

Praying together in Groups

My wife and I were recently asked to recommend some guidelines for covenant groups at our church in order to pray effectively together. In case these ideas are helpful, we pass them on to you.

The purpose of praying together:

- 1) To exalt the Lord in worship and praise - vertical.
- 2) To intercede for the mission of Christ's people - missional.
- 3) To pray for the family of God, one another, and ourselves - internal.

The Lord's Prayer is instructive in modeling these dimensions. It starts with the vertical in which we are to "hallow" His name. It then reaches out to the world, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven"- missional. Finally, it deals with us as far as our sins being forgiven, our needs provided and overcoming temptation and being delivered from evil-internal.

All three dimensions should be part of the experience of prayer groups. The tendency is to focus on ourselves and our own families, health and job problems, etc. However, Jesus wants us to start with a focus on His Father and on the wider world so that we are "big picture people", not myopic, introverted and ingrown. "The Lord inhabits the praises of His people". When we start with God, keeping centered on Him and His character, we invite Him to manifest His presence, which is crucial when we seek to connect with Him in prayer together.

Becoming aware of His almightiness and that He is with us as we meet, gives us a proper perspective and enables us to rise in faith to consider the horizontal and internal aspects of mission to our world and our own welfare from the perspective and position of being seated with Christ and sharing the authority He has given us. Then, as Jesus said, "If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed", you can speak to mountains and they will be moved (Matt. 17:20). Repeating such promises of Scripture out loud during the time of prayer also enables us to get a heavenly perspective, realizing the Lord's ability to answer us and releasing us to a higher level of faith and expectancy.

"Conversing with God" enables everyone to participate by praying brief prayers of one sentence or more (normally not more than one minute). Long prayers by dominant individuals tend to kill the sense of participation so the session becomes boring and deadening. Praying briefly and repeatedly, as people feel led, gives shy members the confidence that they can enter in. It brings a dynamic sense of the Holy Spirit's presence and leading, enabling everyone to be more sensitive to His voice and how they should pray about situations.

It is not necessary in such free-flowing prayer that is caught up with the presence of the Lord to always conclude with the words "in Jesus name" since the conversation is not ending but is simply passing from one to the other in interactive intercession. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17).

At such times, God often gives impressions, verses of Scripture, or words of encouragement that can be shared after such a season of corporate, listening prayer. This helps the group to sense His direction and any actions that He may be leading them to take together or individually.

As certain members of the group feel burdened to pray about particular issues such as caring for the homeless, nations in crisis, the healing of individuals, it can be an indication of where their spiritual gifts lie. Prayer group facilitators can and should be alert, as they see recurring patterns in members' prayers, to help them discover their particular gifts and callings for mission.

In Ephesians 3:20, Paul reminds us of the awesome potential of our connecting with the Lord in corporate prayer: "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen."