on the spot. Not only does this support them in prayer, but it also reminds them that you actually believe prayer matters. You'll also find that other people notice when you pray with people in the church. There always will be people eavesdropping on these conversations and prayers, and, as they watch, they will be reminded that their pastor is a man of prayer.

CREATE STRUCTURES FOR PRAYER

It might seem easy to discard the weekly prayer gathering of the church. After all, far too often these prayer meetings have been poorly attended, sloppily led, and an excuse for people to gripe and complain. We'd best be careful here not to throw out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. It's not that prayer meetings are bad; it's that bad prayer meetings are bad.

It's imperative that we have some ongoing structures and programs within the church to facilitate united prayer, especially as the church grows. Some churches do this through monthly member's meetings that focus on prayer for the needs of the church. Others have a time in the middle of the week, such as Wednesday lunch, when church members can drop by and pray with the church's leaders. At Summit, we have weekly times we call the "Hour of Power" for us to come together and do nothing but pray. Still others united in regular prayer campaigns, such as a "40 Days of Prayer" focus leading up to Easter. Whatever the method, church planters need to create structures that highlight the role of prayer and allow church members to pray together. These regular prayer

gatherings provide your church an insider's look at what you value and believe. I once had a woman approach me who'd been coming for some time, checking out the church. She said, "I now see what you all believe and I'm ready to put my faith in Jesus." This wasn't after a Sunday service but after a Tuesday night prayer gathering.

SHARE THE GOSPEL

One of the best ways to grow in prayer is to put yourself in situations where prayer becomes vital. When we live safe, secure lives devoid of any risk, we are unlikely to feel the necessity of prayer the way we might if we did hard things like build relationships with people who are far from God. When we seek to share the gospel, we're confronted with our own inability to bring about spiritual change for someone else. They might even ask us questions we don't know how to answer, so we seek God's wisdom in prayer.

It likely will be helpful for you to talk about the non-believers that ask these questions with your church leaders or staff. I know church plants that have an active list of the names of people with whom they are seeking to share the gospel. In fact, this was the motive behind our own efforts as a church that led to the development of the "Who's Your One?" campaign in the Southern Baptist Convention. We simply wanted a way for all the people linked with our church to have the name of one person they were praying would come to faith in Jesus. This is such a simple goal, but imagine the change that would result if everyone in all of our churches could simply share the gospel with one person!

PREACH YOUR PRAYERS

By this I don't mean that you have to preach a sermon series on prayer, though this might be warranted at times. The reality is

that if you are faithfully walking through almost any book of the Bible, you are going to come upon passages that relate to the task of prayer. But even if the sermon text does not explicitly speak of prayer, you should be able to relate any sermon to prayer in some way. A great way to do this is by using the illustrations and applications throughout your sermon to speak of ways that God is faithful through prayer in your life, the life of the church, or throughout church history. People should hear you talk about prayer more often than when you are preaching on prayer.

This is especially true in a church planting context. You are building everything from scratch, so everything you are doing is an act of faith. You'll naturally talk about the programs, structures, or events your church is doing to run hard after your vision. Don't lose sight of the fact that you'll need a steady refrain of prayer so your people don't assume you are trusting in your own might or power to get the job done. Make it clear that you believe fruitfulness in church planting only comes through the power of God.

KEEP GOING

The work of pastoral ministry—especially in a church planting or revitalization work—is difficult, to say the least. You will regularly want to give up. I can't think of any single catalyst for perseverance more important than prayer. When I think back on the history of our church, I can recount story after story of God's faithfulness to answer the prayers that many have prayed through the years. I know I've often asked God to do things that I could not fathom how He would come through for. My faith, many times, was small. I'm thankful that my God takes faith the size of a mustard seed and uses it to do astounding things like move mountains (Matt. 17:20).

Church planter, I pray that the same will be true for you. Of all the great things God will do through you, perhaps the greatest will be what He does in you as He grows your capacity to pray bold prayers and believe He will answer.



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