

Let Love Rule

It Might Be Time for a Heart Check

By Phil Miglioratti

☒ Whenever a particular colleague would call me on the phone, I would immediately freeze up. Our ministry was suffering from his seemingly self-serving decision-making and destructive actions. When confronted, he refused to repent or resign.

Somehow I survived that situation. But when he called, more than a decade after he finally moved on, I hesitated to pick up the phone.

But I'm glad I did. This time he was calling to confess that he was taking responsibility for the failure of our ministry relationship. And he recognized that I had sought reconciliation. That surprising call led to a few more calls, a few emails and, eventually, an invitation from him to lead his members in a prayer weekend.

I was ready to respond positively to him because, from the beginning of that troubled time, I had done my best to resist the urge for revenge and the feelings of resentment. I had resolved to love him in my heart by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Every day multitudes of Christians are praying for revival by petitioning the Lord to change hearts, forgive sins, cleanse lives, and fill churches. God calls us to pray this way. But perhaps we have failed to anticipate that when the Lord answers those prayers, He also expects something else to

change—the heart of how and why the Church prays.

In his epistle, Jude wrote, “Dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life” (1:20–21).

Every renewed relationship requires a change of communication patterns. Jude makes it clear that for Christ followers to keep their revived relationship with the Lord, prayer is an essential component.

“Praying in the Holy Spirit” enables us to stay “right at the center of God’s love” (Jude 1:20–21, MSG). Our call to pray is a call to experience and express God’s love. He wants His love to reign—to be central at the core of our praying—now and always.

Love Motivates a Revived Church to Pray

If it is true (and it is!) that without love, we are nothing (1 Cor. 13:1–3), then it may also be true that loveless prayers produce precisely nothing.

Few of us would admit to “loveless” praying, but our need for sweeping revival in the Church is an indication we have “abandoned the love [we] had at first” (Rev. 2:4, ESV). If praying is a sign of staying in love with God, then abandoned prayer meetings reveal a Church that has grown cold, content with the status quo.

If a sign of love is caring more about the one you love than yourself, then our “heal me, help me” prayer lists reveal a self-centered Church. Is our longing for revival actually a response to our Lord wooing us, warning us that the love we had at first is gone?

Action Step:

Ensure that love is the motivating factor in every spoken or silent prayer. Instruct those you lead in prayer to include phrases such as these:

- Because of Your great love . . .
- With gratitude for Your love to us through Christ . . .
- Grant us the Father's heart of love as we pray . . .
- Break our hearts over the people and problems that break your heart, Lord. . . .

Love Shapes the Way a Revived Church Prays

Loving our Savior—easy. Loving a changing and crumbling culture—not so easy. In fact, many of us are becoming alienated from and fearful of our postmodern, increasingly anti-Christian, society. What was once an “in God we trust” nation seems to have become antagonistic toward Christianity. Sometimes society feels like our enemy.

For some, this takes away the motivation to pray with love. Others interpret it as permission to pray with anger and judgment. But we know our Lord's command: “I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). Love and prayer are inextricably linked—even in difficult situations. *Especially* in difficult situations.

God gave us His love as the ultimate weapon of warfare. So when He calls us by His Spirit into prayer, He calls us to extol His love in praise and to declare His love as the ultimate purpose of our petitions. Being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2) is more than a cerebral absorption of Bible information. It is a transformation of all we are and all we do, including how and why we pray.

The Apostle Paul's prayer becomes our model: “That your love may abound more and more” (Phil. 1:9). And as our love for God abounds, our love will also abound for what God longs for: “For the earth [to] be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). Now

that's love!

Action Steps:

- Encourage others to join you in praying that your praises and petitions will become saturated with love—authentic love for Almighty God.
- Pray you will grow in love for others in the Body of Christ, as well as in redeeming love for the hard to love.
- Pray with love for those who are lost (that they will not perish), those with the least (the poor and the powerless), and those who lead others (often easily deceived by the enemy or deluded by the evil dark enticements of greed or power).

Love Portrays the Message of a Revived Church

If we pray for the spreading of God's love to all the nations but outwardly express a lack of love for individuals or a lack of compassion on relevant issues, we are only making noise (1 Cor. 13:1). In fact, worse than noise, our culture perceives us as hypocritical and judgmental, like twenty-first century Pharisees.

The Church has not so much become irrelevant as we have been exposed as irreverent, unable to practice what we preach—and thereby disproving the gospel in the minds of those who need Christ. Great-Commission praying requires a Great-Commandment lifestyle of love.

For instance, in many areas our children's schools have become off limits to the gospel, and Christians are often considered persona non grata. But that did not deter a pastors prayer group in Southern California. Having heard that the nearby high school had a serious dropout problem, they began praying together for the school and the students.

Their concern became a burden, which led them to pray on site,

knowing that the best insight comes only from seeing and feeling the burden of the situation firsthand. They were careful to stay on public property and did not behave in an offensive manner (preaching or waving Bibles). They simply prayed silently or quietly as they walked the campus. Soon, students who attended their congregations began to engage them in conversation, asking “Why are you here? What are you doing?”

This gave the pastors opportunities to explain their purpose (to ask God to help the students succeed at their studies) and their motive (because they truly cared about all the children at the school). Coinciding with the time frame of their on-site prayers, the dropout rate drastically declined. And the school district, to the pastors’ surprise, asked them to pray at other troubled schools in their district.

“Make love your aim” (1 Cor. 14:1, RSV) refers not only to God-focused praying but also to outward-focused living. Christ’s love compels us to love one another in the Body of Christ (1 Thess. 4:9) and to love our neighbors (Matt. 22:39) who are not yet part of God’s family.

Jesus prayed that we, His Church, would be proof to the world that God loves them (John 17:23). Actually, loving them—through our love-motivated prayers—is the only way to accomplish that.

Action Steps:

- Ask the Holy Spirit to identify the individuals He wants to reveal His truth to through your words and deeds of love.
- Create a list at praycareshare.com to receive an automatic weekly reminder to pray.
- Ask the Lord to show you how to demonstrate your love in ways each person will best appreciate—an act of mercy or hospitality, or problem-solving resources.

- As Paul instructs us, “Pray also . . . that whenever [you] speak, words may be given [you] so that [you] will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which [you are] an ambassador” (Eph. 6:19–20).

Everyone is created in God’s image and desperately needs at least one saved-by-grace, filled-with-the-Spirit person to pray for them, show them love, and tell them the gospel truth. And that means picking up the phone when you dread talking to the person on the other end! God loves the world through those who love Christ. You and I are those ambassadors of God’s love.

PHIL MIGLIORATTI is COO of Mission America and national coordinator of Loving Your Communities to Christ. His passion is to network pastors, prayer, and city transformation movements. He blogs at Philsblog.net.

Love Help Center

Here are some resources to help you pray with love as your heart motivation:

- An email reminder to pray for lost persons: praycareshare.com
- A website stocked with stories and resources devoted to the prayer-care-share lifestyle: LOVE2020.com
- Video clips to help you cast vision and train Christ followers in loving their neighbors and their communities for and with and to Christ: youtube.com/LoveGodOthers
- Scriptures and links to articles: [#Love2020](https://twitter.com/Love2020)
- Podcasts and commentary: [facebook.com/make-love-your-aim](https://www.facebook.com/make-love-your-aim)

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