

“What a help for local church prayer leaders! Recently, I took the unpublished manuscript of *The Prayer-Saturated Church* with me to a seminar I was teaching. I was so taken by the content that I ended up tearing out pages and teaching them instead of my material. The local church now has a new and fresh construction manual for the House of Prayer.”

—DR. TERRY TEYKL, prayer consultant, Renewal Ministries

“Thank God for Cheryl Sacks! *The Prayer-Saturated Church* is a must for anyone involved in prayer ministry. It gives practical, balanced revelation on how not to get distracted so you remain focused for breakthrough praying in your church. Cheryl not only has lived and led prayer but has now written and explained how the prayer ministry evolves and matures.”

—DR. CHUCK D. PIERCE, vice president, Global Harvest Ministries;
president, Glory of Zion International Ministries, Inc.

“*The Prayer-Saturated Church* is a major missing link between the church and the transformation of congregations, cities, and nations. It is practical yet deeply personal and warm. It gives us keys to the release of revival and a great harvest of souls.”

—CINDY JACOBS, founder, Generals of Intercession

“The dynamic prayer movement that God has been activating throughout America has now reached a new level. *The Prayer-Saturated Church* not only will help you understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches concerning prayer, but it will also motivate you to jump into the stream and move forward in the divine flow. I congratulate Cheryl Sacks for this strategic and exciting book!”

—C. PETER WAGNER, president, Global Harvest Ministries

“When Cheryl Sacks speaks about prayer, people listen! She is a gifted communicator, and she is also uniquely anointed to call people and churches to a deeper, higher level of intercession. So this book isn’t just full of good prayer ideas; it will ignite your spirit! Cheryl has been especially called by God to impart her passion to church leaders. I’ve felt it! I’ve seen the results! I’m Cheryl’s pastor.”

—DR. GARY D. KINNAMAN, senior minister, Word of Grace, Mesa, Arizona

“Cheryl Sacks has produced a resource that both pastors and prayer leaders have been waiting for years to put their hands on. She covers the A to Z’s of birthing and building prayer into the ministry and mission of the local church. This handbook is essential for every prayer ministry I have ever known. Buy it, use it, and give thanks to God for Cheryl.”

—PHIL MIGLIORATTI, facilitator, Church Prayer Leaders Network

“This book is one that is incredibly comprehensive yet thoroughly practical. Cheryl not only covers the “how” of prayer ministry but also the “why.” For anyone interested in building or improving their church as a house of prayer, *The Prayer-Saturated Church* is a must-read.”

—DR. GREGORY FRIZZELL, prayer and spiritual awakening specialist,
Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma



THE
PRAYER
SATURATED
CHURCH

A COMPREHENSIVE HANDBOOK FOR
PRAYER LEADERS

CHERYL SACKS



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Sample from *The Prayer-Saturated Church* / ISBN 1600061982
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ISBN-13: 978-1-60006-198-1

ISBN-10: 1-60006-198-2

Note: Some of the names of individuals and churches used in the illustrations have been changed to protect privacy.

Visit the *Pray!* website at www.praymag.com.

Visit the Church Prayer Leaders website at www.prayerleader.com.

Cover design by Jason Gabbert, The DesignWorks Group,

www.thedesignworksgroup.com

Cover images by IndexStock

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Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 / 10 09 08 07

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Dedicated to

*my loving husband and prayer partner, Hal, and my
precious daughter, Nicole, whose prayers and those of her
friends have filled our home for many years.*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was made possible by the prayers and support of many special friends. First, to my husband, Hal, your love, prayers, and spiritual input have been my constant strength. Also your work with pastors for more than twenty years paved the way for me to train church prayer leaders in many cities across the nation.

Nicole, my precious daughter, the image of you and the kids from Sacred Edge filling the floors, doorways, and stairwell of our home with heart-wrenching cries to the Lord for your generation has forever changed my perspective of the word “prayer.”

I cannot say enough about my editor at NavPress, Rachelle Gardner, except that without you there would be no book. Your prayers, encouragement, and editorial direction are a gift from God. I’ll never have another cup of Starbucks without thinking of you. To Jon Graf, my friend and founder of *Pray!* magazine, thank you for giving me this great opportunity.

To my assistant, Kathleen Graham, thank you for picking up my office duties and helping compile the resource list and disk materials. You’re the best! Sandi Powelson and Caroline Erickson, your input on several sections of the book was invaluable.

To my pastor, Gary Kinnaman, I think you started this process when you opened the door for me to implement my prayer ideas at Word of Grace. Thanks for believing in me.

To my friend and “house of prayer” mentor, Terry Teykl, catching your vision has changed the course of my life. To my friends Steve and Mary Marr, thank you for all your hand-holding of a first-time author.

I am grateful for the intercessors, too numerous to name, who birthed this book. A special thanks to Deborah Tyrrell and my mother, Chris

Mackin, who prayed me through the final weeks.

To the donors who gave so generously so I could purchase a new laptop computer, may the Lord richly bless you. And my dear friend Cindy Jacobs, your constant encouragement kept me from giving up.

To my spiritual Mom, Hazel Shelton, thank you for taking the time to teach me the power of prayer. There could be no greater gift.

Finally, I want to thank the Lord Jesus Christ for helping me complete this work. This book is first and foremost for and about You.

FOREWORD

Ezekiel 47 is a prophetic passage about a river—the river of God—that flows from the altar in the temple of God. This river, as it flows, gets ever broader and deeper, and it brings life and enrichment. It teems with life and brings fruit wherever it flows.

That is also a picture of the church and the work of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Out of the church flows the work of the Spirit on earth. The artwork inside the front cover of *The Prayer-Saturated Church* captures that image. When a church is truly connected to the Spirit of God, His Spirit flows in ministry—first through the church and then out the doors into the surrounding community, bringing life and fruit wherever it flows.

How does a church become filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit of God? There is only one way: through prayer. The Spirit's working doesn't come through gaining Bible knowledge, though that's important. It doesn't come through learning about leadership, though that's important. The Spirit's work doesn't come through dynamic small groups or the latest church growth ideas, though they are important, too. The transforming, life-giving work of the Holy Spirit only comes through powerful prayer. It comes through becoming a prayer-saturated church. How do I know this?

Luke 11:5-13 is an interesting passage on prayer. Usually this passage brings sermons on persevering in prayer. But there is a hidden little message in its powerful thoughts. At the end, Jesus says, "How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" The passage wasn't about the Holy Spirit; it was about asking for what we need—ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking. And what do we get as we pray more and more? Luke says we get the Holy

Spirit! We get the river of God that flows in and through us.

Since the beginning of *Pray!* magazine, one of my greatest passions has been to see God use our ministry to fuel prayer in the local church. While that passion was never written into our mission statement, it has been a driving force under the surface, like a hidden river deep in the bed-rock that brings life to parched ground.

Seeing prayer become foundational in the lives of believers and then in the life of every church is what we are about. It's in our blood! It seeps out of our pores. We get excited over every step forward in raising the prayer level in a church. We grieve over every roadblock, every setback we hear about from prayer leaders.

As a result of this passion, we have developed relationships with many prayer leaders over the years. Our relationship with Cheryl Sacks developed as she and I both sat on the advisory board of The National Association of Local Church Prayer Leaders (now the Church Prayer Leaders Network). A few years ago, we began feeling that it was time for a new, major work on raising up prayer in the local church. We wanted a practical, helpful, encouraging, challenging, and, above all, comprehensive book that would provide everything a pastor, church leader, prayer coordinator, or intercessor needed to develop his or her own church into a prayer-saturated church. After watching Cheryl and seeing the breadth of her experience in the relatively uncharted waters of local church prayer, we knew we had our author. Lo and behold, when we approached her, we found out that she was already working on such a book.

I believe *The Prayer-Saturated Church* is, bar none, the finest, most complete work on church prayer that has ever been written. Multiple copies should be in every church. As you seek to grow prayer in your church, God's Word, the Holy Spirit, and then *The Prayer-Saturated Church* will guide you in making your church that Spirit-transforming, life-giving community God wants it to be.

—JONATHAN GRAF, founder of *Pray!* magazine,
president of Jonathan Graf Ministries, Inc.

THE CHURCH THAT PRAYER BUILT

If we call upon the Lord, He has promised in His Word to answer, to bring the unsaved to Himself, to pour out His Spirit among us. If we don't call upon the Lord, He has promised nothing—nothing at all. It's as simple as that. No matter what I preach or what we claim to believe in our heads, the future will depend upon our times of prayer. This is the engine that will drive the church.

— JIM CYMBALA
Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire

Many years of my life's journey were spent as a high school journalism teacher. I still intercede regularly for the public school system. One morning I was up early praying.

"Oh God," I cried. "Please return prayer to the classrooms of schools across our nation."

Suddenly the Holy Spirit responded to my plea. His words seemed almost audible as they rang through the air: "Now why don't you ask that prayer will return to the *church*?"

At first I was stunned. Then I began to ponder the meaning of those words. Could it be that the Lord saw the church's doors closed to prayer—just as they are in our schools?

I knew our Christian community needed to pray more. For more than twenty years, while my husband, Hal, and I had been working with the

pastors of our city, we also had been leading citywide prayer meetings. Attendance was up and down. I was always asking the Lord for a new strategy.

But now He dropped this new thought into my mind: *How can the city become a “house of prayer” when the local churches are not even praying? The citywide prayer movement will never be any stronger than the prayer in the local church.*

Thus began my journey of training local church prayer leaders to work alongside their pastors in building houses of prayer.

THE LOCAL CHURCH PRAYER MOVEMENT

The world is now in the midst of an escalating prayer movement—and the hot spot of the movement is local church prayer mobilization. Christian bookstores are filled with books on the whys and hows of prayer and the need to pray, but very few address the topic of local church prayer. Fewer still offer any actual plan for developing a church into a house of prayer.

Recently, the pastor of a church in my city sat in our office belaboring the woes of trying to mobilize his church to pray. He had put himself through a crash course on prayer in the previous two weeks, reading some eight to ten contemporary books on the subject. He was now convinced that he needed to get a prayer ministry up and running in his church and spiritually map his community. He seemed overwhelmed by the vast amount of work to be done on this important project, and he didn’t know where to start.

This is the same place in which literally thousands of pastors and prayer leaders find themselves today. Their eyes have been opened to the need to make prayer a priority in their church, yet they simply don’t know where to begin.

I am writing this book to help fill the gap—to provide comprehensive, practical, and strategic material for mobilizing prayer in the local church. Whether you’re a pastor, church elder, prayer leader, or interested intercessor, if you have a heart to see your church draw closer to God in prayer, I have written this book for you. While I’ve aimed most of the material at the church prayer leader (whether that person is a pastor, staff member, or volunteer), I’ve also included “For Pastors Only” sections. You’ll find these

clearly marked within the chapters.

In the following pages you'll find help for establishing a prayer ministry and becoming more of a praying church. You'll learn how to assess your church's needs, build a prayer action team, and develop a comprehensive prayer strategy that involves the entire congregation—and how to avoid many pitfalls along the way.

This book is for churches at every level of prayer. I've seen churches that are full of prayerful people and God's tangible presence, yet they don't have many organized opportunities for prayer and desire to increase that. Then there are churches with plenty of programming but not much prayer. Many pastors and church leaders are tired of running endless programs without seeing much fruit. I am writing for any of you who see outward signs of success but feel empty because of the lack of the presence and power of God. This book is essentially a call for the church to return to her first love, with a road map to show her how to get there.

Why is this movement so important?

- Prayer is the priority for transforming our nation (1 Timothy 2:1-4).
- Prayer-saturated churches are capable of transforming their communities.
- Churches need a designated person to promote and mobilize prayer initiatives.
- Pastors, church staff, and prayer leaders need resources to help them succeed in this mission.

THE UPPER ROOM PRINCIPLE

If an outsider observed your church, would prayer be immediately visible? For many churches, the answer is no. Yet prayer is certainly what anyone would have noticed about the early church or any of the churches during the Great Awakenings. Their continual practice of prayer was the primary reason for phenomenal growth and evangelism.

In the book of Acts, the early church was awakened, equipped, and mobilized to pray. They prayed in the temple, in one another's homes, and in the streets. They even had a special room where they assembled for

prayer: “And when they had entered [the city], they mounted [the stairs] to the upper room where they were indefinitely staying. . . . All of these with their minds in full agreement devoted themselves steadfastly to prayer, [waiting together] . . .” (Acts 1:13-14, AMP).

The Upper Room was filled with activity; people were always coming and going. Many believe that it was a place where prayer was going on continuously—24/7.

The Upper Room became a launching pad for the church’s mission. The disciples emerged empowered to share the message of Christ with boldness and authority. Profound and exciting things happened after the Holy Spirit came upon them. This little group of disciples with no build-ings, no money, and no tapes and books, turned the world right side up.

Terry Teykl, in his book *Making Room to Pray*, explains this prayer phenomenon in what he calls the Upper Room Principle. The principle is simple:

When God gives us a great task, He expects us to seek Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength before we endeavor to do that task, because we must realize completely that His Spirit, not our might or power, will accomplish the work (see Zechariah 4:6).¹

THE CHURCH THAT PRAYER BUILT

In 1993, Biltmore Baptist Church was in trouble. After a string of devastating events, this once-active congregation of 600 had diminished to 175. In the wake of dissension, factions, and power struggles, the only staff left was a part-time secretary. There was no pastor, only an interim worship leader.

“We were a desperate, broken people,” recalls church member Carolyn Fuqua, “but we began to call out to God.” The congregation went through a time of confession, repentance, and cleansing. “We asked God to send us a pastor with a vision that would lead us.”

God sent a man by the name of James Walker. Together he and the congregation dreamed about what their church would look like in the future. Yet none of them could have even imagined what God was going to do.

“We began to pray that God would send people to help the pastor fulfill the vision — God’s plans and purposes, not man’s,” says Carolyn. “We asked the Lord to bar the door to people who would come with a hidden agenda or who were seeking power or position for themselves. We asked God to do something so big that no man could take credit for it.”

Ten years later Biltmore Baptist Church is a growing, dynamic church. With a staff of close to eighty, including sixteen ministers, membership has reached nearly five thousand. According to Carolyn, the phenomenal turnaround is all because of prayer.

With the coming of the new pastor, seeking God together became the church’s number-one priority. “The prayer ministry was born in the heart of the pastor,” says Carolyn. “He believes it, he preaches it, and he gives leadership to it.”

Carolyn now serves on staff as the prayer ministry coordinator. She and her nine-member leadership team coordinate the church’s prayer activities. The expanding prayer ministry began as “God’s 300,” became “God’s 600,” and is now “God’s One Thousand.” At this time, 825 intercessors are involved in one of eighty-nine prayer groups.

Every person in leadership is a part of the prayer ministry. “Whether you’re a pastor, deacon, or Sunday school teacher, you’re either leading a [prayer] group or you’re a committed member of one,” says Carolyn. “We are a church dedicated to and excited about seeking God together.”²

And what are the results of all this prayer?

Increased unity and harmony. “I always knew there could be a place where people got along—where egos were laid aside,” says Carolyn. “In the last ten years I’ve seen this. I can honestly say that I don’t see ego in our sixteen ministers. They love the Lord and they love each other.”

Increased fruit in ministry. Every year the church baptizes from 300 to 400 people, and from 500 to 600 people join the church. “One Sunday we baptized ninety-six people in a nearby lake.”

Increased presence of God. Jesus is exalted and praised in every worship service. God’s Word is preached with authority. Many broken people, in difficult situations, have come to the church. “Because of the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit, we’ve been a place of healing,” says Carolyn. One family shared how they pulled into the parking lot and right away knew something was different. They began to weep and said the presence of God was so evident they could have just sat in their car and worshiped.

“We believe what is happening at Biltmore Baptist Church is because people are on their faces praying for God to pour out His blessings and power upon the church,” says Carolyn. Our constant prayer is, ‘Help us to stay clean and obedient and blessable. Let not your Holy Spirit depart from us.’”

REDEFINING SUCCESS

The way we define success in the church is often influenced more by the world than by the Scriptures. It is easy to believe that if we are busier, we are more fruitful. If we have more people and more money, we are more successful. In some cases this is true. However, the real mark of success is obedience.



The definition of success is: finding out what is on Jesus’ heart and then doing it, when and how He says to.

— STEVE SMITH
Australian church consultant

The question is, “Are our activities pleasing the Lord? Does His pleasure shine upon our work? Is God’s tangible presence in the church?”

The following story told by one church leader illustrates this point:

Our church has been struggling with a sense of spiritual dryness and a lack of God’s leading for more than a year, and the leadership has finally thrown their collective hands in the air and basically given up. They know that we need to get back to the basics and have decided to suspend all of the church’s programming (the church numbers over nine hundred families, so that’s a lot of programming!) and announced a time of fasting and prayer. They say that the fasting and prayer will continue for at least forty days and that if we are not able to get back to our First Love in forty days, then we will go eighty, or 120, or whatever God leads us to!

The most remarkable thing, though, is that when a group of prayer people from the different churches got together for a time of prayer and fellowship and found out what was happening at my church, they said that they had been hearing God say something similar at their own churches but had been afraid to act on it. They fear losing “sheep” to churches who have programming going on. What are you up to, God? We have decided to take Moses’ words to God to

heart: “We are not moving unless you come with us” (*Exodus 33:15, my liberal paraphrase*).³

Another church, Solid Rock in Colorado Springs, led by Calvin Johnson, stopped all other activities to call the church to thirty days of prayer and fasting. Each staff member was asked to take at least three days off to pray and fast. Immediately murmuring and complaining ceased. People repented who had unforgiveness in their lives; people who had been disconnected returned to the church.

WHERE ARE WE?

When I think of the church in other nations around the world, words come to mind such as all-night prayer meetings, prayer and fasting chains, and multichurch and community-wide prayer and worship gatherings.

What is the American church known for? I think people might say we’re known for great programs, effective small groups, excellent resources, or good administration. Most people probably wouldn’t think of the American church as being known for dynamic prayer.

“A paradigm shift is needed in the minds and hearts of American church leaders if their churches are to become houses of prayer,” says Frank Damazio, pastor of City Bible Church in Portland, Oregon. A number of years ago his church made that shift, and his experience led him to believe that if a church is to become a house of prayer, six areas need to change:⁴

1. The heart of the senior pastor.

Only the senior pastor can cast the vision on Sunday morning to the whole church. No one else has that place of visibility or authority. When the pastor’s heart is captured, the whole church is affected.

2. The heart of the congregation.

A house of prayer is made up of living stones—the prayer lives of God’s people. Through a pastor’s example and prayers, a congregation’s heart can be moved to spend more time with the Lord. In fact, it’s important to see this happen even before establishing a prayer ministry.

3. The spiritual atmosphere of the church.

When the prayers of God’s people focus upon the things that open the

heavens over a church, the spiritual atmosphere will change. Damazio asks his congregation to pray over twelve specific goals, some of which are biblical truth to lead the church, strong prayer and intercession, awesome worship, liberal giving, healing, and miracles.

4. The worship service.

When prayer is a priority of the church, it will be visible in the week-end service. When Damazio realized the announcements were taking more time than the prayer time, he made a radical change in the service agenda. Now the church makes as much room for intercession as they do for worship.

5. Intentional prayer mobilization.

Start a prayer ministry—one that ignites the whole church to pray. Then select a pastor of prayer or church prayer coordinator to lead it. Even though the pastor is the church's primary motivator for prayer, it's helpful if someone other than the pastor is given the responsibility to lead the prayer ministry.

6. Outward, not just inward, focus.

In addition to praying for the church, it's important to include an outward focus of prayer. This includes prayer warfare for cities and nations. A house of prayer has a heart for the world.

WHY PRAY?

Some Christians today are not sure if prayer really makes a difference. They think, *Why would an all-knowing, all-powerful God need me to pray? Isn't God going to do what He wants to do anyway?* Because their view is "whatever will be will be," they say, "Why pray?"

A look at Scriptures throughout the Old and New Testaments reveals that although God is all-sovereign, He chose from the time of Creation to work on the earth through humans. He is in partnership with us, not independent of us. Scripture reveals no other way in which God intervenes in the affairs of earth.

Didn't Jesus tell us to ask that His kingdom would come and His will would be done (see Matthew 6:10)? Why would He tell us to ask for something He was planning to do anyway?

Didn't He tell us to ask for our daily bread (see Matthew 6:11)? Yet

doesn't He know our needs before we ask?

Why would He tell us to pray for laborers to be sent into the harvest field? Doesn't the Lord of the harvest want this more than we do⁵ (see Matthew 9)?

There is only one logical explanation: God does nothing outside the realm of prayer and intercession. Is it any wonder the Bible is filled with multiple entreaties, urgings, and invitations for us to pray?

In addition to those already mentioned, many other verses in Scripture answer the question "Why pray?"

- Because it is right (Luke 18:1)
- Because it is commanded (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- Because it is sinful to neglect it (1 Samuel 12:23)
- Because neglect of it grieves God (Isaiah 43:21-22; 64:6-7)
- Because it is the medium through which God bestows blessing (Matthew 7:11; Daniel 9:3)
- Because it is essential to victory over the forces of evil (Ephesians 6:12-18)
- Because of the obligation imposed by Christ's example (Hebrews 5:7; Mark 1:35)
- Because of the emphasis given to it in the early church (Acts. 6:4; 12:5; Romans 1:9-10; Colossians 1:9)

With such importance upon prayer in God's Word, it should come as no surprise that the Father proclaims that prayer will be the priority activity of His church: "For my house will be called a house of prayer" (Isaiah 56:7).

Today God's Spirit continues to lead Christians into a lifestyle of prayer, a divine partnership of Jesus with His church, so that the things that have been prepared in the heaven will become reality on earth.

WHY CHURCHES DON'T PRAY

Recently, I asked a group of some two hundred pastors and prayer leaders to make a list of the reasons churches don't pray or pray more. Among the top reasons given were the following:

- **Busyness.** Overwhelmingly so, the number-one reason these leaders said churches don't pray is because of busyness. Jesus led a simple, unencumbered life. We too must avoid being weighed down by activities and the cares of this world that keep us from sitting at His feet. What would need to change in your church so that more time could be given to prayer?



The spiritual history of a mission or church is written in its prayer life.

— R. ARTHUR MATTHEW
Born for Battle

- **Apathy.** There was no tie for second place. Apathy took the slot, hands down. Many people in churches today have little desire to spend time with the Lord. Why is this? I think one Christian leader described it best: “If we’re not hungry for God, it’s because we’ve filled ourselves up with something else.”

- **Self-sufficiency.** Another top reason given was that church leaders and those in the congregation are confident they can run things themselves. Even if this isn't really what they believe, they haven't become desperate enough to stop and change their mode of operation. Jesus had strong words about a church in this condition in Revelation 3:17: “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”
- **No leadership.** Both pastors and prayer coordinators said there was a lack of leadership to guide the vision for prayer in their churches. They said leaders were focused upon other ministry activities. Little time was given to supporting the prayer ministry. These were churches that had prayer leaders. I can only imagine what it would be like in those places where no one is assigned to lead the ministry of prayer.

WHAT A HOUSE OF PRAYER LOOKS LIKE

Jesus declared in Mark 11:17, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” But what does a house of prayer look like? What did Jesus have in mind when He spoke those words?

Dr. Greg Frizzell explains, “If a restaurant is called a ‘House of Fish,’ that implies . . . that the predominant practice of that establishment is the cooking and eating of fish. When you call a place a ‘house of something,’ you certainly expect that ‘something’ to be the predominate practice of the establishment. In exactly the same way, if the church is to be a ‘house of prayer,’ God expects prayer to be its predominate ongoing practice. When a church chooses to become a house of prayer, the practice of prayer literally saturates all it does.”⁶

In the context of describing a house of prayer, it is important to define *prayer* so that familiarity with the word doesn’t cloud our vision. Oswald Chambers defines prayer as “coming into perfect fellowship and oneness with God.”⁷ Because a house is “a dwelling place,” a house of prayer then is “a dwelling place for God—a place where we abide in perfect communion and intimacy with Him.” Out of communion with Him will come strategies, plans, and power to accomplish the mission of the church.



God doesn’t want our service and activity apart from a relationship with Him, and in fact, He will not accept them without it.

— JOHN FRANKLIN
A House of Prayer

A TOUR OF A VIRTUAL HOUSE OF PRAYER

It is 7:00 a.m. on Sunday and twenty-five men have gathered to meet their pastor before the church service. For the next hour they pray over their pastor—that he will preach not with the words of man but in the power of the Holy Spirit. Then together with their pastor, they move throughout the sanctuary praying for the person who will sit in each seat during the upcoming service. Already other intercessors have gathered in the prayer room where they will intercede throughout the entire church service.

When the worship begins, there is an atmosphere of faith and expectation of what the Lord is going to do. Soon after the service begins, the worship leader invites the people to break into small groups and pray for the community surrounding the church, including other pastors and churches in the vicinity. Following the service, people stream to the front

of the sanctuary to make confessions of faith and ask for prayer for personal needs. Trained altar prayer ministry teams are already on the front row, prayed-up to help. Church members linger to talk about the Lord and pray with one another.

On Sunday afternoon, three couples meet for lunch. Amid the talk of football, kids, and busy schedules, much of their time is spent excitedly talking about what is happening in their church, miraculous answers to prayer, and testimonies of sharing Christ with strangers and neighbors.

At 9:00 Monday morning, the church receives a call that a nine-year-old boy has been admitted to the hospital for tests and observation. He is running a seriously high fever. Within the hour, the church prayer chain is fully activated and the call for prayer is spreading throughout the church. One of the crisis prayer teams has been notified, and its members are on their way to the hospital to pray on-site.

At 10:00 Tuesday morning, the weekly women's prayer meeting is getting started. One focus today will be interceding for the youth and their schools as the fall semester begins. Meanwhile, the church prayer coordinator is meeting with her pastor to discuss plans for the upcoming staff prayer retreat. Everyone is amazed at how well the staff meetings are going now that they have been spending the first thirty minutes praying over agenda items.

Before the Wednesday night corporate prayer gathering, the pastor meets with a group of fifteen children who serve as a part of his intercessory team. They are planning a trip to the sheriff's office to pray that the Lord would guide and protect him in his line of duty.

Thursday afternoon the church's prayer coordinator hosts a meeting for other prayer leaders from throughout the community. They will pray together and plan the next monthly multichurch prayer and worship gathering.

On Saturday morning the pastor meets with a group of twenty-five men for the monthly men's prayer breakfast. They pray together about being a Christian influence in the workplace. Tomorrow the men will meet their pastor in the sanctuary at 7:00 a.m. to pray for the church services.

Though this church is fictitious, the stories are all true. They come from a composite of churches that are finding new ways to incorporate more prayer into the life of their church.

BIBLICAL SNAPSHOT OF A HOUSE OF PRAYER

If Jesus were to visit your church next Sunday and were given complete freedom to conduct the service, what do you think He would do? This question is worth pondering for more than a few seconds. I'm not sure what would happen, but most likely our agenda would go flying out the window. I think the announcements would be very short.

Well, at least once, Jesus did visit a church and take over the weekend service. Actually it was the temple and it was on the Sabbath day. What did He do?

Matthew 21:12-16 contains this memorable story of Jesus kicking the money changers out of the temple in "righteous anger." I can only imagine what the scene was like. Artists' renditions of this episode depict Jesus with whip in hand, overturning tables and driving out those who were selling at exorbitant prices the supplies required for making temple sacrifices.

In this passage, we discover the progressive steps for building the house of prayer. The first thing Jesus did was cleanse the temple of impure motives and activities, making it a house of *purity* (verse 12). Sometimes before you build a new structure you have to tear down the old. God says He will not pour new wine in old wineskins. Old wineskins can't hold the new things. Don't be surprised if the Lord builds a new "structure" in your church by first demolishing the old.

National prayer leader Wes Tullis says, "When we invite God to dwell in our midst . . . it is an invitation for Him to dismantle everything that the Holy Spirit did not initiate."⁸

Next, Jesus reminded us of His Father's words, in Isaiah 56:7, "My house will be called a house of prayer" (verse 13). Isaiah talks about those who will come to the house of *prayer*. It's a place where the broken, the foreigner, the eunuch can come and worship. This is a place where you will find acceptance no matter what you look like, no matter what your station in life. A church doesn't get to this place unless our hearts are changed. That's one thing that happens when we pray.

What Jesus then demonstrated is that a praying church is a place of *power*. The lame and the blind came to Jesus in the temple, and He healed them (verse 14).

Finally, when the children saw the wonderful miracles that Jesus performed, they cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (verse 15). After

the church became a house of *power*, it was transformed into a house of *praise* (verse 16). We know that God inhabits the praises of His people. At this point, we can be certain that God's presence filled the temple. I have noticed that praying people are most often worshipping people. Prayer and worship are all about focusing upon the Lord. When we open ourselves up to Him, He will clean us up, fill us up with His nature, and send us out to change the world. We'll see salvations, miracles, liberal giving to the poor, and Christlike living.

HOUSE OF PRAYER, OR PRAYER MINISTRY?

It is important here to distinguish between a church with a prayer ministry and one that is a house of prayer. Prayer ministry is a broad term defining a church's strategies for involving their congregation in prayer. A prayer ministry could be as simple or as complex as a church chooses to make it.

Traditional prayer ministries involve only a portion of the congregation, usually those with the greatest desire or burden to pray.

In a true house of prayer, we see prayer saturating every aspect of individual and corporate church life. Communication with our Father is the lifeblood of the church—an indispensable pillar—without which God-given dreams, giftings, and spiritual power lie dormant. In a house of prayer, talking and listening to God characterize worship services, business meetings, and even informal social gatherings. The whole congregation is involved in a lifestyle of drawing near to Him.

Establishing a prayer ministry can be a positive first step toward becoming a house of prayer. However, this can happen only when we realize that a prayer ministry is a means to an end, not an end in itself. God's purposes are hindered when we look at prayer ministry as just another program of the church. Prayer is communion with the living God. Without prayer, the life flow from Christ to His body is cut off; the church ceases to be a living organism and becomes little different from any other organization.

Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

In the Old Testament, God's house, or temple, was built of stone,

but in the New Testament it was built of His people (see Ephesians 2:19-22). The defining characteristic of that new house is that God's very presence would dwell among His people in a love relationship through prayer. No record exists in Scripture of another way God prefers to relate to His people.

Having a praying church is not just a good idea; it is the foundation from which everything else flows.

SEVEN MARKS OF A PRAYING CHURCH

But how do we measure whether or not we have a praying church? What does one look like? The following are seven signs or marks of a praying church:

1. Most members have a strong devotional prayer life and are committed to praying for others.
2. Church members have a biblical understanding of who God is and how they can relate personally to Him through prayer.
3. Leaders are praying people and set an example of prayer for the congregation.
4. Prayer is a way of life throughout the church. Rather than being seen as an isolated program, prayer permeates every ministry within the church and every outreach of the church.
5. Corporate prayer meetings are given high priority in the lives of the church leadership and congregation.
6. Spending time in the presence of the Lord produces humility, purity, unity, compassion, and Christ likeness in the lives of leaders and the congregation.
7. God's presence fills His house. Perhaps the single most distinguishing characteristic of a "house of prayer" is that it is filled with the tangible presence of God. A lack of spiritual appetite in the congregation is replaced by spiritual hunger. Unbelievers' hearts are converted by the life-giving messages preached from the pulpit. The spiritual objectives of the church begin to move forward, not so much by human ingenuity and hard work as by the supernatural assistance of God's Holy Spirit. Striving ceases;



I know it's easy for pastors to think, "Don't talk to me about another ministry I have to organize and promote. My plate is full already!" However, developing a strong prayer ministry will actually make your other ministries more effective.

— DR. GREGORY FRIZZELL
*How to Build an Effective
 Prayer Ministry*

it often seems more is accomplished with less effort.

Don't be discouraged if your church doesn't possess all of these qualities. Not many do. Instead, take a look at these characteristics and prayerfully and honestly survey the prayer life of your church.

MAKING ROOM FOR HIM

It was 8:30 Sunday morning. Hal and I were sitting in a service at Skyway Church in west Phoenix. The service was taking a "house of prayer" format—the whole service was going to be devoted to prayer. The guest speaker, Esther Ilnisky, spoke

for a few minutes and then invited children and youth to join the adults on the platform to help lead the prayer meeting.

"Would you pray over all the hurting and abused children in the world?" Esther asked, handing the microphone to a five-year-old boy. With stammering lips and a shaking voice, the child began to pray. As he continued to pray over his generation, I was amazed at his clarity and focus.

"God, make the mothers and fathers stop fighting," he prayed. "Tell them it's hurting their kids."

Then with tears streaming down his face, he fell to his knees. He wept uncontrollably and finally laid prostrate on the platform with his face in his hands. Several young children moved to pray for and comfort him as the prayer meeting continued.

A young girl prayed, "God, tell the parents to stop killing our brothers and sisters through abortion."

Another child prayed for the salvation of young people who did not know Christ. Others prayed for revival in their schools and that our nation would return to Christ. The simplicity of their prayers accompanied by humility and brokenness brought tremendous conviction to our hearts.

It was now time for the second service. Pastor Greg Brown looked at the platform filled with some two dozen children, teenagers, and adults crying out for change in their world. He obviously was trying to decide whether or not to stick to the church's schedule.

Then he took the microphone and instructed the ushers to stand at the door and tell people who were coming into the second service what was happening.

"Tell them it will not be church as usual today," he said.

The first service melted into the second, and the extraordinary move of God did not end until after 2:00 p.m. When you ask God to make your church a house of prayer, be prepared for change. You may be wonderfully surprised by what He will do.

THE HOUSE OF PRAYER

Building a successful prayer ministry is an important goal for any church. However, this is only the beginning. God's heart is after something more. His desire is that your congregation will be known as a house of prayer—a habitation for His presence and glory that transcends the walls of your church.

The goal is for prayer to saturate every aspect of the individual and corporate life of the church. In this stage, the whole congregation becomes consumed with a passion for intimacy with Christ that spills over into the entire community.

It is like the dream the prayer leader at First Baptist Church in Boerne, Texas, shared with me: "All of a sudden it began to rain in the sanctuary. The people were rejoicing. They didn't seem to mind the rain at all! As the worship became sweeter and the prayer more fervent, the water kept getting higher and higher. Then someone opened the door and the water began to flow out of the church and into the street. It touched everything in its path—homes, other churches, people without Christ. And everywhere the water flowed, there was life."

I believe this dream is symbolic of what God is about to do with His houses of prayer. He is calling the church to a place of intimacy with Him. As we respond by inviting the presence of the Lord into our midst, we will see the power of God transform our churches, communities, and world.

I hear the Lord asking, “Who will help Me build this house of prayer?”
Is it you?

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