

Discipling a Congregation through the Levels of Prayer

By Jon Graf

A number of years ago, I had a pastor friend share how he was concerned that the small prayer meeting at his church was too intimidating so he could not encourage most of his people to attend. The problem was that it was made up of seasoned intercessors who loved to pray. Sounds good, except that the length of the prayers and the emotion with which some prayed was discouraging, or a turnoff, to others.

That is one of the difficulties in moving a congregation forward in prayer. Everyone is at a different level of experience. And while you want to encourage people to go deeper, some of those levels don't mix well. So how do you disciple people at these various levels?

The Beginner

Probably the biggest lack of training in most churches is at the most simple, basic levels. That beginning believer, that immature Christian who may be a little weak in their faith, how do you get them to see prayer as important, get them to want to learn, and what do you provide for them to grow?

This level is overlooked in discipleship for two reasons: 1. It is assumed most new believers will naturally begin to pray—a very false assumption; and 2. Very few materials are available at this most basic level.

A wise prayer leader will work to shore up the opportunities to disciple immature or newer believers. As you plan and strategize, think through these questions:

1. What is the intimidation level of the opportunities for prayer we currently have? Church prayer meeting, small groups, Sunday school classes, corporate opportunities in morning worship service; etc.

2. What type of prayer level does each setting we have, cater to?

3. What are the best settings for new believers or immature pray-ers?

4. Can we tweak a setting to make it better for the beginner? Or do we need to start something new?

Once you have analyzed your situation, you are better able to develop a strategy to train and encourage the beginner in prayer.

Core Things to Teach

1. The Purposes of Prayer. Why is prayer important? (Relationship with God and the relationship between prayer and releasing God's will on earth.)

2. Praying God's Purposes. People need to understand that prayer is not just to get stuff from God to make our lives better. We need to be actively praying for spiritual growth in our lives and the lives of those we love—things like the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and the qualities in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), for example.

3. Praying Scripture. One of the best things you can teach a new disciple is how to incorporate God's Word into their prayers.

4. Out Loud versus Silent. Another great thing to teach a new believer is the benefits of praying out loud (helps you stay on task and prevents your mind from wandering; has a spiritual warfare dynamic; a shy person who hates praying with others

finds it easier if he or she has learned to pray out loud by themselves).

5. Alone versus Together. People need to learn the importance of praying with other people. There are multiple reasons this is important, but the two most significant things are that it brings unity to the body and it grows the level of faith in a church.

Available Resources

While I mentioned that there were not a great many resources specifically targeted to beginning or immature pray-ers, here are some suggestions for things to use (all are available through prayershop.org).

1. Love to Pray by Alvin VanderGriend. This forty-day devotional covers a complete theology of prayer. Each day provides a simple devotional thought based on Scripture, some specific things to focus prayer on, and an action step.

2. *The 21 Most Effective Prayers in the Bible* and *21 Keys to Answered Prayer* by Dave Earley. These books offer powerful truths and practical help about aspects of prayer with which we all struggle.

3. *Prayer Connect Issue 32: "Prayer 101."* This back issue of *Prayer Connect* magazine looks at the core aspects of prayer everyone should understand as a foundation for an effective prayer life.

4. *Patterns for Prayer* by Alvin VanderGriend. This is a 365-day guide (offered in a 3-volume set) that provides a biblical agenda to pray each day for yourself, family and friend, your church, the lost, and the world. It gets people focused on the biblical purposes we should be praying about.

5. *The Power of Personal Prayer and Praying Like Paul* by Jonathan Graf. *The Power of Personal Prayer* covers some core

topics about prayer, then seeks to take the reader deeper and deeper into many aspects of prayer. *Praying Like Paul* specifically teaches people to pray for spiritual growth using Scripture.

6. *Solid Foundation* and *Pray the Word* books. These resources teach both the importance of praying Scripture and how to do it.

7. Prayer guides in general. Most people need help thinking of specific items to pray on given topics. Most prayer guides offer Scripture-based prayers or ideas of things to pray. They can be a real boost to beginning pray-ers. Keep a bunch stocked in locations around your church, or better yet, hand some key ones out to everyone.

8. Join the Church Prayer Leaders Network. Every church should have someone (preferably a pastor or prayer leader) who is has an annual membership to the CPLN. With it, you have access to almost 1,000 articles and ideas on growing prayer, plus a 10% discount on all prayer resources at prayershop.org.

Jonathan Graf is the president of Church Prayer Leaders Network, a ministry that assists churches in growing prayer within their congregation.