

3 Starting Points to Grow Prayer in Your Church

By Jonathan Graf



Recently I did a study of prayer mobilization in the Bible. I discovered something I thought was interesting: prayer was usually mobilized by a leader challenging the people.

In the Old Testament we see Nehemiah, Ezra, Jehoshaphat, to name some, who challenged people to seek God and provided a venue for them to do so.

Some of you would say, “that isn’t the case in the New Testament.” Perhaps for the first months and a few years in the life of the early church people prayed without a lot of encouragement from leaders. But by the time the epistles were written, we see Paul and James again challenging those under their care to pray. James’s passage in chapter 5 goes through a lengthy encouragement for people to pray more often. Paul asked people to join his missionary endeavors by praying (Romans and 2 Corinthians). He also challenged people to “pray without ceasing,” to pray when they had anxiety, to pray for those in authority. I suspect all these challenges were made because James and Paul saw the people slacking off where prayer was concerned.

How like our people is that?

What's the answer? As leaders—pastors, elders, small group leaders, prayer leaders—we need to challenge people to pray. Your people will not likely pray a lot without encouragement and challenge from you. In light of that fact, I asked the question, “what prayer opportunities are the most effective in mobilizing a congregation to pray?” Here are what I consider to be the three best:

1. Engage Your Congregation with a Prayer Initiative.

A prayer initiative is where everyone prays on a given theme for a set period of time. 24 hours, a week, 2 weeks, a month, 40 days, are the most popular. If done well, a prayer initiative cannot be matched at pulling the most people into prayer. And a number will have such a good experience that they will catch the importance of prayer and will be better at it the rest of their lives.

Why is a prayer initiative so good? (A) Most use scripture-based prayer guides which both teach people to pray God's Word, but also move people to pray a more kingdom agenda rather than their own. (B) Because the entire church is involved, people are reminded week after week to participate. There is also a built in accountability as people hear others talking about their experiences. That builds within each person a desire to participate more. (C) Prayer initiatives have a twofold manageable time commitment. First people are not making a commitment to pray every day for the rest of their lives (while that would be great, it is too scary a commitment for most). Instead they know they are committing to 30 days or two weeks. But secondly most prayer initiative guides ask for no more than a one to five minute commitment each day. That fact is not intimidating to people at all.

Remember, however, a prayer initiative will only work well if it is well planned, prepared for, and promoted. Just purchasing some prayer guides a week ahead of the Sunday where you announce this is starting today, will not work.

For more information prayerleader.com has some articles on the power of prayer initiatives. Some of the prayer initiatives we recommend are *Praying God's Word Over Your City*, *Asleep in the Land of Nod*, *Revolution on Our Knees* and *Love to Pray*. While all are good, *Love to Pray* is by far the one we recommend the most. It has powerful content, but also the most developed materials for a church that wants to do a prayer initiative right.

2. Take Advantage of a “Passionate” Need.

By this I mean three things. First, pay attention when a congregation's heart seems to be focused somewhere. Has something unusual and difficult happened in the life of your congregation—a natural disaster or catastrophe in your community or the world? Is there something going on that naturally moves people to cry out to God? Take advantage of that and work hard to rally meaningful prayer events, meetings, groups, times in the worship service, etc.

Second, pay attention if there is an area of unusual need in your congregation (a lot of people with cancer, a lot of people who lost their jobs due to a local plant's closing, etc.) People's hearts are tender to such things. They can be an opportunity to rally more than normal prayer.

Third, is there an area of significant ministry your church is experiencing? Maybe your youth group is growing all of a sudden, maybe your MOPS program has more women in it from the

community than from your church. Look for those kinds of things and rally prayer around them. God is at work there, which means Satan will be on the attack. This may be an opportunity to get more people praying.

3. Hold a Prayer Weekend or Conference.

Call the entire church to a special concentrated event to both encourage and challenge them in their prayer lives. This can be very effective to inspire a number of people to go deeper in prayer. And it may not be as expensive as you think.

Many of you have budgets as prayer leaders, and could put on a prayer conference without the leadership of your church suggesting you do it. But for a conference to be truly effective, you need everyone on board. The following factors will make a prayer conference successful:

A. Supported by leadership. Pastors and elders will not only promote it, but will model its importance to the congregation by attending.

B. Prayed for. I notice a difference in a church where I know the event I am speaking at has been well prayed over. Have prayer teams praying even months ahead.

C. Well planned. Pay attention to the details. Get a planning team together at least four to six months ahead.

D. Well promoted. Without proper promotion it is difficult for the event to be successful. A few years ago I was in a church of 600+, where I had been before. Only 5 came to my Saturday morning seminars. One lay leader who had known me for years told me the next day that he didn't even know I was speaking that weekend. I noticed there were no posters or announcements of the event anywhere in the church regarding the prayer seminars, even though there were many announcements of other

events around.

F. No competition with other events. Try to pick a weekend when no other ministry has things planned. Better yet, get it on the calendar and encourage pastoral leadership to put the word out that other events cannot be scheduled for that weekend. The same church that did not promote my event, had scheduled two other events that same Saturday morning. The larger the church, the more difficult it is to keep only one thing on a weekend, but you will see more success if it is possible to do.

Conclusion:

Above all, these events will have far reaching impact on your church if you capitalize on them. When you hold them, make sure you promote and highlight the other ongoing prayer opportunities that are available to people. Put a brochure together that explains various ways each participant can get involved in the regular prayer life of the church. Strike while the fire of their interest is hot!

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If you would like a more complete treatment of this subject, Jon recommends his book, *Restored Power: Becoming a Praying Church One Tweak at a Time*.