

THE PRAYER MEETING

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What follows is a very simple and pointed article providing support for the prayer meeting.

1. The **IMPORTANCE** of the prayer meeting

Jesus called the center of Jewish worship, the Temple, the “house of prayer.” The disciples came to Jesus and did not ask him to teach them how to preach. Rather, they approached Jesus and said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” To pray corporately is vitally important for the life, health, joy, power, and influence of the local church.

2. The **LIFE** of the prayer meeting

Every church should have regular times of calling upon the Lord corporately. From a church’s infancy, and through its development, maturity and growth, the church should retain the prayer meeting. A barometer of the spiritual health and vibrancy of a local church can accurately be measured by the prayer meeting. Corporate prayer is the heart of the church. Corporate prayer in the prayer meeting is like the spinal cord that holds everything together. The prayer meeting serves as the nucleus through which everything in the body is joined, empowered, strengthened, and sustained.

3. The **VIBRANCY** of the prayer meeting

The prayer meeting has life when Spirit-indwelt believers join together and pray to God believingly. Vibrancy and life does not occur when people simply gather because of tradition, because of superstition, or because someone wants them to be there. Rather, the vibrancy of the meeting is when believers recognize they have nothing before a holy God, they are in and of themselves nothing before a holy God, and cling to the righteous merits of Christ Jesus who has supremely loved them, efficiently died for them, eternally ransomed them, and gloriously pardoned them. The life of the prayer meeting is when believers are gripped by the gospel and when they hold God to His promises and gather together in meeting with God. Like a muscle, strength and health results when it is flexed and worked over and over. So it is with the body of Christ. Strength, health and vibrancy results when God’s people meet consistently and regularly to pray.

4. The **FOCUS** of the prayer meeting

The Apostle Paul affirmed that all things exist “for the glory of God”. Whether Christians eat, drink, or whatever happens, everything must be done to the glory of God. The prayer meeting must elevate God and His goodness, His power, His sovereignty, His providence, His holiness, His discipline, His glory. Thus, the focus of the prayer meeting must be about God. The prayer meeting should not be a time of chatting or a time of sharing requests for a majority of the evening. There is an occasion for sharing personal requests but the bulk of the meeting should be about God, His glory, His gospel, His person, His providence, His empowering, His regenerating and sanctifying power. As is any and every ministry of Christ’s church, the focus of the prayer meeting must center on God — and on His glory.

5. The **SCHEDULE** of the prayer meeting

The prayer meeting should progress at a proper pace without overburdened periods of silence without people praying. A godly man (the pastor, an elder, a lay leader) should provide oversight for the prayer meeting and give guidance to the various seasons of prayer. The prayer meeting could begin with a brief time in the Word of God (a sermon, a Bible study) praying through a text of Scripture. This ensures that God’s people hear from God through the Scriptures and that prayer is a response to God’s revealing of Himself through His Word. Prayer is taking hold of God and praying to God, through Christ, responding to Scripture, as a corporate body.

6. The **PRAYERS** of the prayer meeting

Prayer meetings must never become old and ritualistic. Never shall the prayer meetings become cold, dry, lifeless, and boring. When God’s people pray, God is worshiped, sought, enjoyed and beseeched through various kinds of prayers. The prayer meeting should include adoration and praise where believers remember and acclaim the

person, and work, and character of God. The glory of God also is revealed through confessing sin, receiving God's grace, repenting of sin, corporate confession of sins and the embracing of Christ's abundant forgiveness and sufficient pardon. Thanksgiving, supplication, petitions, and intercessions should also occupy a part of the prayer meeting. The prayer meeting should also include special season in praying for revival in the Church, the city, and the land. Thus, the meeting is to be God-centered in praying so that God might be glorified in and through His church as the body corporately gathers to call upon God together. Herein lies the various kinds of ways that the children of God call upon God in the prayer meeting.

7. The **FREQUENCY** of the prayer meeting

Shortly after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the early church gathered to hear the Apostles' teaching, to pray, to fellowship, and to break bread together. Undoubtedly this was frequent. As often as people gather to hear the Word, to break bread and to fellowship, so it could be argued that God's people should gather for the primary purpose to pray. Thus, a weekly, corporate prayer meeting may appropriately serve a local church. Some choose to pray in home/small groups or before worship services on Sunday. To have a prayer meeting designated during the week for the flock to come, gather, hear the Word, receive comfort and encouragement, and pour out their hearts before God can serve as a vital organ and central nerve to the life and health of the Body. To state it simply, the more frequent, the better.

8. The **JOY** in the prayer meeting

The kingdom of God consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The Christian who has entered the school of prayer never graduates. He never receives that terminal degree. He always longs for more. He craves for it more. His delight is meeting with the Supreme Lord of the universe. The prayer meeting should be filled with an atmosphere of joy in God, boasting in Him, taking hold of Him, calling upon Him with eager and glad expectation. To pray is to fuel gladness. To corporately pray is to enflame a fire with gasoline. Joy should be present in the prayer meeting and flow from the prayer meeting. To pray without joy is similar to talking to one's greatest lover without ever having joy. That relationship could not last long nor would it be very healthy. To be with a lover is to have joy in their presence. So it should be when God's people gather to pray.

9. The **EXPECTANCY** in the prayer meeting

One of the greatest woes in many prayer meetings happens when people pray with little expectation that God might actually hear *and* answer their petitions. This is clearly portrayed in Acts 12:5 when the people of God corporately prayed for Peter while he was imprisoned. In answer to their prayers, God miraculously released him from prison and when he found his way to the home where the church had gathered, they disbelieved the servant-girl who told them that Peter was standing at the gate! O how horrible is it to gather to pray without fervently believing and earnestly expecting that God will in fact hear and most assuredly *answer* the prayers specifically. This underscores the importance of praying specifically. To pray corporately for specific requests cloaked with earnest expectation only heightens the anticipation of God's people as they await God to work and it prompts corporate praise amongst the flock when God does in fact answer prayers in a specific way. Pray expectantly. God desires His people to pray no other way. Half-hearted praying is useless. Pray fervently. Pray boldly. Pray believingly and expectantly.

10. The **GOAL** of the prayer meeting

The goal of the prayer meeting is the supremacy of God, the glory of Jesus Christ, the empowering of the Spirit, and the revival of God's people. The ultimate goal is for the glory of God in the gladness of God's people as believers pray to the Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through His atoning work, and through the Spirit of God who intercedes with silent groanings in bringing the petitions before the Father. The prayer meeting should serve as a powerful instrument for keeping the church pure and holy. It should ward off those professing-but-false Christians who live in wanton rebellion and ongoing sin. The prayer meeting could catapult Christians to more consistent seasons of calling upon the Lord throughout the week. It should, in a very real sense, prepare believers for heaven where there will be ongoing and unhindered fellowship, joy and communion with the Triune God.