



DANIEL HENDERSON

OLD  
PATHS  
NEW  
POWER

*Awakening Your Church through Prayer  
and the Ministry of the Word*

## **Praise for *Old Paths, New Power***

As we pray, God is making us spiritually fit to receive what He is already willing to do. If you have great dreams for what you long to see God do . . . if you believe He is already willing. . . if you want to grow those you lead in their commitment to “praying the price,” definitely read *Old Paths, New Power* by my friend Daniel Henderson.

### **JAMES MACDONALD**

Senior pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel, author of *Act Like Men* and *Vertical Church*

Thank you, Daniel, for calling us back to the centerpiece of all ministry—prayer and the ministry of the Word of God. As busy pastors, we can be distracted by many good things and incrementally drawn away from this core calling. We then reap a harvest of ineffectiveness, frustration, and spiritual mediocrity. *Old Paths, New Power* is a timely warning to choose that which God blesses and to order our lives and ministries around that which produces eternal results.

### **CRAWFORD W. LORITTS JR.**

Author, speaker, radio host, and senior pastor of Fellowship Bible Church, Roswell, GA

Daniel Henderson is one of the finest teachers I know. When he teaches on prayer he is unparalleled. In this masterful new volume, he invests all of the prayer treasure he has collected over a lifetime. When you finish reading it, you will eagerly get on your knees, and vow to never pray carelessly, casually, or complacently again.

### **RICHARD BLACKABY**

President of Blackaby Ministries International, coauthor of *Experiencing God*

I have firsthand knowledge of the impact of Daniel Henderson’s life and ministry. I am his successor, which has afforded me the “gift” of building upon his passion for prayer and the ministry of the Word in the local church. Daniel’s ministry, as demonstrated in this book, builds spiritual depth and maturity into God’s people by teaching and modeling for them “how” to worship, pray, and rely on Christ *alone* for everything.

### **TROY DOBBS**

Senior pastor, Grace Church, Eden Prairie, MN

Unlike many books on church growth strategy, Daniel Henderson points out the importance of making the “the next new thing” the “first old thing.” This is a must-read book for seminary professors, seminary students, pastors, ministry leaders, and pastoral search committee members. I wish this book was written thirty years ago so I could have read it before my first pastorate!

### **BENNY WONG**

Senior pastor, First Chinese Baptist Church, Los Angeles, CA

When I teach on the personal spiritual disciplines found in Scripture, I always emphasize that the two most important are the intake of the Word of God and prayer. If a Christian isn’t committed to these, then forget fasting, journaling, and the rest of the disciplines. All other personal spiritual disciplines grow out of and are built on the foundation of the intake of Scripture and prayer. I am grateful for this valuable resource that reinforces the preeminence of these disciplines above all others.

### **DONALD S. WHITNEY**

Professor of Biblical Spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, author of *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*

When it comes to prayer, Daniel Henderson is passionate, personal, and practical. Look at his life and listen to his words and you just want to pray more and better. He not only calls Christians, pastors, and churches to prayer but he shows us how to do it.

### **LEITH ANDERSON**

President, National Association of Evangelicals, Washington, DC

Daniel Henderson is the clearest voice on pastor-led prayer and spiritual awakening alive today. *Old Paths, New Power* provides a winsome blueprint to create a thriving culture of prayer and spiritual renewal. Packed with ready-to-use resources, pastors are going to love this book!

**BYRON PAULUS**

President/Executive Director, Life Action Ministries

I am thankful that the Lord has awakened my heart in recent years with a fresh passion for prayer in my life and within our congregation. In God's providence, we invited Daniel Henderson to come alongside our leadership teams to provide high-impact training for developing and maintaining a dynamic culture of prayer. The principles in this book have changed our staff and I believe they will spark a new Spirit-empowered beginning for you and your ministry.

**LON SOLOMON**

Senior pastor, McLean Bible Church, McLean, VA

Daniel Henderson is a trusted voice in directing leadership back to the priority of prayer according to the authority of Scripture. I have greatly benefited from his ministry and have watched his influence shape a culture of prayer on our campus. I highly recommend this work.

**JOE KELLER**

Vice President of Student Life, The Master's College, Santa Clarita, CA

I also share the vision of Daniel Henderson, and can only imagine what this world would be if God would favor us with an outpouring of his Holy Spirit as practically described in *Old Paths, New Power*. I have dreamed of such, and as a "Pastor to Pastors" for nearly three decades, I know our wildest imaginations can only be realized when the world's clergy are willing to pay God's asking price.

**H. B. LONDON**

Pastor-to-Pastor Emeritus

God calls us to make more and better disciples. The faithful and fruitful pursuit of this call demands a passionate commitment to prayer and the Word (Acts 6:4). Daniel Henderson gets it. This book reveals it. Read and learn from a humble, godly man whose Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based approach to prayer God has used to transform my prayer life.

**WILLIAM WARREN**

President, The Mid-Atlantic Baptist Network

Senior pastor, Allen Memorial Baptist Church, Salisbury, Maryland

Daniel's prophetic call to return to the old paths is a timely word for all of us who lead in the church. I believe this book will become a catalyst in the lives of pastors to start chasing after God and the power that can only come through prayer.

**LANCE WITT**

President and founder of Replenish Ministries

The principles in this book have helped me as a senior pastor to deepen my personal experience in prayer, as well as lead our congregation in moving from being a church that prays to becoming a praying church. As a result, Acts 6:4 is no longer just a text I teach, but an experience I regularly enjoy.

**DANNY HODGES**

Senior pastor, Calvary Chapel, St. Petersburg, Florida

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*Awakening Your Church through Prayer  
and the Ministry of the Word*

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DANIEL HENDERSON

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## *Overcoming Weapons of Mass Distraction*

Each day in the United States, nine people are killed and an additional 1,180 people are injured in crashes that are reported to involve a distracted driver.<sup>2</sup> The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that 58 percent of automobile crashes involving teenagers are caused by distracted drivers.<sup>3</sup>

Distraction has also become the great and subtle archenemy of pastoral health and spiritual awakening in today's society. It is not that pastors are fundamentally disinterested in a great spiritual movement in our churches; they are just diverted. As pastors, we are not apathetic about revival; we are just agitated with lesser things.

I often say that the devil does not have to destroy a Christian leader; he only has to distract him. Over time, that distraction will grow like cancer on an internal organ until it drains the effectiveness of a minister through discouragement, dilution, and despondency.

John Piper explains our struggle this way:

Ministry is its own worst enemy. It is not destroyed by the big bad wolf of the world. It destroys itself. One survey of pastors asked,



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“What are the most common obstacles to spiritual growth?” The top three were busyness (83%), lack of discipline (73%) and interruptions (47%). Most of these interruptions and most of our busyness is ministry-related, not “worldly.” The great threat to our prayer and our meditation on the Word of God is good ministry activity.<sup>4</sup>

### SYMPTOMS OF THE DISTRACTION CANCER

In a *New York Times* article, writer Paul Vitello reported,

The findings have surfaced with ominous regularity over the last few years, and with little notice: Members of the clergy now suffer from obesity, hypertension and depression at rates higher than most Americans. In the last decade, their use of antidepressants has risen, while their life expectancy has fallen. Many would change jobs if they could.<sup>5</sup>

In 2015, one denomination confirmed those earlier findings. Its research, based on responses from four thousand clergy, found that ministers indicated a higher rate of obesity, high cholesterol, and difficulties from depressive symptoms than the rest of the population. One quarter of the respondents reported significant stress dealing with critical ministry personnel, and 46 percent noted a significant instance of hostility from members upset about not being consulted or questioning their ministry devotion and personal faith.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. R. J. Krejcir of the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development has been actively involved in multiple surveys of thousands of pastors in various settings from 1989 to 2006. Krejcir states, “Over 70% of pastors are so stressed out and burned out that they regularly consider leaving the ministry. Thirty-five to forty percent of pastors do leave the ministry, most after

only five years. 100% of pastors we surveyed had a close associate or seminary buddy who had left the ministry because of burnout, conflict in their church, or from a moral failure.”<sup>7</sup>

We are a distracted, distressed, discouraged, and even diminished bunch. The war against our focus, fruitfulness, and fulfillment is unrelenting and producing tragic numbers of casualties.



### ***In Their Own Words***

Watch as Lance Witt (pastor, Replenish Ministries) unpacks

“Keys to Staying Healthy” at <http://www.64fellowship.com/oldpaths/07/>

## **SOURCES OF DISTRACTION**

What distracts pastors from the ministry? The answer is multifaceted. Not surprisingly, spiritual attacks continue to distract pastors. “The enemy is always launching weapons of mass distraction on my life,” declared one pastor friend of mine as he stood in his pulpit with tears running down his cheeks, appealing to his congregation to pray for him. The enemy loves to target us with interferences of any and every kind.

In the early twenty-first century, our increasingly complex information society now tempts many pastors with a much newer distraction: the almost never-ending stimulation from the latest apps, tweets, posts, and text messages. Advertisements appeal to our desire for possessions, and the entertainment media offer the distractions of sitcoms and hit movies that can be viewed anywhere and anytime. In the midst of all of these inducements, who can focus? And we know that email, Facebook, and other social media have made pastors much more accessible to the masses than could have even been imagined twenty years ago. Such distractions can take us away from our family and times with God.

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Ironically, distractions can also be the fruit of trying to please people. Pastor Carey Nieuwhof writes,

Leadership is inherently difficult because it requires a leader to take people where they don't naturally want to go. So you have a choice as a leader. You can focus on leading people, or focus on being liked. When you focus on being liked, you will instinctively try to please the people you're leading. And when you do, you will become confused. Pleasing people is inherently confusing because people don't agree. One person wants it one way. Another wants it another way. And soon, you're bending over backward to make everyone happy, which, of course, means that in the end, you will end up making no one happy, including yourself. It's actually a recipe for misery for everyone.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, we can easily be tempted to find our worth in the opinions of needy people. We will tend to live in desperate pursuit of an elusive equilibrium. Ernest Becker warned, "Groups 'use' the leader sometimes with little regard for him personally, but always with regard to fulfilling their own needs and urges."<sup>9</sup>

So because we are high-value targets in the spiritual battle; because our tech-crazy society throws distractions at us like pieces falling from the sky in a game of Tetris; because we struggle with our sense of worth based on productivity; and because we feel relentless pressure from needy and sometimes demanding people, we must be stewards who focus on the highest and best priorities.

Piper concludes that the routines of ministry are the greatest distractions from our focus on prayer and serving the Master:

What opposes the pastor's life of prayer more than anything? The ministry. It is not shopping or car repairs or sickness or yard-work that squeezes out prayer into hurried corners of the day. It is budget developments and staff meetings and visitation and

counseling and answering mail and writing reports and reading journals and answering the phone and preparing messages.<sup>10</sup>

In a world of demanding ministry, we must prioritize and at times even say no. One of my elders would often challenge me, “Daniel, ‘no’ is a Christian word.” Another mentor often reminded me that “The power of ‘no’ is in a stronger ‘yes’.” In current-day ministry the force and clarity of our “yes” must be louder than ever, like a foghorn piercing the sea of suffocating demands. With the press of countless options, our “no” must be clear and compelling, based on biblical clarity and conviction.

## **BIBLICAL PINNACLES OF PRIORITY CLARIFICATION**

The Acts 6 example has already informed us of three priorities that were held inviolable by the apostles: (1) prayer, (2) the ministry of the Word, and (3) empowering others to guide major ministry efforts. But there is an Old Testament parallel that merits sober consideration.

If I were to ask you about a paramount moment in the Old Testament when a leader was overwhelmed and in need of clarifying key priorities, you would likely think of Moses. The scene in Exodus 18 tells of Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, paying a visit to Moses, accompanied by Moses’s wife and two sons. After an evening of sharing stories and rejoicing in the Lord’s mighty deeds in, through, and for Moses, Israel’s leader is back at work the next day surrounded by long lines of people in need of Moses’s advice and leadership in judging between disputes. Seeing this workload, Jethro responds. “What you are doing is not good. You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. Now obey my

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voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you!” (vv. 17–19).

Facing overload and burnout, Moses needs some sage advice and a solution to this untenable situation. Jethro’s guidance aims to help Moses and the people survive and thrive. Most importantly, Jethro tells Moses that by complying “God will be with you.” There it is again. The mark of real spiritual influence. The manifest presence and empowerment of the Almighty.

Now, most of us would at this point conclude that the essence of Jethro’s advice was to “delegate.” And, yes, that was part of the prescription but only one-third of the message and the last of three admonitions. Here is Jethro’s directive:

You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. (Ex. 18:19b–22)

The advice represents the same three priorities in the same order:

1. *Prayer*. “Represent the people before God and bring their cases to God.”
2. *Teaching the Word*. “Warn them about the statutes and the laws” that they may walk in them and do them.
3. *Empowering others to serve*. Find qualified men who can help you judge the people.

Did you notice that in both testaments, at a moment of leadership crisis, the same three priorities emerge in the same order? The result of this focus in Acts 6 was a supernatural explosion of the Gospel. The result for Moses is enough to make most of us covet the outcome. Jethro promises, “If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.”

Isn't that what every leader needs and desires? It is our deep-seated longing: that the Lord would be with us; that God would direct us; that we will endure and that peace would reign in the hearts of the people we shepherd. Prayer. The Word. Empowering others to lead. These are the old paths that can result in new power, fresh joy, and authentic perseverance.

*Prayer. The Word.  
Empowering others to  
lead. These old paths  
can bring new power  
and fresh joy.*

## THE HIGHEST FIVE

While preserving these three core elements, over the years I have clarified *five priorities* (“yeses”) in my pastoral ministry of several decades. They represent the old paths of biblical focus and have consistently delivered me from draining distractions. In summary, I sought to *maintain, model, master, multiply, and mobilize* within these clarified decisions.

### *1. Maintain*

My first priority was to maintain an exemplary Christ-honoring life (1 Tim. 3:2–7; 4:12, 16; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:3; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9; Titus 2:7–8). Primary focus must be on one's spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, marital, family, and relational

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health. Without it, credibility and ministry will fail. It's been said, "Example is your most powerful rhetoric."

### *2. Model*

Second, I resolved to model a commitment to prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; 9:28; 11:1; 22:39; Acts 1:14; 6:4; Rom. 15:30; Col. 1:3; 4:2). The prayer level of any ministry never rises any higher than the personal example and passion of the primary leader. We cannot point the way—we must lead the way.

Spurgeon noted, "Sometimes we think we are too busy to pray. That is a great mistake, for praying is a saving of time. . . . If we have no time we must make time, for if God has given us time for secondary duties, He must have given us time for primary ones, and to draw near to Him is a primary duty, and we must let nothing set it on one side." Spurgeon concludes, "Your engagements will run smoothly if you do not forget your engagement with God."<sup>11</sup>

Martin Luther said it this way:

It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business in the morning and the last in the evening. Guard yourself against such false and deceitful thoughts that keep whispering: Wait a while. In an hour or so I will pray. I must first finish this or that. Thinking such thoughts we get away from prayer into other things that will hold us and involve us till the prayer of the day comes to naught.<sup>12</sup>

When Acts 6:4 describes the apostles as being "devoted" to "prayer and the ministry of the word," the verb is from *καρτεροῦς*, which means *strong*, *staunch*, and originally, "to persist obstinately in" or to "adhere firmly to."<sup>13</sup>

### *3. Master*

Third, I committed to master the study of God's Word (1 Tim. 4:6, 13–15; 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:1–2; Acts 6:2). When I teach seminarians



and speak to young pastors about preaching, I remind them that, over time, the process is more important than the product. Nothing is easier today than to produce a clever sermon, given all of the podcasts, video illustrations, and content-rich websites. Yet, the cultivation and conviction of earnest study is what produces the character of a pastor and infuses his preaching with passion and application. This “conviction to “study to show myself approved” ultimately results in a depth of life that makes the message authentic to the heart of the preacher. The prophet Ezekiel understood this. “Son of man, let all my words sink deep into your own heart first. Listen to them carefully for yourself. Then go to your people . . .” (Ezek. 3:10–11 NLT).



### ***In Their Own Words***

Watch this interview with John MacArthur on “Reclaiming Our Pastoral Responsibility” at <http://www.64fellowship.com/oldpaths/08/>

## *4. Multiply*

Fourth, I resolved to multiply leadership within the church (John 17:6–20; Acts 10:17–38; Eph. 4:11–12; 2 Tim. 2:2). Leaders don’t fall off trees. Future generations develop through intentional, biblical, and transparent equipping. We must proactively identify and then shape the hearts and minds of emerging leaders.

For two decades, in nine-month increments, I met with a fresh group of younger men in the church. For many years, we gathered seventy-five minutes each Saturday morning; years later we met on Thursday mornings. My invitation to these men stated, “Leaders make habits out of the things most people don’t like to do—starting with getting out of bed.” My staff and elders nominated these men, church members already serving in ministry and displaying potential for greater spiritual influence in the church.

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My strategy was simple. We would spend a few minutes praying from the Scripture and then enter into spirited discussion and application in connection with the chapters I had assigned for weekly reading. I just selected a handful of books that had most influenced my life.<sup>14</sup> Of course, the reading was helpful, but the free-flowing interaction seemed especially profitable. These men became key influencers in many avenues of ministry in the succeeding years and most went on to disciple other men.

### *5. Mobilize*

Finally, I determined to mobilize the church toward our mission (Matt. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; John 20:21; Acts 13:1–3; Phil. 3:12–17; 2 Tim. 4:5–8). The goal always should be “to keep the main thing the main thing.” Because the Holy Spirit is the “how-to” of ministry, I tried to lead the church to seek His mind, will, and direction for the ministry, involving others with me in prayer, fasting, and full surrender of the fabric and future of the ministry to Him—to reveal God’s evangelistic and missionary heart, and for me to be an example and catalyst for His Great Commission.

## MOBILIZING THE CHURCH

Notice that while the first four priorities focus on myself and our leaders, the final priority seeks to involve every member. This came about after I moved from the familiar approach I describe as “vision by imitation”—attendance at various conferences, reading books by successful pastors, and seeking to implement what God had apparently blessed in their contexts—to “vision by inspiration.”

“Vision by imitation” was often a miserable disappointment, because I was not one of those leaders. To be honest, ambition for achievement drove my strategy.

After studying Acts 13:1–3, where the leaders simply fasted and

ministered to the Lord in anticipation of His next step for their ministries, we shifted to “vision by inspiration.” We launched a Forty-Day Spiritual Discovery comprised of a churchwide devotional study and prayer guide that we designed for every member of the congregation. We urged everyone to fast in some fashion (solid food, dessert, television, Facebook, shopping, etc.). For me it became my first (and only) forty-day fast from solid food. Of course, we sponsored accelerated prayer opportunities each week. At the end of this united and extraordinary season, the pastors and elders held a prayer retreat to discern what we had “received” during this journey.

With unanimity we came to a conclusion about the ministry direction for the next year. We agreed it would involve a 25 percent annual increase in general fund giving—our present trend was about 10 percent. After much pushback from the finance team, we forged ahead in sharing this plan with the congregation, submitting it to the Lord in our various weekly prayer times. We believed that if we could not trust this process, we might as well throw spaghetti on the wall and just concoct something from the image of smeared tomato sauce.

After an overwhelming vote of approval from the congregation (since they, too, had a vital role in this direction), we began our new budget year on July 1. We did not conduct any stewardship campaign or preach on generosity. We just moved ahead with the things that arose from our forty-day discovery.

We finished that ministry year exactly 25 percent ahead of the previous year, enabling us to fund all the Lord had placed on our hearts to advance the Gospel. Now, this is not some formula for an annual budget increase. Rather, it is an illustration of the priority of leading the people in a credible, prayerful, participatory process of receiving the Lord’s mind and will for the church. I’ve come to believe that He reserves His most fruitful plans for those who

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maintain the most focused passion—for Him. God is always glad to oblige when we give Him our undivided attention. We continued this process in the years to follow with fruitful results.

### PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

A return to the old paths requires robust clarity and sustained conviction around clear, biblical priorities. Your list may be different from mine, but be sure the commitments are biblical, distinct, and practical. You must own them—passionately. To be effective, these priorities must relentlessly shape your schedule. Each week the calendar must be organized around these commitments. Otherwise, distractions will tank effectiveness.

Once these priorities are clarified, communicate them to family, board members, staff, and even the congregation. Change agents can be misunderstood, and having a team around you that understands the importance of your priorities will reduce friction and criticism. Staff members will find it easier to define their priorities to complement yours. The church will understand better (although not always) why you cannot comply with their many requests and, hopefully, will see the value you bring to their lives and to the overall ministry when you are focused and ultimately fruitful.

To overcome the enemy's weapons of mass distraction we must make right choices, engage in the best commitments, allocate our time accordingly, and create an environment of understanding. Too much is at stake to be lured away from the old paths. A fresh experience of His power in the everyday trenches of ministry is our greatest and highest need.



***In Their Own Words***

Watch Jim Leggett (pastor, Grace Fellowship, Katy, TX) offer helpful wisdom on “Rhythms for Spiritual Health” at <http://www.64fellowship.com/oldpaths/09/>

# ON THE PATH TO POWER

## *Fruit That Lasts*

BY FRANCIS CHAN

Periodically I am asked if in my travels I see a difference in the way we pray in America compared to places like Asia and Latin America. My answer is always the same, “Yes, a big difference.” The reasons for this contrast may seem subtle, but they are important.

In America, we have other options. There are other ways to fill a room other than through prayer. There are other ways to get people to raise their hand or come forward or cry, other than prayer. There’s a way to create the semblance of a movement of God outside of prayer.

Of course, it’s not a real movement of God. It is often a manufactured thing. We know how to create excitement. I guarantee you with the right band or right song selection, we can generate something really “cool” whether it was good in God’s eyes or not. So we have multiple options. In many other places of the world it’s “all or nothing.”

And so this is very important because it’s ultimately about the true fruit that results when we’re abiding. That’s the fruit that will last. Sadly, some of us are content with the fake stuff.

Jesus once told Peter, “Satan has asked for you, that he may

sift you as wheat.” Then Jesus added, “But I have prayed for you” (Luke 22:31–32 NKJV). Jesus prayed. He demonstrated His dependence. Essentially He says, “Peter, do not worry, because I prayed.” That’s huge. That’s a massive inspiration for us.

Paul resolved “to know nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). He didn’t come with this wise and persuasive speech. He could have, but He chose not to. He said that there was something about that self-reliance and self-exaltation that emptied the cross of its power. Paul didn’t want to do that. So it seems all the enhancements that we add to sound intelligent or to make the service work are actually hurting the real cause.

But most of us as preachers don’t want to sound dumb. Rather than doing what Paul did, which was to make himself sound less than what he is, I’m always trying to sound more intelligent than I am, or more godly. Paul reminds us that all that stuff diminishes the power. Paul had determined to come to the people in weakness, trembling, and fear. Simple Gospel. In essence, he says, “I’m going to depend on my prayer life—and the prayers of others.” Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for him so he could preach boldly as he desired. He had determined to ground himself in reliance on God—and then preach a simple, foolish message. That’s a risk for us because either the Spirit comes through or not.

What I often tend to do I (and I’m guessing others do the same) is set things up so that even if the Spirit doesn’t do anything, I still don’t look like a failure—and I can still feel pretty good. So then if the Spirit does move, then I go from a kind of midpoint of impact to a higher point. But I’m never down here where nothing happens. Why? Because I’ve got my program set up nice and safely. I’ve created this cone of protection so that Francis Chan does not look stupid, and this event does not look like a failure. Of course, we try to justify this because it would “discourage the people” if it turned out badly.



## OLD PATHS, NEW POWER

But it's not like this in Scripture. The leaders in the Bible always seemed to take the risk. I think of Elijah, who said, "Okay, I'm going to call down the fire from heaven or my head gets chopped off. I don't have a trick ready or some guy with matches over on the side. I'm depending on God showing up. It's going to happen."

It's what we see with Joshua. His determination was, "We're going to march around the city and blow the trumpet, so this better work." It was the same with Paul. He determined, "I'm going to tell you that Christ was crucified. That's going to be enough."

I am learning that the more we trust, and take those steps of faith, the more we really honor the Lord. We have to determine that the Spirit is sufficient and prayer is going to do it. This is all it's ever taken. That is when real thing happens. That's when we really see God move. That's when we see the true, genuine fruit—the fruit that's going to last.

*Adapted from an interview conducted by The 6:4 Fellowship (www.64fellowship.com). Used by permission.*

## *AN OLD PATHS PROFILE*

### **PASTOR ROBBIE SYMONS**

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ROBBIE SYMONS, pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel in Oakville, Ontario, grew up in a religious home, even serving as an altar boy in the Anglican Church. It was not until 1997, after finishing college, that the grace of Christ arrested his soul and he was dramatically converted after a season of deep misery and questioning. A year later, he met his future wife, Gillian, and they were subsequently married. Neither wanted to go into full-time ministry, but God had other plans. Robbie entered seminary full-time and served as an associate pastor for a period of time.

In 2003, God placed a calling and a dream within a small group of people to see a Harvest Bible Chapel come to the Greater Toronto area. Through supernatural circumstances, a core group of people was formed and the momentum was building. It

wasn't long before ideas were being articulated, prayer meetings were being scheduled, and plans were underway for the launch of this second Canadian Harvest Bible Chapel.

The church website summarizes the story: "With a Spirit-led resolve to proclaim the Word of God without apology, to passionately worship His only Son, and to believe firmly in the power of prayer, Jesus is building His Church.

Harvest Oakville has experienced the power and grace of the Lord in its growth from a Bible study of 18 people in 2003 to over 3000 worshipers today." In addition, Harvest Oakville has been used by God to plant five churches across Canada during its short history. Robbie states, "My hope for Harvest, in two words, is LIFE CHANGE! The mission God placed within me early on with Him was to *help*

*people realize their full potential in Jesus Christ."*

Robbie's strength since the start of Harvest has been his commitment to boldly proclaim the Word. They are now on the radio daily in the Buffalo/Greater Toronto region. It is because of his commitment to the Word that his preaching ministry is being so blessed. Yet recognizing the essential nature of prayer, Harvest has a dedicated staff to help Robbie raise the bar in prayer.

Today prayer pervades virtually every area of the ministry. Robbie leads the staff in a prayer time every Tuesday morning to start their week together. Every meeting with the elders starts with "prayer and the Word," sometimes taking up half of the total meeting time.

An hour-long pre-service prayer gathering is sponsored on Saturday nights and Sunday mornings. Teams also meet to pray during the services. Robbie leads a monthly church-wide prayer meeting on the third Wednesday of every month where hundreds show up to pray.

In recent months the church has sponsored "Mini-Prayer Summits." These one-day, no-agenda prayer gatherings are scheduled quarterly. The church is also beginning to connect with other pastors and churches, both to participate in united prayer but also to encourage and equip other leaders in effective prayer.

In commenting on his growing conviction about prayer, Robbie often tells his church, "Without prayer, we're dead!" He describes prayer as the easiest and hardest thing they do at Harvest. It is the easiest because of the simplicity of abiding in Christ but the hardest because the flesh fights it and the devil hates it.

As Robbie reflects on his journey and thinks of his pastoral colleagues, he notes, "At its core I honestly believe that many pastors simply do not wholeheartedly believe in prayer. I believe that we have been deceived into thinking that when we can accomplish something we can see, then we are truly productive. Therefore, we get busy 'doing' and lack

the faith to understand the true power of fruitfulness is built upon pleading for *God* to do it.

“For many pastors of my generation, or younger, we must align our theology of prayer with our practice of prayer. And for some we need a whole new theology of prayer,” he adds. “Simply put, for many young pastors they simply do not live out that ‘apart from Christ we can do nothing.’ This is when techniques, leadership tactics, and systems start to crowd out simple and passionate pursuit of the Lord. This is what Satan loves to see,

because it’s so much easier, with way less opposition, to operate in the foolishness of the flesh than in the strength and power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. If young pastors are not careful and humble, they might actually find themselves pursuing a level of success that God isn’t even in. We must, as young pastors, define success by what the Bible actually teaches. This is incredibly important in our day to see leaders raised up with true and Christlike character, Spirit-filled power, and humility-based leadership.”



PART 2

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PRAYING  
LEADERS  
AND THE  
SUFFICIENCY  
OF GOD'S  
SPIRIT

Thirty minutes of Spirit-aided  
intercessory prayer is more effective  
than all the new programs and stylistic  
changes we are constantly tinkering with.  
Human ingenuity can't be compared  
to God's power.<sup>1</sup>

**JIM CYMBALA**

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A pastor who feels competent in himself  
to produce eternal fruit—which is the  
only kind that matters—knows neither  
God nor himself. A pastor who does not  
know the rhythm of desperation and  
deliverance must have his sights only  
on what man can achieve.<sup>2</sup>

**JOHN PIPER**



## *Finding the Conviction to Make a Change*

**W**e've heard, read, and preached the stories many times. All four Gospels record a version of Jesus entering the temple courtyards, reacting to the self-serving merchandising, and in three of the accounts declaring, "My house shall be called a house of prayer" (Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). John's account of this action says, "His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (John 2:17). The word *zeal* means "fierceness of indignation" or "fervor of spirit."

Commenting on this display of emotion, Stetzer and Rainer write, "Jesus is angry when we use His assembly for anything other than His intended purpose. Specifically He is angry when prayer is replaced by earthly activities. Jesus expects His people to practice praying and encourage others to do the same."<sup>3</sup> They elaborate:

If your vision is for personal transformation, this will be seen in the practice of praying. Strategies, excellence, methods, or even commitment cannot substitute for humble dependence on God. If our motivation is numerical growth, then we have no real reason to pray. Organizational expansion principles will produce results relative to your community or "market." Teamwork, communication, people skills, and quality control will produce

## OLD PATHS, NEW POWER

results. But none of these things will produce substantive results from God in the lives of people. . . . Transformation is [God's] work. We cannot rely on ourselves and see transformation. It is impossible for us to affect life change.<sup>4</sup>

To what degree do today's pastors really desire transformation? In what fashion are pastors feeling a "fierceness of indignation" about a lack of prayer in their churches? What evidence do you see of a resolute practice of prayer in your local church? Honestly, when it comes to understanding and pursuing the old paths of "prayer and the ministry of the word," pastors are all over the map. Like a kaleidoscope of infinite colors, so are pastors in their level of commitment to prayer as a core component of church life.

## THE REAL CONVERSATIONS

I remember a candid conversation with a well-known pastor. After a thought-provoking lunch discussion, I asked, "What does prayer look like in your church and staff?" I knew he had authored a book about personal prayer. He responded, "We're not really into that. We have a group of ladies trying to start a prayer meeting but we are going to shut it down."

"Why?" I asked.

He responded, "It will be nothing but a gossip session."

Admittedly, some request-based prayer gatherings do downgrade into gossip. Still, I was stunned by his nonchalant dismissal of the role of united prayer in the life of the church. At best, it seemed the ministry engaged in what I call "zipper prayer"—opening in prayer and closing in prayer.

In another conversation with a key staff leader in a large church, I probed about his seeming aversion to the role of prayer in the ministry. He responded, "I just believe in hard work." Of course,

we all believe in hard work. If anything, I am a borderline workaholic. But I prodded further, “And who do you know who is committed to prayer in the church that is not a hard worker?” After struggling to come up with any names, I expressed to him that real prayer is not an excuse for laziness but, in fact, is one of the most arduous engagements I know of in ministry. Prayer is not a replacement for hard work but, in most cases, empowers Christians for even more fruitful work. As the conversation ended, rather tensely, I smelled a smokescreen.

Clearly, some church leaders are content with a “Martha” mindset—serving but not listening to the Master. They do not seem to comprehend the corporate application of Christ’s profound words to Mary about the value to pursuing intimacy with Christ as the heart of our work for Christ and the key to eternal reward for our labors (Luke 10:38–42).

On the other hand, I still remember the first time I heard the audio recording of Pastor Jim Cymbala’s landmark sermon, “My House Shall Be a House of Prayer.”<sup>5</sup> Sitting in my office, I wept as Cymbala spoke with staggering conviction about this nonnegotiable cornerstone of New Testament ministry. He spoke as a pastor who believed and practiced prayer as the “engine” of every element of the church. He spoke of astounding answers to prayer, including the return to faith by his daughter Chrissy. I could not believe an American church was actually demonstrating prayer in such a profound way. Over the years, I’ve been to the Brooklyn Tabernacle dozens of times, enjoying the prayer meeting, participating in their services, and bringing in more than one thousand leaders to observe and learn.

*To return to the old paths we must aspire to new experiences of power the Lord intended for New Testament pastors.*

## OLD PATHS, NEW POWER

Most pastors are sandwiched somewhere between the indifference reflected in the above conversations and the off-the-chart passion of Cymbala. Some may even hide behind the “hard work” justification. Regardless, if we are going to return to the old paths we must evaluate our current attitude and aspire toward new experiences of power the Lord intended for New Testament pastors.

In this chapter we will consider seven stages that help evaluate the actual level of engagement in prayer by a pastor. But one quantifiable reality is the allocation of resources. How much of the pastor’s time, staff time, or board time is allocated for prayer? What amount of the budget goes toward equipping, organizing, and emphasizing prayer? Do any staff dollars reflect the priority of prayer? How about precious communication resources like space in the bulletin, announcements, video testimonies, and even the web page? I’ve been astounded to see the sparse visibility given to the priority of prayer on most church websites. By this standard, it would appear that it is really not a primary emphasis. Resources always follow passion.



### ***In Their Own Words***

Watch Khanh Huynh (pastor, Vietnamese Baptist Church, Houston, TX) share on “Enduring Pastoral Leadership in Prayer” at <http://www.64fellowship.com/oldpaths/10/>

## **SEVEN STAGES FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER LEADERSHIP**

Clearly some leaders have a passion to see prayer flourish in their lives and churches while others seem complacent. Some pastors give a real priority to prayer while many seem satisfied with lip service. (To understand why we struggle to lead in prayer, see Appendix 1.) In this moment, let’s consider the factors that shape a life of influence in prayer.

In recent years, I have enjoyed coaching pastors (via Internet-based live interaction over a period of four months)<sup>6</sup> about their role in shaping a culture of prayer in their churches. One early point of diagnosis in each coaching group involves identifying the key stages that shape a praying leader. If you are a pastor, I hope you will give serious consideration to these stages—or levels of engagement. Some pastors start at a higher level based on strong biblical conviction or lessons learned in the school of hard knocks. Others are on a lower level, struggling to understand or embrace their role of prayer leadership. In any case, all of us can grow and honor Christ as we embrace a greater effectiveness in leading our church to become a house of prayer.

If you are not a pastor, consider the potential of your influence on others—and, of course, pray for your pastor and his onward journey in prayer. Remember, it is almost impossible to be a critic and a loving intercessor at the same time.

### *1. Complacency*

It is hard to comprehend a smug, complacent attitude toward prayer, especially in light of all that was modeled and taught by Christ and everything we read about the role of prayer in the New Testament church. Still, some pastors have utterly dismissed prayer as a significant core of the culture of the leadership team and congregation.

One pastor I know often declared to his church that prayer was “weird,” citing a few peculiar experiences he’d encountered with some “prayer warriors.” In spite of the clear New Testament teaching, and the countless positive examples of prayer, he dismissed it as an optional sidebar in his personal priorities rather than the core of Christ-honoring ministry.

This complacency is often rooted in such personal issues as previous negative experiences, an introverted personality, or a struggle

## OLD PATHS, NEW POWER

with personal prayer. I learned early on that we must submit our subjective experiences and biases to the authority of the Scriptures rather than subjecting the teaching of the Scriptures to our personal experiences. Most pastors know this, but a minority still seems to violate this unambiguous principle when it comes to prayer.

### *2. Cooperation*

The vast majority of pastors are at this level of prayer leadership, being at least accommodating toward the value of prayer in the church. Like a husband who dutifully goes shopping with his wife, many leaders willingly cooperate with the “prayer warriors,” “the prayer team,” “the prayer fanatics,” or the ones who seem to have a “gift of prayer.” They are encouraged to do “their thing.” Typically, this is done to appease the enthusiasts and at least have the option of pointing to a “prayer ministry” announcement in the bulletin. The pastor’s personal commitment to lead any of this is negligible.

### *3. Concern*

Often some experience prompts a genuine concern for prayer. Maybe the pastor encounters a personal, family, or ministry difficulty that triggers a greater sense of need for God. Perhaps a book or some other teaching prompts him to give more attention to prayer. The leader may have a concern that stimulates a sermon series on prayer, increased reading about prayer, and even some occasional prayer events in the church. Unfortunately, this concern can wane under the burden of busyness or other high-profile initiatives in the church.

### *4. Commitment*

Over time, concern may grow into a more tangible commitment. At this stage, the leader begins to devote regular portions of his personal time to the prayer efforts. He may feel that he should

lead an occasional prayer gathering or insert more prayer into various meetings. He may desire to engage personally with the prayer team to give them encouragement and guidance. The prayer activities and initiatives become more visible as he feels a greater commitment to see prayer become a vital part of the church.

### *5. Conviction*

At some point, commitment must lead to clear, uncompromising conviction. This is the point where everything changes. Essentially, the pastor concludes, “We must become a ‘house of prayer’ and I must personally lead this pursuit.” Typically, a leader will have a gripping persuasion to consistently seek the Lord in his private life. He feels compelled to guide his staff and his church with real certitude in regular and substantive experiences of life-giving prayer. He cannot do otherwise. He recognizes it as essential to his calling and will not relent in his pledge to model becoming a house of prayer by the example of his life.

Pastor Cymbala exemplifies this as well as anyone I know. Springing from an early ministry crisis, Cymbala embraced a strong conviction about prayer that led to uncompromising leadership. He set aside every Tuesday night to led his people in a focused, extended prayer gathering. More than forty years later, thousands gather each week to seek the Lord because of Cymbala’s sustained devotion.

But it doesn’t stop there. Most Tuesday mornings Jim leads his staff in a chapel gathering, typically marked by extraordinary prayer. Very often Jim leads special weekend or even weeklong prayer emphases, with enthusiastic attendance by the congregation. In recent months, he has opened the church auditorium for an hour of waiting on the Lord, again on Tuesdays from noon to one o’clock. During a recent visit, I observed Pastor Cymbala simply sitting on the front steps of the church during this hour, silently



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in prayer, weeping and pouring out his soul to the Lord in sweet surrender. I don't simply admire Jim's example and substantive allocation of time to prayer. I admire the fact that his conviction continues to grow, as an example to his people and an expression of his love and need for the Lord.

During a recent leadership event a few years ago, he said it so clearly and convincingly: "Our people will pay good money to go hear some Christian musician but they won't come to meet with Jesus for free. I take that personally. What am I preaching? Am I leading people to a personality, a church, an event, a denomination? Or am I leading them to Jesus?"<sup>7</sup> A pastor in one of my coaching groups wrote, "True conviction produces passion. Also, if something is a true conviction you do it—you always have time for what you really want to do."



### ***In Their Own Words***

Watch revival leader and retired pastor Richard Owen Roberts' observations on "Pastoring a Prayerless Church" at <http://www.64fellowship.com/oldpaths/11/>

## *6. Competency*

Most pastors receive no training on how to lead biblical, life-giving prayer experiences. Many of us, including this writer, struggled in our early years to facilitate the kind of prayer times people actually want to attend. Very few pastors received any substantive equipping for this in seminary. As we come to understand the power of the pattern Jesus commanded His followers to embrace (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4), breakthrough occurs.

Soon, leaders learn the dynamics and impact of Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer. They develop an increased confidence in the sufficiency of the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the people of God to inspire transforming prayer experiences.

## *7. Contagion*

Admittedly, there is a laboring in prayer that requires perseverance and discipline. But in time, and typically over many years, the Holy Spirit arrests the hearts of a growing number of believers and a palpable movement emerges. Like a contagion, other people catch the fervor of prayer.

Several years into my pastorate in northern California—after teaching on prayer, equipping leaders in prayer, leading multiple three-day prayer summits, meeting a couple mornings every week in prayer—there was a breakthrough. We launched a midweek prayer gathering called “Fresh Encounter,” and soon hundreds were coming every week. More prayer gatherings sprang up. Prayer was woven into every worship service. Soon pastors from across the nation were coming to observe and share in what the Lord was doing. And as a result, their congregations began to experience a fresh work of the Spirit in prayer.

When prayer goes viral, people are not excited about “it” (prayer) but are infectious about “Him” (Jesus). Springing from a palpable environment of transforming prayer, church members carry the flame of spiritual passion into every area of church ministry. Prayer pervades ministry team meetings, small groups, age-specific gatherings, the leadership core, and the public services.

## **WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE? DESPERATION**

Since “conviction” is the turning point in propelling a pastor from a casual complacency to catalyzing an atmosphere of spiritual contagion in the church, what makes the difference? I believe it comes down to this: somewhere in the journey, God may introduce a degree of crisis to bring a leader to the point of desperation. Desperation is a catalyst for a praying life. Whether the crisis is a new and unfolding awareness of one’s need for God or a calamity that

brings brokenness and a disdain for self-sufficiency, God uses it to embed new conviction about the imperative of prayer.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones spoke of our great need for desperation. He noted, “[We] can fight and sweat and pray and write and do all things, but . . . [we are] impotent, and cannot stem the tide. We persist in thinking that we can set the situation right. We start a new society; we write a book, we organize a campaign, and we are convinced that we are going to hold back the tide. But we cannot.”<sup>8</sup>

Then he drew this conclusion, “And so we must throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. It is not so much an organized prayer emphasis as it is an act of desperation. And then, and only then, does the power of the Holy Spirit come flooding upon us and into us. And he does in a moment what incremental organization can hardly accomplish in half a century.”<sup>9</sup>

*“We must throw ourselves upon the mercy of God [in] an act of desperation.”*

—Martyn Lloyd-Jones

One Ugandan leader, speaking at a conference hosted by my church, announced, “My message to America is desperation or devastation. The choice is yours.” He could very well be correct. I have come to believe that desperation can come through crisis or cultivation.

As I’ve said, God often allows the crisis, but we can also embrace a cultivated desperation.

In previous books, I have written extensively on the pattern of what we call the Lord’s Prayer.<sup>10</sup> In its fundamental division we find the first part of the prayer is God-ward while the second is man-ward. I like to describe it this way: “He is worthy. I am needy.” I have concluded that the more we seek the Lord, with a passion for His worthiness, the more we are gripped with our neediness. Adoration cultivates desperation.

The prophet Isaiah confessed, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I

am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5a). This declaration of desperation was not motivated by a circumstantial calamity or some low view of himself. It was prompted by a high view of God. Isaiah gave the reason for his passionate confession: “for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (v. 5b). A consistent pursuit of God’s worthiness produces a deepening understanding of our neediness. Cultivated desperation.

## **RELENTLESS RHYTHMS**

Without fully understanding the impact of it, I committed myself over the years to what I call “relentless rhythms” of worship-based prayer. Early every Sunday morning I met with leaders to pray for an hour of Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer. On Monday mornings, I prayed an hour with the men in our church. Our staff met several times a week, just to seek the Lord. One night a week, we eventually held a weekly all-church prayer time. I was privileged to lead a couple of three-day prayer summits each year. At a personal level and family level, I sought to maintain parallel consistency. I learned over time that this regular pursuit of His worthiness never let me get too far from a gripping understanding of my neediness. This was not just a resolve to pray. Rather, it was a rhythm of carving out substantive time to seek God’s face and then allow Him to arrest my heart to see my great and continual need for Him.

The schedule will differ for every pastor, but the opportunities to cultivate a deeper desperation are countless. The key is to evaluate humbly where we are in the journey toward effective prayer leadership and seek the help of the Lord to grow in our resolve.

## DESPERATE FOR PRAYER IN VIRGINIA

Pastor Lon Solomon has led McLean Bible Church in McLean, Virginia, for more than thirty-five years. During that time, the enterprising church has expanded to five campuses throughout the Washington, D.C., metro area. More than fifteen thousand people identify McLean as their home church.

In the summer of 2013, Lon experienced several months of powerful encounters with the Lord. He described this as a personal revival. Returning from his summer break, he called the staff together and sought their forgiveness for his decades of leading as a prayerless pastor. He asked them to join him on their knees that day as they corporately repented of self-reliance and recommitted to a new paradigm of ministry. Lon delivered the same confession and challenge to the entire congregation, not just once, but in two subsequent weekends.

Immediately after that, Lon invited the church to join him in the prayer room thirty minutes before each of the four weekend services at the main campus to call upon the Lord. The other four campuses initiated similar calls to prayer. In the ensuing months, Lon began to visit with other pastors in the area—most of them in smaller churches and many in ethnic congregations. He sought their forgiveness for McLean's non-cooperation and independence, confessing pride and self-sufficiency. This spark ignited an eventual prayer gathering on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial that coalesced almost five thousand people from some four hundred churches throughout the D.C. area. They gathered to pray for the work of the Gospel. A second gathering has been sponsored with even greater attendance and it appears a broad awakening to prayer is igniting in the region.

In recent years, I've been honored to conduct regular staff training and lead prayer experiences as I have done some coaching. As I

continue to work with McLean, I am encouraged to see a growing prayer culture and even a sustained weekly staff prayer gathering each Thursday morning. Pastor Solomon demonstrates the power of conviction in the heart of the primary leader. In his late sixties, Lon felt a sense of crisis as he reflected on his earnest desire to finish well and at his spiritual best. He recognized that prayer must be central to this resolve. In a spirit of genuine contrition, he turned to the Lord and received in return a conviction that has changed his entire approach to pastoral ministry. He has often publicly wondered, “I don’t understand why it has taken me so long to see this but I am glad it has happened now.”

Prayer is one-half of our ministry,  
and it gives to the other half  
all its power and success. <sup>1</sup>

**CHARLES BRIDGES**

It is better to let the work go by default  
than to let the praying go by neglect.  
Whatever affects the intensity of our  
praying affects the value of our work. . . .  
Nothing is well done without prayer for  
the simple reason that it leaves God  
out of the account. It is so easy to be  
seduced by the good to the neglect of the  
best, until both the good and the best  
perish. How easy to neglect prayer or  
abbreviate our praying simply by the plea  
that we have church work on our hands.  
Satan has effectively disarmed us when  
he can keep us too busy doing things  
to stop and pray.<sup>2</sup>

**E. M. BOUNDS**

## *Leading a Powerful Culture of Prayer*

My friend and fellow pastor Woody Torrence is the smartest guy I know on the subject of cultural change in the local church. His doctoral dissertation concentrated on that very subject. Beyond all his formal education, Woody has discovered that “consistent pressure over time” is the essential factor in transforming the ethos of a congregation.

Having guided Blue Ridge Community Church in Forest, Virginia for over twenty-five years, Pastor Woody has led a significant shift in its culture toward an extraordinary environment of prayer. This has catapulted his church to its present level of profound impact on the community and around the world. Woody was determined to see Blue Ridge become a praying church.

Woody’s journey is an inspiring example of how God changes the heart of a leader, radically reshapes the leader’s ministry approach, and shows Himself strong through a praying church. For many years, Woody has made his strategic plans for ministry, hoping God would bless his leadership team in what they were trying to accomplish. He describes the process as “trying to breathe life” into all the programs they designed. Woody and his team attended national conferences to see how everyone else was doing



## OLD PATHS, NEW POWER

ministry and then try to duplicate those “success stories.” Soon it seemed he was trying to “wear someone else’s ministry clothes.” A year later, he would return to the same leadership conferences only to discover that the “model churches” had already discarded the approach Woody’s team was trying to imitate.

A few years ago, God spoke to Woody in his industrious but weary state of being. The sovereign Christ challenged Woody to resign as “God” and let God be God. At that point Woody decided that he and his leaders would seek the Lord first (and as long as necessary) until they had clarity about where God wanted the church to go.

“We had been trying to make Acts 2 happen, but suddenly realized Acts 1 came before Act 2.” Woody says, “What tied the ‘wait for the Holy Spirit’ in Acts 1 to the arrival of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was Acts 1:14—prayer!” This turning point was the beginning of what is a genuine culture of prayer that is the essential DNA of Blue Ridge Community Church.



### ***In Their Own Words***

Watch Pastor Woody Torrence (Blue Ridge Community Church, Forest, VA) in conversation with Pastor Mike Moran (Interim Pastor Ministries) as they discuss “New Ministry Paradigms Through Prayer” at <http://www.64fellowship.com/oldpaths/12/>

## SEEKING HEARTS

I have enjoyed the privilege of praying with Woody and his leaders. When they pray, they “hit their faces” and stay there until *God* is finished with the prayer time. Three times a day, five days a week, the staff leads in prayer times at the church. Before making any major ministry decisions, they spend significant amounts of

prayer together to find the mind of Christ, not just drum up their own ideas. Before they begin new outreach initiatives, they often sponsor 168 hours (one entire week) of continuous churchwide prayer, and they regularly sponsor congregational prayer services.

As the ministry continues to expand, they do not have a fixed agenda about their next steps; they just want the will of God. They always seem to receive it on their knees. The Lord faithfully launches a powerful new chapter of blessing for the sake of people who do not know Jesus in the region, for God's glory.

## **SEVEN VITAL TRUTHS ABOUT A CULTURE OF PRAYER**

A prevailing theme among the majority of pastors associated with The 6:4 Fellowship is the priority of shaping a culture of prayer. There is no formula or cookie-cutter approach, but we have discovered some vital truths that seem to yield consistent fruit.

### *1. A Culture of Prayer Is Not a Program*

A prayer culture is not a prayer “program.” In our instant society where we can order drive-thru meals, “Googled” answers, and immediate gratification of all sorts, we are tempted to think that there must be a recipe for fast-paced prayer impact. Accordingly, we tend to think that appointing a prayer team (or part-time staff member) and commencing a few new prayer activities will satisfy the goal. The pastors I work with are learning that launching additional prayer “programs” can tend to attract the same small group of prayer-motivated participants but solicit minimal participation from the majority of the congregation. Prayer is soon viewed as a department of the church or an isolated attraction just for the “prayer warriors.” In this scenario, prayer becomes a ministry of the church rather than *the* ministry of the church. There is a difference

## OLD PATHS, NEW POWER

between a church that prays and a praying church. One has prayer programs. The other develops a prayer culture.

### *2. A Culture of Prayer Arises at the Epicenter of Leadership*

A prayer culture always emanates from the epicenter of church leadership. I often begin the process of developing a prayer culture among churches by asking leaders two standard questions:

1. How much time do the leaders spend together in prayer?
2. What kind of prayer experience is it?

The prayer level of a church never rises any higher than the personal example and passion of the leaders. The quantity and quality of prayer in leadership meetings is the essential indicator of the amount of prayer that will eventually arise among the congregation. It is easy to simply spend time in a perfunctory review of prayer requests before attacking the meeting agenda. More vital is a united enjoyment and pursuit of God Himself.

There is a difference between gathering to “pray about things” versus quality time spent seeking God’s face. One approach fixates on telling God what is on our minds. The other seeks to discover what is on His mind, best experienced by worshiping and praying from the Scriptures. When every member of the board, the staff team, and other key leadership teams have become infected with the prayer virus, based on their common conviction and experience, prayer spreads heart-to-heart and life-to-life into every dimension of the congregation.

Speaking to this concern among church leaders, Pastor Donald McDougall writes,

If they were convinced that their problems are spiritual, they would spend more time in prayer meeting than in planning

meetings. . . . If human effort is the means of victory over spiritual forces, then the more believers exert themselves physically, the greater the chance of victory. On the other hand, if the only recourse is to depend fully upon the Lord, then they would spend more time on their faces in His presence, seeking His help. . . . If the church wants to succeed in its God-given mission, its leadership must realize that one of its greatest needs is more prayer meetings, not more planning meetings. If the monthly leadership meetings would give more time to praying than to planning, leaders would soon find a change in attitude, in perspective on ministry, and in results.<sup>3</sup>

McDougal concludes:

The bottom-line objective is for the leadership to face the fact that the church of which they are a part is not their church; it is God's church. And the people they lead are not their flock but very distinctly God's flock. The purpose of their meetings is not to come to a consensus about running the church but to wait upon God to find out how He wishes His church to run.<sup>4</sup>

Leaders often feel pressure from fellow staff or church members to give equal emphasis to other programs (like children, women's ministry, men's ministry, small groups, etc.), just as they do to prayer. Pastor Mark Vroegop explains it well by illustrating that a physical body can live without an arm, a leg, an ear, even an eye. But a body cannot survive without a vital organ like the heart, the liver, or the lungs. He notes that every ministry in the church is vital for optimum body function, but prayer is a vital organ, without which the church is dead. Thus, prayer demands primary attention and effort at every level of the church, especially within the leadership team.<sup>5</sup>

## OLD PATHS, NEW POWER

### *3. A Culture of Prayer Thrives on Experience above Explanation*

A prayer culture is fueled by experience, not explanation. A passion to seek the Lord in prayer is more caught than taught. One pastor friend preached on the subject of prayer every weekend for one entire calendar year. He later confessed it yielded minimal results, except to increase the common gap between the congregation's learning and obedience. Head knowledge alone does not create a passion for God in prayer. He later decided to begin to pray, and invite his people to join him. Admittedly, this ignited a much deeper and greater experience of prayer in the hearts of the members.

Starting a regular churchwide prayer meeting is not always the answer. In my journey, I have served as the senior pastor at large, already-overly-programmed churches. I soon learned that finding a time (weekly, monthly, or quarterly) when a significant segment of the church can show up at another gathering, without other competing activities, is quite challenging. Here is a helpful principle: The all-church prayer meeting is seldom the engine of the prayer culture in an already-established church, but it can eventually become the expression of the prayer culture.

When forming a prayer culture, it is best to "build the sidewalks where the footpaths already exist." Many pastors are learning that it is essential to train believers to lead life-giving prayer experiences in every possible environment where people are already connecting. This would include one-on-one conversations, small groups, fellowship classes, ministry meetings, and weekend services. The goal would be that any believer, in any gathering, with any time frame available to them, can lead Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer experiences.

Early in my ministry, I learned that if I did not intentionally and consistently equip church members to facilitate life-giving prayer, the prayer culture would not grow beyond my ability to

show up. So I was relentless in this endeavor, sponsoring five to six training seminars a year. Eventually, this content became a published book.<sup>6</sup> The next chapter will summarize much of what I regularly teach in many venues around the nation, along with a link to a video presentation of the same principles.



### ***In Their Own Words***

Watch Pastor Jeff Wells (WoodsEdge Community Church, Spring, TX) offer his wisdom on “Leading Prayer Gatherings” at <http://www.64fellowship.com/oldpaths/13/>

## ***4. A Culture of Prayer Is Rooted in Community***

A prayer culture is rooted in clarity and conviction about community. I am often asked, “Which is more important, private prayer or corporate prayer?” The answer: “Yes.” This is like asking, “Which is more important for walking—your right leg or your left leg?” In our Western civilization, marked by “rugged individualism,” we have essentially amputated our corporate prayer leg and are pretty lame on the private prayer leg.<sup>7</sup>

For a prayer culture to flourish, leaders and people must have a clear and compelling New Testament mindset about the priority of corporate prayer. Many modern and, frankly, unbiblical attitudes exist in today’s church that make this difficult.

I remember the day one of my elders told me, “Daniel, I’m not coming to our prayer times.” When I asked for his reasoning, he responded, “First, if I came, I would just be coming to ‘be seen by men’ and the Bible prohibits that. Second, the Bible says to pray in your ‘prayer closet’ so I am going to stay home and pray by myself.” With his permission, I responded, “Why don’t you change your motive and come anyway?” Then I suggested, “We need to expand your prayer closet because it is way too small.”

Distinguished professor and pastor Gene Getz writes,

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The hallmark of Western civilization has been rugged individualism. Because of our philosophy of life, we are used to the personal pronouns “I” and “my” and “me.” We have not been taught to think in terms of “we” and “our” and “us.” Consequently, we individualize many references to corporate experience in the New Testament, thus often emphasizing personal prayer. The facts are that more is said in the Book of Acts and the Epistles about corporate prayer, corporate learning of biblical truth, corporate evangelism, and corporate Christian maturity and growth than about the personal aspects of these Christian disciplines. . . . Don’t misunderstand. Both are intricately related. But the personal dimensions of Christianity are difficult to maintain and practice consistently unless they grow out of a proper corporate experience on a regular basis.<sup>8</sup>

I teach occasionally at a seminary in Virginia, which includes a significant group of students from South Korea. Frequently, I have heard these students ask their American classmates, “Why

do you pray by yourself?” Of course, every morning the prayer chapel on campus is filled with the sound of Korean praise and prayer, while the U.S. students sleep. Not only do the Korean believers have a habit of expressed passion, but they understand what I believe is a truly New Testa-

*I have heard my  
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ment sense of vital community. The Western Church, especially in America, needs to practice prayer within the community of believers. Gathering for corporate prayer, empowered by the Spirit, brings vitality to the church and to private lives.

Charles Spurgeon has called prayer among believers a spiritual heart-check for the local church:

The condition of the church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. So is the prayer meeting a grace-ometer, and from it we may judge of the amount of divine working among a people. If God be near a church, it must pray. And if He be not there, one of the first tokens of His absence will be slothfulness in prayer.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, the “prayer meeting” may be a churchwide gathering, but it can also be a vital prayer time embedded in a staff gathering, a small group, or a weekend service.

#### *5. A Culture of Prayer Stems from a Powerful, Enduring Motivation*

In my prayer journey I’ve been motivated by many lesser incentives, like guilt, approval before others, and even an ego-driven desire for church growth. Of course, a passion for revival can even trigger more prayers. Yet, in the long run, we must remember that there is a difference between seeking revival from God and seeking God for revival.

Ultimately, a consistent and enduring motive for prayer must be rooted in a reality that never changes. The only enduring motive for prayer is that our never-changing God is worthy to be sought. This amazing reality should motivate our prayers now and will be the only kind of praying we will be engaged in throughout eternity: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain” (Rev. 5:12; cf. 4:11; 5:9). This Godward, worship-based compulsion remains steady as it is rooted in God’s character and the glory of His Son.

#### *6. A Culture of Prayer Prompts Supernatural Mission Advancement*

A culture of prayer is always aimed toward the supernatural fulfillment of the Great Commission. Prayer, as seen in the book of Acts, was not primarily therapeutic but transformational, then missional. The apostles are seen seeking the Lord then experiencing fresh passion and power to accomplish His Gospel calling. You



never find a long laundry list of personal health needs, financial concerns, or family issues. As Alvin Reid has said, “Prayer is intimacy with God that leads to the fulfillment of His purposes.” Acts presents the reality of life, community, and global transformation as the Spirit works through a passionately praying church.

The church I pastored in Minnesota fostered a profound missions effort. Their “faith-promise” pledges each year totaled approximately two million dollars. When I first arrived, they appropriately described themselves as a “missionary church.” Soon we adopted the label of a “praying, missionary church.” I have

*The church as it ought  
to be: a prayer-birther,  
Spirit-empowered,  
Christ-honoring  
lifestyle of infectious  
Gospel witness.*

learned that if you are a missionary church and not a praying church, you risk the possibility of sending money and missionaries but without the power, blessing, and reward that only comes by the Holy Spirit. If you are a praying church and not a missionary church, you have prayed amiss, allocating the

purpose of prayer simply to personal needs rather than Christ’s cause. As John Piper has described it, prayer has become a room service intercom rather than a war-time walkie-talkie.<sup>10</sup>

A. W. Tozer challenges our thinking about this balance:

Our most pressing obligation today is to do all in our power to obtain a revival that will result in a reformed, revitalized, purified church. It is of far greater importance that we have better Christians than that we have more of them. Each generation of Christians is the seed of the next, and degenerate seed is sure to produce a degenerate harvest not a little better than but a little worse than the seed from which it sprang. Thus the direction will be down until vigorous, effective means are taken to improve the seed. . . . To carry on these activities [evangelism,

missions] scripturally the church should be walking in fullness of power, separated, purified and ready at any moment to give up everything, even life itself, for the greater glory of Christ. For a worldly, weak, decadent church to make converts is but to bring forth after her own kind and extend her weakness and decadence a bit further out. . . . So vitally important is spiritual quality that it is hardly too much to suggest that attempts to grow larger might well be suspended until we have become better.<sup>11</sup>

There is no greater joy than seeing a congregation ignited to seek the Lord in Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer. This contagion spreads to the community as believers become passionate about the person and message of Christ. They cannot help but speak of “what [they] have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). Mission accomplished. This is church as it ought to be, exhibiting a prayer-birthing, Spirit-empowered, Christ-honoring lifestyle of infectious Gospel witness.

### *7. Building a Prayer Culture Takes Time*

Building a prayer culture takes time. . . and relentless pressure over time. I often say that it is much more a Crock-Pot than a microwave. Visitors to the Tuesday night prayer meeting at the Brooklyn Tabernacle observe the thousands who now come every week to seek the Lord. What they do not see are the years of a small turnout and uninspiring gatherings. What they do see is the fruit of a pastor who would not give up and believed that, with consistent leadership and a learning heart, God would use him to establish a house of prayer for all nations.

I’ve heard it said that we should not expect a big crowd when God is the only attraction. This was said of prayer meetings. Again, while pastoring in Minnesota, the congregation had funded a 4,200-seat auditorium. Because of this capacity, local promoters rented our facility for regional concerts featuring many well-known

## OLD PATHS, NEW POWER

Christian artists. On these Saturday nights, standing-room-only crowds filled the room. Explosive sound, computerized light sequences, smoke, and ecstatic onlookers marked the evening. The following night, we would hold our Sunday evening prayer gathering. It felt like BB's in a tin can. You could have fired cannon in the room and not hit anyone. While hundreds attended, the crowd was negligible compared to the celebrity-artist attraction of the night before.

This is just one of countless examples that the purity and passion of united prayer is often unattractive to modern-day faith culture accustomed to entertainment-oriented events, whether it be on a Sunday, or at a special concert with rock-star “worship artists.” It will take time to build a prayer culture.

## A WORD ABOUT WARFARE

We do well to remember that the devil hates a praying leader and a praying church. When we begin to pray, we pick a fight with the devil at a whole new level. Yet our calling is to be praying menaces to the enemy.

One subtle arena of attack is in the area of pride. Praying people can become prideful about their praying. Non-participants can become prideful in their resistance. The enemy seeks to divide and conquer every initiative of prayer. (I've written about this in Appendix 2, titled “The Pride Divide.”)

This is the reality of building a culture of prayer. I define discouragement as a temporary loss of perspective. We cannot lose perspective but must trust the Lord for the grace to press on in full belief of His extraordinary promises and stated purposes in connection to prayer. Al Toledo, pastor of The Chicago Tabernacle, reminds us that “the commitment of the few can secure the blessing for the many.”<sup>11</sup> Toledo's father-in-law, Jim Cymbala, emphasizes,

“Many churches either pray down heaven’s blessing or gradually turn to shallow formulaic methods instead of the living God. But we should not give up or look for shortcuts.”<sup>12</sup>

In church life, prayer is not the only thing we do but it must be the first thing we do. It can become the very environment of the ministry. It must be our first resolve not our last resort if our work is to be marked by the unmistakable power of the Holy Spirit. And this will take years, even decades. It will not be easy, but it will be worth it.



### ***In Their Own Words***

Watch Pastor Mark Vroegop (College Park Church, Carmel, IN) share his conviction about “Steady Leadership in Prayer” and the power of an Acts 6:4 focus at <http://www.64fellowship.com/oldpaths/14/>

We shall never see much change for the better in our church in general till the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians.<sup>1</sup>

**CHARLES SPURGEON**

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Now, prayer, in order to be continued for any length of time in any other than a formal manner, requires, generally speaking, a measure of strength or godly desire, and the season, therefore, when this exercise of the soul can be most effectually performed is after the inner man has been nourished by meditation on the Word of God, where we find our Father speaking to us, to encourage us, to comfort us, to instruct us, to humble us, to reprove us.<sup>2</sup>

**GEORGE MUELLER**

## *How to Lead Life-Giving Prayer Experiences*

**A**fter decades of pastoral ministry, leading multiple prayer meetings every week, I have concluded that God is not the author of boredom, especially when we are conversing with Him. Yet I have been in prayer meetings (and even led some) where participants snored, snorted, drooled, and fell over, while taking a prayer nap. In my book *PRAYzing! An A to Z Guide to Creative Prayer*, I declare war on sleepy prayer times.

If prayer lacks creativity, energy, and innovation, it is not God's fault; it is ours.<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, we've all engaged in some *supplication siestas*. Even Peter, James, and John dozed off in the presence of Jesus, first on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:32) and later on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:36–42). Like Jesus' inner circle, our spirit is willing, but our flesh is weak.

In contrast, the New Testament commands us to be watchful, wakeful, and alert in prayer (Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Peter 4:7). As a pastor, my frustration with lethargic, dozy gatherings has motivated me to try to learn more about how to avoid these dead-in-the-water prayer times. Over the years, I have embraced valuable lessons about creative approaches to prayer. There is still much to

learn, but this chapter will help us all to avoid nodding off and restore the old path priority of becoming a praying church.

### **HOW *NOT* TO START A PRAYER TIME**

The opening moments of any prayer gathering often set the trajectory for the entire experience. How we start the prayer time is a core factor in its effectiveness.

“Does anyone have any prayer requests?” I admit that over the years I’ve heard it and said it. But don’t start here. This establishes an immediate man-centered—rather than God-centered—experience. It also eats into time. After Uncle Charlie, Aunt Matilda, and Billy Bob share a long list of ailing body parts, friends traveling on vacation, and third-cousins in crises five states away, no one else has the time or desire to unload all their needs. Time is limited and precious. Of course, this starting point is not a good stewardship of time in any case, because after participants have described in detail all the assortment of needs, we circle back and pray about it all again (if there is any time left actually to pray).

Another traditional approach is to begin by saying, “Let’s just pray as we feel led.” The intention, I suppose, is an urging to be led by the Spirit in our prayers. Somehow, this gets lost in translation and is interpreted, “Just pray whatever comes to your mind.” What ensues is typically a disconnected flurry of impulses based on the experience of the day or pressing frustration of the moment. Not a good place to start.

Commonly, we might even announce, “Let’s just pray around the circle.” This is unhelpful as participants are forced to pray because it is “their turn” whether the Spirit is really prompting them or not. Introverts freeze up, especially when the person just before them in the circle extrapolates a prolonged King-James-style prayer speech. Of course, if you are the last person in the

circle, you either agree with all that has been said since everyone has already stolen your prayer material, or you try to develop some additional content so as not to appear unspiritual.



### ***In Their Own Words***

Watch as pastor and prayer facilitator Dennis Fuqua gives practical wisdom on leading prayer and why “All Prayers are not Created Equal” at <http://www.64fellowship.com/resources/oldpaths/15/>

## **THE EIGHT GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR LEADING LIFE-GIVING PRAYER EXPERIENCES**

How do we avoid a false start? What are the keys to launching and sustaining a dynamic prayer experience? Here are eight guidelines that can help leaders facilitate prayer. These principles have become very instinctive for me while leading prayer experiences over the years. I am confident you will find them to be effective in many prayer settings: a weekly prayer group, a small group in a home, a Sunday school class, a ministry leadership meeting, and even in large group prayer gathering.

### *1. Foundation*

Begin corporate prayer times (and personal times as well) with an open Bible. This serves as the foundation for prayer. I call this Scripture-fed prayer.

I’ve noticed in normal interactions that whoever starts a conversation tends to direct the conversation. Prayer is two-way conversation; so who should start the conversation? This depends on our understanding of true prayer. If prayer is our opportunity to blow into God’s presence and inform Him of all He needs to do to structure the universe according to our specifications for a happy and comfortable life—then we should start the conversation.



Instead, if prayer is about knowing His will, trusting His grace, and joining Him in His purposes, then we should let Him start the conversation. This requires open Bibles.

Addressing this very idea, Pastor John Piper notes, “I have seen that those whose prayers are most saturated with Scripture are generally most fervent and most effective in prayer. And where the mind isn’t brimming with the Bible, the heart is not generally brimming with prayer.”<sup>4</sup> George Mueller (the renowned man of faith and evangelist who cared for thousands of orphans and established dozens of Christian schools in the 1800s) spoke about the vital role of Scripture in his prayer life. He noted that for years he tried to pray without starting in the Bible in the morning. Inevitably, his mind wandered sometimes for ten, fifteen, even thirty minutes.<sup>5</sup> Then, when he began to start each morning with the Bible to nourish his soul, he found his heart being transformed by the truth, resulting in spontaneous prayers of confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and supplication. This became his daily experience for decades, resulting in great personal growth and power for life and ministry.

### *2. Fervor*

Fervor is the element of Spirit-led prayer apart from which prayer is impossible. While we know this, we cannot forget the vital, practical role of the Spirit in our united prayers. It is imperative to engage in an intentional focus and reliance upon the Holy Spirit at the outset of every prayer experience. We know He is our indwelling prayer tutor who leads us in prayer that is God-aligned and reassuring—and that ultimately conforms us to Christ and leads to God’s glory (see Rom. 8:26–30).

### *3. Faith*

A worship-based faith transforms the nature of all united prayer. Hebrews 11:6 reminds us, “Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” This vital requirement of faith-filled worship in prayer focuses on the reality and character of God, knowing He rewards those who seek Him. Don’t miss that focus. Seeking Him, not just presenting long lists of needs, means pursuing His face first and foremost to know His nature.

### *4. Focus*

After we establish this Scripture-fed, Spirit-led, worship-based prayer, we must lead with a biblical and balanced focus. Jesus gave the clear pattern in what has been called the Lord’s Prayer. This is not just something to be quoted by memory but to be experienced by corporate enjoyment. (Notice all the plural pronouns.)

Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” (Matt. 6:9–13)

When Jesus said, “Pray like this,” it was not just a suggestion or one of many options. It was a command for our good and His glory as we pray. We are not permitted to freelance with traditional alternative approaches or override this model with our own clever “improvements.”

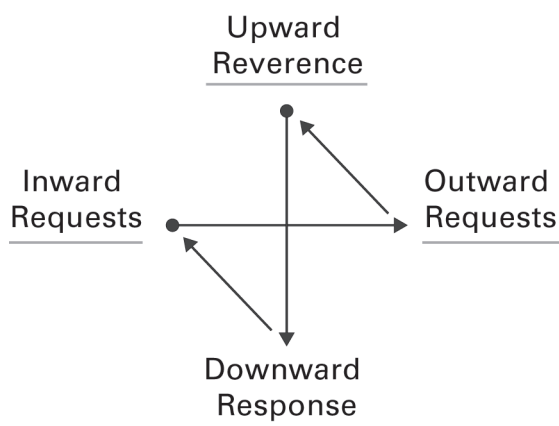
In following this pattern, I see a very simple approach but then also a more comprehensive experience. Most fundamentally, there are two parts to the prayer. The first half is entirely Godward (or upward). The second half is manward (or downward). I like to

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capture this two-part rhythm with this descriptor: “He is worthy. We are needy.” Even when there is only a short amount of time to pray, starting with a passage of Scripture then engaging in a pure articulation of worship captures the participants with His worthiness. Then, moving to a time of trusting Him with our needs is natural. Our requests are informed and inspired by our worship.

A more comprehensive breakdown of the prayer is focused on four movements. I describe them as *reverence*, *response*, *requests*, and *readiness*, what I called “The 4/4 Pattern for Prayer.” This 4/4 pattern, following the exact themes of the model prayer, looks like this:

### THE 4/4 PATTERN FOR PRAYER



With an open Bible, the beginning point in prayer is to ask, “Who is God?” and “What does He reveal about Himself in this passage?” This sparks worship (reverence) in alignment with the focus, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.”

Since worship is the response of all I am to the revelation of all He is, the next movement is an expression of surrender and submission. “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is

in heaven” guides to us yield our will, our mind, and our agenda to His purposes. This is prompted by the question, “How do You want me to respond?” and is often guided by a verse in the passage.

“Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” answers the question, “What should we pray about?” Participants can allow the Scripture to guide their requests in connection to both resource needs and relationship needs, as Jesus’ model prayer indicates.

In the final movement we find a focus on readiness for spiritual battle. Where do we go from here? What will we face today in a sinful and hostile world? As the pattern indicates, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Praying from the Scriptures is especially vital at this point, as the best way to overcome the attacks of the enemy is with the memorized and spoken Word of God (Matt. 4:1–10; Eph. 6:17).<sup>6</sup>

### *5. Flow*

The real challenge in leading a prayer time is to facilitate the participation of the people so that all things are done for edification. Sometimes this can feel like herding squirrels. To guide a flow of prayer that reflects continuity, agreement, unity, and blessing I follow what I call “the ABCs of prayer.”

*Audible.* This seems so elementary, but participants must be reminded to pray loudly enough that others can hear. In group prayer, there is no point in opening one’s mouth if the others cannot hear. And—we need to hear what the Spirit is prompting in others. Hearing another believer as he prays enables me to know his heart in a deeper way and prompts things in me that I need to pray about. It fosters a collective sense of understanding and agreement. It can even teach me to pray more effectively, especially when the other person is further down the road in their walk with Christ.

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*Brief.* I've been in many prayer times when I wanted to tap someone on the shoulder and ask, "Does your train of thought have a caboose or not?" Long, protracted, scattered prayers have a way of sucking the life out of a prayer time. Encourage brevity on a regular basis. Violators may need to be encouraged offline toward a more measured participation. Many people in prayer meetings are spiritually sincere, just not socially aware.

*Clear.* Guiding participants to pray clearly, about one thing at a time, encourages greater agreement and focus. When someone dumps a load of thirty-four different requests, it creates confusion as the others do not know which one of the many disconnected appeals to agree with. An effectively led prayer time allows people to pray multiple times but preferably about one thing at time.

Providing distinct entry points helps facilitate this. Also, [www.64fellowship.com](http://www.64fellowship.com) has many examples of this idea of praying from the Scriptures with balanced focus and edifying continuity.

### *6. Freedom (to Move and Change Position)*

Too many times we lead prayer experiences where participants sit comfortably in a padded chair or pew, with head bowed and eyes closed. This posture can be a surefire recipe for drifting minds and sleeping bodies. It is helpful to give permission (even encouragement) to participants to stand, walk, kneel, or even lay prostrate. Eyes can be opened—and should be when praying from the Scriptures. "You can lift your hands, sit on your hands, clap your hands, look at your hands, and even smell your hands, whatever," I tell people. Just stay physically engaged to allow the body to transmit the expression of the soul.

### *7. Flexibility*

Over the years, with the Lord's help, I have created thousands of Scripture-fed prayer guides that were utilized in corporate prayer gatherings. However, we know that while the Spirit can direct ahead of time He also prompts the unanticipated focus in the moment. The point is simply to prayerfully and thoughtfully plan, as necessary, but to hold the plan loosely, knowing there is a unique dynamic that occurs when believers get together and pray.

### *8. Faithfulness*

Leading in prayer is a lifelong calling, not a short-term fix or the theme of the month. We must embrace a mindset of leading for the long haul. I remember a number of years ago, after more than a decade of intense prayer leadership, crying out to the Lord, "How long do I have to keep up this 'prayer thing'?" In a clear way, the Lord directed my heart to a penetrating question, challenging me to endurance: "Daniel, how long will you brush your teeth, take a shower, eat breakfast, and get dressed?" I understood. It was as if the Lord said, "Why would you question the longevity of this paramount commitment any more than these other basic lifelong routines?" That settled it for me.

Since then, I resolved that the consistent pursuit of spiritual intimacy and leadership in prayer ministry is my way of life until my final day on earth. I tell leaders everywhere I go that they need to develop a dream of dying on their knees. My dream, and I hope yours as well, is to seek spiritual intimacy at a personal level and lead God's people humbly into His presence until my concluding day. Like Paul, let us finish the course!

## **KEYS TO FACILITATING EFFECTIVE AND EDIFYING GROUP PARTICIPATION**

Beyond these guidelines, here are a couple of practical ways to improve the corporate prayer experience.

### *Allow for Variety of Participation*

While praying out loud brings positive benefit, I never require people to pray aloud. Being a strong extrovert, I do not understand it, but some people get exceedingly stressed over the idea of articulating what is in their hearts in the company of other people.

I like to get people praying together, sometimes in pairs, triplets, or other groupings. However, I always allow the freedom for someone to simply pray alone or exclusively with a spouse or friend with whom they feel more comfortable.

### *Level the Praying Ground*

When praying from the Scriptures, I love to give people a track to run on. The goal is to guide the group in praying with as much specificity and application as possible. Accordingly, you can offer specific entry points that allow people to finish the sentence or fill in the blank. Helping the participants consider specific reasons, times, or circumstances is often a very encouraging tool. Various phrases are effective, such as: because, when, even though, even if, etc.

For example, you might offer any of the following prayer expressions to launch individuals into prayer:

“Lord, thank You that You were faithful when . . .” (Responses might include expressions like:)

- You woke me up this morning to a new day to trust You (Lam. 3:22–23).

- You empowered me to overcome my addiction to drugs (1 Cor. 10:13).
- You forgave and cleansed after a season of rebellion during my college years (1 John 1:9).
- You empowered me to finish my schooling in spite of my weariness (Phil. 1:6).

“Lord, You are great because You are . . .” (Possible responses:)

- You are the creator of the universe (Gen. 1:1).
- You have done awesome deeds throughout history (Ps. 145:5).
- You number and name the stars of heaven (Ps. 147:4).
- You are the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16).

“Thank You that You love me, even though . . .”

- I have sinned against You so often (Romans 5:8).
- I often do not even comprehend Your great love (Eph. 3:19).
- I do not act in sacrificial love toward my family and friends (1 John 3:16).

“I am feeling fearful about \_\_\_\_\_; give me grace to trust You.”

“I pray for my friend \_\_\_\_\_, that I would see him or her come to saving faith.”

“Give me faith to share the Gospel this week when . . .”

“My friend, \_\_\_\_\_, needs your special grace because . . .”



## OLD PATHS, NEW POWER

The options are endless, especially when the prompters come right from the truths of Scripture. While this may seem simplistic, the net effect is that it “levels the praying ground.” Long-winded people who struggle to find their punctuation are guided to pray specific, focused prayers. This may also enable introverts to participate without feeling that they have to come up with some highly conceptual prayer speech. Such open-ended expressions can help long-term believers to be more transparent and practical in their prayers. New believers find it easy to join in with these simple points of guidance.

### SUFFICIENT WORD AND SPIRIT

Beyond these practical recommendations, remember that the Word and Spirit are fully sufficient to equip us to pray and to lead others in prayer. Senior pastor Cliff Boone of Cedar Crest Bible Fellowship Church (Allentown, Pennsylvania) is a champion of expository preaching. Recently he has been awakened to the equal priority of prayer. Cliff told one interviewer, “How could I have missed the priority the Scripture gives to corporate prayer? Now, I never feel more like a pastor than after I have led my people in a prayer meeting. That had been a missing piece of ministry for many years. Before, as I led my people in prayer I always felt inadequate, but now I say, “This is going to be great. It’s a whole new ballgame.”<sup>7</sup> Boone testifies that the blanks have been filled in and speaks of his constant two-part prayer, “Lord, teach me to pray and teach me to teach my people how to pray.” This is pastoring as it ought to be in the old paths of “prayer and the ministry of the word.”<sup>8</sup>



***In Their Own Words***

Watch Cliff Boone (Cedar Crest Bible Fellowship Church, Allentown, PA) share his joy about “Learning to Lead in Corporate Prayer” at <http://www.64fellowship.com/oldpaths/16/>

Prayer is the master-weapon. We should be greatly wise if we used it more, and did so with a more specific purpose.<sup>1</sup>

**CHARLES SPURGEON**

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I believe the greatest indictment on our generation of pastors and Christian leaders is the loss of confidence in calling our people to regular times of corporate prayer. The consequence is a church and leadership that have put their confidence in the wisdom of men, not the promise of God. God is too slow for our taste. It is easier to find the right talent, the right music or program, and give the people what they *think* they need rather than wait on God for what they *really* need . . . Him!<sup>2</sup>

**PASTOR SANDY MASON**