

## **Promoting Formative Prayer in the Church**

So then, how can we foster the practice of prayer in the lives of our congregations without being superficial or mechanical about it? A church can promote formative prayer in a number of practical ways.

### **Own and model**

Be intentional about how prayer is modeled in public services. Have lay people lead in prayer. Select people whose prayer has a natural and sincere quality. Avoid the cliché. Demonstrate the full range of vital prayer: praise, thanksgiving, supplication, confession, etc.

### **Instill the need for prayer**

Teach about prayer. Don't turn every teaching about prayer into a harangue, and don't simply say that if we prayed more the world would be changed. The biblical instruction about prayer is wide and deep, and teaching about it should captivate listeners and leave them motivated to learn more.

Encourage people to bring prayer into all functions of the church. Don't make one prayer event (a weekly meeting, a prayer day) *the* litmus test for whether the church is praying. Look for unique moments in the church to have a specifically prayer-oriented event or season of prayer.

Be honest about the struggles of prayer. Leaders should admit how they sometimes find it hard to be motivated to pray and talk about where they find dryness, oppression, or hard work in prayer.

Emphasize the privilege of prayer. Help people be awestruck that the Creator of the universe has permitted us to approach him anytime, anywhere. Cultivate an attitude of prayer.

Point people to the Trinity. One of the earliest evidences we have that early Christians thought of Jesus as divine is that some of their prayers were addressed to him. God has revealed himself to us as Father, Son, and Spirit. Revelation of person always has implications for communication. Prayer will be wider and will go deeper when we avail ourselves of the opportunity to address the Father, the Son, *and* the Holy Spirit.

Talk about the practice of Journaling as a form of prayer. Encourage people to not merely make lists of requests but to write out heartfelt conversations with God.

Develop prayer chains that connect people in small groups or in a network that goes through the whole church.

Designate leaders who will have a special ministry of prayer to the sick. Encourage those who have special gifts of prayer to focus on that as their ministry in the church.

Offer people the opportunity to have someone pray for them at the conclusion of each worship service. Let the final word in worship be, we will hold you up before God.

It cannot be overstated that prayer forms us and transforms us. This dialogue with God is the direct and dynamic impressing of God's mind on our souls. Our words to him are the overture for his word to encompass and shape our hearts. Churches must teach prayer as a practice, model prayer as a privilege, and develop prayer as an instinct in every corner of the church's life.