

Prayers of the Saints: Diagnosis: Why Don't We Want to Pray?

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SCRIPTURE

Ex 30:7-8: And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it [*the altar of incense*]. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations.

Mal 1:11: For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

Rev 5:8: And when He [*the Lamb*] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, reach holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.



AN EAST INDIAN EVANGELIST described his first experience at an American prayer meeting. He was visiting a megachurch known, even in India, for the pastor's outstanding preaching. He was thrilled when the pastor invited the three thousand Sunday worshippers to the midweek prayer meeting. The pastor even shared that something was "heavy on his heart" for prayer.

The evangelist couldn't wait. In India, the prayer meeting was the heartbeat of the church, where you stormed the heavens, often far into the night. The designated prayer chapel seated only five hundred, so he arrived early to get a seat. But at the designated 7:00 PM start time, he was alone. At 7:15, puzzled and still alone, he wondered if he had the wrong location, so he went outside to check the name. Yes, it was the same chapel the pastor mentioned on Sunday. Finally, at 7:30 a few people straggled

in, chatting about sports and weather until the leader arrived at 7:45. The leader shared a short devotional with the seven attendees, prayed briefly, and closed the meeting.

The evangelist was stunned. No worship. No crying out to God for help. No senior pastor. What was heavy on the pastor's heart?

What about prayer for the sick, for the lost? No one in this story thought that corporate prayer is important: not the senior pastor (he didn't show up), the congregation (only seven came), or the prayer leader (he was forty-five minutes late and only had one brief prayer). Prayer was a mere window dressing. If you doubt something, you don't think it works, so you don't use it. No one here thought prayer works. Unbelief is as practical as faith (Miller, Paul. *A Praying Church*. pp 12-13).

- 1: Power of Corporate Prayer (4/21)
- 2: Diagnosis: Why don't we want to pray? (4/28)
- 3: History of Prayer in the Bible (5/5)
No CE (5/12)
- 4: The Goal of Prayer (5/19)
- 5: Saints in Motion (5/26)
- 6: Praying without ceasing: individually (6/2)
- 7: Praying without ceasing: corporately (6/9)

WHY DON'T WE, AS A CORPORATE CHURCH, WANT TO PRAY?

I. Reasons

A. Open forum

- B. It's Immanuel Kant's fault (well, he's someone we can start to blame)
 1. Kant taught that prayer (and religion) is a superstitious delusion. All religions are subjectively helpful, but none of them are objectively true (Kant, *Religion Without Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*).
 2. Rise of secularism from the 18th Century Enlightenment:
 - a. Spiritual realm consists of those things that are true for me: love, art, beauty, right vs. wrong, God, religion, etc. (subjective).
 - b. Physical realm consists of things that are true for all: $E=mc^2$, science, physics, matter, etc. (objective).

Want more to enhance your prayer life?

A Praying Church: Becoming people of hope in a discouraging world by Paul E. Miller

Prayer, Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God by Timothy Keller

Prayer: Does it make a difference? by Philip Yancy

- C. Thus man began to compartmentalize the sacred and the secular
1. God becomes distant and seemingly uncaring because we see Him as not being connected to the world
 2. We can become disconnected within ourselves about the sacred and the secular (modern day Gnosticism).

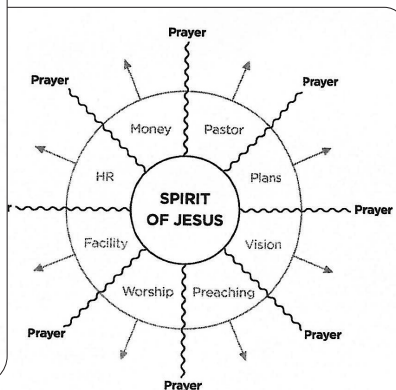
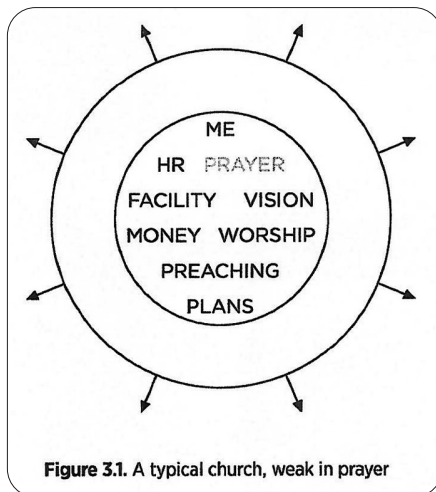
II. The Remedy

- A. **Re-connecting the sacred and the secular**
(the subjective with the objective): this can come through in prayer

To live without prayer being woven into every part of every day is stupid, foolish, senseless, or is an evidence that your belief in the existence of the Creator, who has said we are to call upon Him, is an unsure belief. Common sense Christian living takes place in an atmosphere where prayer is as natural as breathing, as necessary as oxygen, as real as talking to your favorite person with whom there is no strain, as sensible as reaching into the bag of flour for the proper supplies for making bread (Edith Schaefer, *Common Sense Christian Living*).

- B. **The Spirit of Christ as the power needed in prayer** (remember the “bread” from Luke 11:13)

1. Prayer accesses the Spirit of Jesus. The apostle Paul articulates a specific pattern I call the church’s power train: *prayer --> Spirit --> Jesus --> power*.



Our car’s power train moves power from the engine to the transmission and then the wheels. Paul prays the church’s power train in Ephesians 3: he prays to the Father for the gift of the Spirit to make Jesus present (P. Miller, *A Praying Church*, pg. 25).

2. The Church’s Power Train

prayer → *Spirit* → *Jesus* → *power*

- a. Power Train active at Pentecost (Acts 1-2)
 - *Prayer*: Acts 1:14
 - *Spirit*: Acts 2:1-4
 - *Jesus*: Acts 2:32-33
 - *Power*: Acts 2:37-38
- b. In Paul’s prayer: Ephesians 3:14-19: For this reason *I bow my knees before the Father [prayer]*, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with *power through his Spirit in your inner being [Spirit]*, so that *Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith [Jesus]*—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God [*power*].

3. Resurrection power

The Spirit made Jesus’s body come alive, and now he continues to make Jesus’s body on earth (the church) come alive. The Christian life, then, is a continual experience of the resurrection Spirit of Jesus. When we pray together, the Father responds with the Spirit of Jesus, who re-creates mini-resurrections in our families and communities.

The resurrection itself is an answer to prayer. On Friday afternoon, as he was dying, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” (Matt. 27:46). On Sunday morning, the Father responded with the gift of the Spirit to his Son. Then, fifty days later, at Pentecost, Jesus turned around and gifted the Spirit to us. Peter says, “Having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he [Jesus] has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing” (Acts 2:33).

So praying together *is* good for us, and our

Father *does* answer our prayers, but the Bible's vision is much bigger: we are talking about the very life of Jesus by his Spirit flowing into our lives, our families, and our communities, reflecting "the immeasurable greatness of his power."

That's why corporate prayer is so critical: *prayer is not a ministry of the church—it is the heart of ministry through which the real, functional leadership of the intimate union of the Spirit and Jesus, formed at the resurrection, operates.* Or to put it more simply: *prayer accesses the Spirit of Jesus. He runs the place.* If you miss the Spirit of Jesus, then prayer becomes a dreary work (P. Miller, *A Praying Church*, pp. 29-30).

III. Praying Scripture

Psalm 143. A psalm of David.

¹ *Oh* Lord, hear *our* prayer, listen to *our cries* for mercy; in *Your* faithfulness and righteousness come to *our* relief.

² Do not bring *Your* servants into judgment, for no one living is righteous before You.

³ The enemy pursues *us*, he crushes *us* to the ground; he makes *us* dwell in the darkness like those long dead.

⁴ So *our* spirits grows faint within *us*; *our* hearts within *us* are dismayed.

⁵ *We* remember the days of long ago; *we* meditate on all *Your* works and consider what *Your* hands have done.

⁶ *We* spread out *our* hands to You; *we* thirst for You like a parched land.

⁷ Answer *us* quickly, Lord; *our* spirits fail. Do not hide Your face from *us* or *we* will be like those who go down to the pit.

⁸ Let the morning bring *us* word of Your unfailing love, for *we* have put *our* trust in You. Show *us* the way *we* should go, for to You *we* entrust *our* lives.

⁹ Rescue *us* from *our* enemies, Lord, for *we* hide *ourselves* in You.

¹⁰ Teach *us* to do Your will, for You are *our* God; may Your good Spirit lead *us* on level ground.

¹¹ For Your name's sake, Lord, preserve *our* lives; in Your righteousness, bring *us* out of trouble.

¹² In Your unfailing love, silence *our* enemies; destroy all *our* foes, for *we* are Your servants. *Amen.*

Isaiah 61: Spirit of the Sovereign Lord

Dear Lord Jesus, ¹ the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on *You*, because the Lord has anointed *You* to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent *You* to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,

² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of ven-

geance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,

³ and provide for *those of us* who grieve in Zion—to bestow on *us* a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. *We* will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of *Your* splendor.

⁴ *We* will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; *we* will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.

⁵ Strangers will shepherd *our* flocks; foreigners will work *our* fields and vineyards.

⁶ And *we* will be called priests of the Lord, *we* will be named ministers of our God. *We* will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches *we* will boast.

⁷ Instead of *our* shame *we* will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace *we* will rejoice in *our* inheritance. And so *we* will inherit a double portion in *our* land, and everlasting joy will be *ours*.

⁸ For *You, O* Lord, love justice; *You* hate robbery and wrongdoing. In *Your* faithfulness *You* will reward *Your* people and make an everlasting covenant with *us*.

⁹ *Our* descendants will be known among the nations and *our* offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people that you, Lord, *have* blessed.

¹⁰ *We* delight greatly in *You, O* Lord; *our* souls rejoice in *our* God. For *You* have clothed *us* with garments of salvation and arrayed *us* in a robe of *Your* righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so *You, Sovereign Lord,* will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. *Amen.*

Ezekiel 36:23-29

Dear Father, please ²³ show the holiness of *Your* great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name *we* have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that *You are* the Sovereign Lord... when *You are* proved holy through *us* before their eyes.

²⁴ *Please act as You have promised when You said that You will take us out of the nations; You will gather us from all the countries and bring us back into our own land.* ²⁵ *You will sprinkle clean water on us, and we will be clean; You will cleanse us from all our impurities and from all our idols.* ²⁶ *You will give us a new heart and put a new spirit in us; You will remove from us our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh.* ²⁷ *And You will put Your Spirit in us and move us to follow Your decrees and be careful to keep Your laws.* ²⁸ *Then we will live in the land You gave our ancestors; we will be Your people, and You will be our God.* ²⁹ *You will save us from all our uncleanness. Thank you, Father, for doing all this through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1 Corinthians 1:4-9: Paul's Prayer for the Corinthians

Dear Father, ⁴ we thank *You, our God*, because of *Your* grace given *to us* in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in Christ *we* have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— ⁶ *You*, thus, confirm *the* testimony about Christ among *us*. ⁷ Therefore *we* do not lack any spiritual gift as *we* eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. ⁸ *We thank you, that You* will also keep *us* firm to the end, so that *we* will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ *You, God, are faithful*, who has called *us* into fellowship with *Your Son*, Jesus Christ our Lord. *To Him be glory and honor, Amen.*

Ephesians 1:17-23: Paul's 1st Prayer for the Galatians

Dear glorious Father, ¹⁷ *We ask that You*, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, *would give us* the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that *we would know You* better. ¹⁸ *We pray that the eyes of our hearts* may be enlightened in order that *we* may know the hope to which *You have called us*, the riches of *Your* glorious inheritance in *Your* holy people, ¹⁹ and *Your* incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ *You* exerted when *You* raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at *Your* right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And *You* placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of *You* who fills everything in every way. *Amen.*

Ephesians 3:14-21: Paul's 2nd Prayer for the Galatians

Dear glorious Father, ¹⁴ *we* kneel before *You*, the Father ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ *We pray that out of Your* glorious riches *You would* strengthen *us* with power through *Your* Spirit in *our* inner beings, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in *our* hearts through faith. And *we* pray that *we*, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that *we* may be filled to the measure of all *Your* fullness, *O God.*

²⁰ Now *to You* who *are* able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to *Your* power that is at work within us, ²¹ *to You* be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! *Amen.*

Colossians 1:9-14: Paul's Prayer for the Colossians

Dear Father, ⁹ *we* continually ask that *You would* fill *us* with the knowledge of *Your* will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰ so that *we* may live a life worthy of *You* and *to please You* in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of *You, our*

God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to *Your* glorious might so that *we* may have great endurance and patience, ¹² and giving joyful thanks to *You*, the Father, who has qualified *us* to share in the inheritance of *Your* holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For *You have* rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son *You* love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. *Amen.*

1 Peter 1:3-9: Peter's praise for the Church

Dear Father, ³ Praise be to *You*, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In *Your* great mercy *You have* given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for *us*, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by *Your* power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this *we* greatly rejoice, though now for a little while *we* may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ *We know that* these have come so that the proven genuineness of *our* faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though *we* have not seen Him, *we* love Him; and even though *we* do not see Him now, *we* believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for *we* are receiving the end result of *our* faith, the salvation of *our* souls. *In Christ's Name, Amen.*