

Prayers of the Saints: The Goal & Purpose of Prayer

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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.



THE GOAL & PURPOSE OF PRAYER

I. Introduction

From Paul Miller's, *A Praying Church*

In 1973, Dad spoke at a local church and said, "The gospel can change anyone." After a psychiatrist challenged him, Dad went home wondering, "Do I really believe the gospel can change anyone?" He decided to find the toughest people in Philadelphia to see if the gospel could change them. He knew that a motorcycle gang hung out at a local ice-cream stand, so he went there, got an ice-cream cone, and walked over to a group of rowdy teenagers who regularly gathered there to drink and share drugs. With ice cream dripping down his hand, Dad gave one of his memorable opening lines: "I'm Rev. Miller. Are there any Warlocks here?" When they started taunting him, Dad only made it worse by saying, "Actually, I'm Dr. Miller." Just as the mocking was worsening, a tough-looking redhead-himself a thief, drug addict, and alcoholic-walked up: "Shut up. I know this guy. He picked me up hitchhiking. We should listen to him." The redhead's name was _____. Over the next six months, Dad befriended _____, even listening to his drunken calls in the middle of the night. Dad patiently loved [him] and eventually won him to Christ.

II. Why do we pray? What is the goal?

III. Corporate Prayer

A. **The Lord's Prayer** (Luke 11:1-13) The 5 askings (commands, requests, etc.)

1. Hallowed be your Name (sanctify your Name)
2. Your Kingdom come (bring in your Kingdom)
3. Give us each day our daily bread
4. Forgive us our sins – as we forgive those who sin against us
5. Lead us not into temptation

B. **Is it wrong to pray for self-protection, self-promotion, and self-comfort?**

For this reason **I bow my knees before the Father**, 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, **so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**—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.* (Eph. 3:14-19)

We do church best when we don't look at church but gaze at Christ. Nor does Paul center on prayer. He centers on Jesus and all he is for us. Prayer is the church's lifeblood because it's the conduit to the Spirit continually renewing in us Jesus' resurrection life. I get itchy when people talk almost exclusively about the power of prayer or how amazing prayer is. Prayer merely accesses the Spirit, who makes Jesus present. That's why we go to church. To eat Christ. He's the center. He's everything.

—Paul Miller, *A Praying Church*

C. Big & Bold Prayers

Absent a clear kingdom goal, prayer easily becomes therapeutic, formless, and just boring. It can drift into asking for some version of a pain-free world. John Newton knew how to pray big.

*Thou art coming to a king,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.*

Jesus encourages us to pray big. If you strip “your kingdom come, / your will be done, / on earth as it is in heaven” from the Lord’s Prayer, then you let the air out of the prayer, and it turns inward (*ibid*).

D. Paul’s Ephesian Model for a healthy church (*ibid*).

IV. Praying through Ephesians 3:14-21

LEADER: We bow our knees in prayer before You, our Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named...

Let us praise the Lord that He is our Father and that He is sovereign over all the nations of the earth.

LEADER: We pray that according to the riches of Your glory You may grant us to be strengthened with power through Your Spirit in our inner being...

Let us ask the Father for the gift of His Holy Spirit to be poured out on us. Let us ask that we would be filled with His strength in our inner beings.

LEADER: so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith—

Let us ask the Lord to increase our faith. Let us ask for a clearer vision of Christ Jesus and His Gospel of grace.

	Typical Evangelical Church	Paul’s Ephesians Model
What is the church’s power train? What makes a good church?	Good preaching + pastoring + vision + generosity. (<i>Each of these is wonderful, but they aren’t the power train.</i>)	In response to prayer, the Father continually pours out his Spirit so that the saints overflow with Jesus’s love.
What does the power train move?	The answer is not clear. Growth? Attendance?	The saints and their beautification!
What place does prayer have in the church?	Prayer is good, but we are all so busy. Prayer is delegated to a few prayer warriors.	Prayer at all levels continually ignites Spiritual wisdom, power, love, and glory.
What is the church?	The gathering on Sunday for worship, fellowship, and preaching. (<i>Sunday is critical, but it’s not the church.</i>)	The saints, attentive to their “head,” overflowing with love for Jesus and one another, who then love to gather Sunday to be filled with prayer and the preaching the word.
Who are the primary ministers?	The pastors, elders, and ministry leaders. (<i>Thank God for pastors, who labor tirelessly especially with the critical saints! But they are not primary.</i>)	All the saints. (<i>We wear out our pastors if we make them primary.</i>)
What’s the role of pastors and staff?	To provide the structures to make the church happen, especially preaching. (<i>Good preaching is critical! But there’s more.</i>)	To equip, encourage, and enjoy the saints in their countless ministries. To feed Christ to the saints with preaching and prayer.
What is the leadership attitude toward the saints?	The laity are encouraged not to be consumers, which they often act like.	The saints are the church! They need to be encouraged to be what they are—saints!
What is the role of programs?	The staff makes sure five to ten crucial programs are staffed. (<i>Programs are important, but the informal ministries are powerful.</i>)	Each saint runs five to ten informal ministries. Leaders focus on equipping, thus multiplying the saints’ effectiveness.
How is outreach done?	By programs. (<i>It is good to have several outreach programs. But programs cannot duplicate the saints’ hundreds of relationships.</i>)	The entire congregation reaches out into their families and communities.
How do we measure success?	Sunday attendance, budget, and a strong lead pastor. (<i>Growth in numbers is wonderful, but it’s a secondary metric to love and faith.</i>)	Are we growing in love and unity, overflowing with the love of Christ? Do we look more like Jesus?
What if there is a pandemic and we can’t meet Sunday?	The church stops being church because we aren’t meeting together.	We consciously enter a fellowship of his suffering. Fewer programs allow for more in-depth discipling.

LEADER: We pray that we would be rooted and grounded in love, that we may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of Your love, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge

Since we don't fully comprehend God's love for us in Christ Jesus, let us pray and ask to know it. Let us, as saints in God's Kingdom, cry out to Him to be able to comprehend the immensity of His love to us.

LEADER: We pray that we may be filled with all of Your fullness, O God.

What a bold request — to be filled with all the fullness of God. But let us not be shy. Let us ask boldly to be filled with NOT a portion of God, but the fullness of God.

LEADER: 20 We pray to You who are able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us..

Let us give ourselves to Him again, laying our all at the feet of Jesus. Let us ask Him to do in us far more than we can ask or imagine.

LEADER: to You be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

ALL: Amen.