

Practical Prayer

DAVID ERICKSON*
World Missions

Spending the past twenty-two years in a pioneering Muslim context has grown my prayer life. Reading the Word? Now, that's easy and enjoyable. But praying? That's always been more difficult. Because I am a practical person, here are several practical takeaways from the past two decades.

CONSISTENTLY. Early on, I remember being amazed at the devotion of my Muslim friends, who pray consistently five times a day. I was also sad discovering that they had no clue *what* they were praying. I know I need consistency, too! But what stuck with me over the years is the personal and relational nature of prayer. As believers in Jesus, we come to God as we are with our praises, needs, and requests. We are in a relationship with the God who saved us, continues to sanctify us, and wants to commune with us. Our prayers should reflect this reality and cause us to humbly, thankfully, and even consistently come to him (Matthew 6:6-11).

ALOUD. As an extrovert (dare I say, extreme extrovert), typical prayer postures like sitting alone and praying quietly in my head are not easy. My mind wanders, I am easily distracted, and after just a few minutes, I'm ready to jump up and move on to the next "active" thing. However, I find praying aloud engages my mind and body along with my heart. It keeps me focused on God. I "feel" my prayer more significantly this way. Not only can I pray for longer stretches, but I stay attuned to my Savior through this prayer (Lamentations 3:55-57).

CORPORATELY. I am blessed by corporate prayer. Our team prays together virtually twice a week. The elders from our church pray together once per week, and so does the U.S. Missional Enterprise team. Hearing others, seeing others, and joining together in prayer is incredibly uplifting, and God uses these times of corporate prayer to draw me closer to Him (Matthew 18:20).

So much about prayer remains a mystery to me this side of eternity. But we know that every relationship needs communication, we know that God hears, and we know that God changes our hearts as we pray. For most of my Muslim friends, their prayer life is devout but lacks true communion with the loving and gracious Father. Because of Jesus, we have the ability for our prayers to be a part of our intimate relationship with God. God wants us to come to him. God hears us. And God answers! So, let's pray! ▲

*Name changed

Creative Prayer Practices

Looking for creative ways to pray? *The Ripple Effect* podcast facilitates experiential prayer practices to help you dive in a little deeper on your journey of just being with Jesus.



Or explore the journal prompts on the enclosed *Immanuel Journaling* bookmark and see what Jesus might say to you.

THE POWER OF ONE VOICE

continued from cover

My own journey has revealed the richness of collective prayer in profound ways. Once a month I gather with a small group of Asian American women in one of our homes for group spiritual direction. In the midst of our busy lives and diverse backgrounds, we find solace in coming together—sharing our lives and discerning God's voice together. We take turns intentionally being silent and asking, "Lord, what is your prayer for this sister?" We do not give advice so much as ask questions and share curiosity based on Scriptures that come to mind. These sessions are marked by a deep sense of belonging, encouragement, and mutuality.

While Western culture often celebrates autonomy and self-expression, it can unintentionally reduce faith to a solitary experience. An emphasis on personal prayer alone risks neglecting the biblical call for believers to "[be] completely together in prayer" (Acts 1:14, MSG). There is undeniable power in standing shoulder to shoulder with fellow Christians and seeking the Lord.

What might happen if we, the Church, prioritized gathering regularly for collective prayer as an act of unified worship? In several places in the New Testament, we see believers crying out to God together and lives being transformed as a result. The most well-known is probably Acts 1, when the Holy Spirit is first poured out on the believers in Jerusalem at Pentecost, which ultimately birthed the Church. What might God do among us if we more consistently call on His name together as one? ▲

To learn more, scan the QR code to read Timothy Isaiah Cho's article on how to start this practice in your church or ministry.



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Real-Life Stories and Tools for Wholehearted Growth and Discipleship

The Power of One Voice: Embracing Collective Prayer Practices

JANE MENNING
City Director | Minneapolis and St. Paul



A few years ago, Adam Johnson, our ISM leader in Minneapolis, invited our staff team to pray like many churches around the world do—in one voice, or what the Koreans call *tongsung kido*. We were all praying for the same international student's request, we could all hear each other praying, but the only One who heard each of our prayers was the Lord. It was a powerful time!

Prayer has always been an essential part of a vibrant faith journey. It is a sacred connection to God, a way to cultivate hope in a chaotic world, and a source of refreshment and guidance. Jesus himself often spent time praying in lonely places. The bulk of my prayer life is constant dialogue with the Lord about my anxieties, supplications, gratitude, and praise. However, while individual prayer is vital for our personal relationships with God, we would do well not to overlook the power of collective prayer with the global Body of Christ.

In many parts of Asia, prayer isn't merely a personal practice: it is a shared activity that binds believers together in purpose and intercession. Many South Korean congregations gather regularly, often at dawn, to pray in unison, calling upon God's name as one body. I remember praying with saints in East Asia as they lifted up their hearts to the Lord in the midst of persecution, struggle, and cries for revival, and it was transformative precisely because it moved focus off myself and my own words to our collective prayers together.

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God Changed My View of Prayer

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I had a love-hate relationship with prayer.

For most of my life, God spoke to me sporadically, usually in times of great need or longing. He also spoke to me regularly through His written Word. And then there were the nudges of the Holy Spirit, but I was cautious about trusting those, as they might have been my own impulses or feelings.

What people called “prayer” was a process I didn’t enjoy. It mainly consisted of a list of requests for which we petitioned God together. We usually barged right into God’s presence, waxed verbose in asking for what we wanted, thanked Him, and dashed out. But God changed that through three life experiences.

The death of my daughter. Our family had gone through ten years of one hard experience after another, and our friends were comparing us to Job. When Paula died, our suffering went to another level. I pretty much ground to a halt. Like Job, I sat in the ashes and argued with God day and night. What carried me through was that God talked back. He poured himself out to me, day after day. I experienced him in ways I never had before.

An intense course of study in spiritual formation. I didn’t want to lose this intimacy with God, so I asked Him

to send me help to grow in hearing Him. I was accepted into the Renovaré Institute and studied with Dallas Willard, Jan Johnson, and others. I learned new habits and skills to help me grow in hearing God, and I drew closer to Him.

Developing new habits. One spiritual discipline I worked on was practicing the presence of God moment by moment. Remembering Brother Lawrence’s intentionality from *The Practice of the Presence of God*, I went back to focusing on being constantly present to God. Keeping my mind on things above was a challenge (Colossians 3:1), but I began to truly experience Jesus as Immanuel, God With Us.

I also asked God to help me distinguish between what I discovered to be four sources of my own inner voice. My inner voice was often my own thoughts, reasoning, and emotions, but sometimes my conscience—my internalized sense of what I ought to do and be. The conscience was easy to mistake for the Holy Spirit, but I learned that while my conscience could be harsh, the voice of the Holy Spirit was always respectful, even when telling me hard things. The fourth source of the inner voice came from our spiritual enemy, who accuses and deceives.

Learning to distinguish between the sources of the inner voice freed me to trust the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, and to act on his prompting with more confidence. It also helped me recognize how God speaks, which sometimes is through images or impressions. Now, for me, prayer goes beyond words. It is not something I do. It is a way of life. ▶

Foundational Intimacy

CYNTHIA HAGEN
Train – Develop – Care

When I was a new believer just learning about prayer, the focus of our student prayer meetings was warfare for the campus and the Great Commission: re-taking “enemy territory.” I also heard about petition, asking God to meet needs. Prayer seemed transactional. It was much later that I finally learned to use prayer to form intimate relationship with God. I could listen to Him, and He would listen to me.

It’s so valid to pray for warfare, petition, thanksgiving, guidance and support, praise, meditation, and more. But when Jesus taught prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, His first modeled step was to address God out of intimacy: “Our Father in heaven.” I wish I had learned to rely on intimacy first, as foundational roots undergirding every other reason to pray. If warfare and petition flow through deep relationship, what a difference that might make!

If you created your own prayer tree today, what would be its foundational roots? Are you and the Lord both satisfied with that in this season? How can you encourage intimacy in prayer for those you disciple?



Just Be: A Letter on Prayer to a Younger Me
By Lyndi Lee Markus, Editor-in-Chief for UpFront

