

Guiding a Short Prayer Time with a Large Group

Mid-week Service – Groups Over 15 in Attendance

Whether it's the faithful twenty-five meeting in the fellowship hall on Wednesday night or 25,000 in a huge venue, your goal's the same; guide them into the presence of God to talk with Him about their needs.

In most situations, you'll want to use large group techniques for a group over fifteen. Let's remind ourselves of the definition of a prayer time.

A prayer time (as opposed to a prayer meeting) is a time set aside for group prayer during a meeting that has a primary purpose other than prayer. Generally, you'll have a time limit of less than fifteen minutes and people in attendance who do not usually participate in public prayer.

The largest prayer time I've ever witnessed was a denominational meeting in a convention center and involved over 20,000 people. More typical would be the prayer time during a mid-week worship service. Other large group prayer

times you might find yourself leading would be large Bible Study classes, retreats, and conferences.

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Just as the purpose remains the same, some of the techniques we've already learned will carry over. Prayer by suggestion, scripture meditation, and Biblical visualization, scale up to any size group with little or no change in method. See chapters 11, 13, & 14.

On the other hand, topical praying (chapter 12) will require some modification. Here are some topical prayer techniques that you may find useful in large group prayer times. With all these

methods, be sure to give those who are afraid to pray out loud some way to participate.

- **Huddle groups** - The prayer leader that guided those 20,000 convention-goers asked everyone to huddle up in groups of three to five, then asked them to pray, round-robin style, for some particular needs that he suggested. This works great in groups where you know that the majority don't mind praying out loud. Even so, make it clear that they can participate without praying publicly.
 - ✓ Another, more time consuming, but personal version of this is to pass out note cards to everyone. Ask them to write down a prayer request and give it to another person in their huddle group. Then give the groups time to pray, round-robin style, for each other.
- **Topical prayer groups** – Divide the group into small groups with leaders prepared to lead topical prayer.
- **Divided requests** - If you have a printed prayer list, divide it up then separate the group into corresponding sections.
 - ✓ Another version of this is to read a request, then assign it to a particular section of the congregation or group. You might have the folks sitting in that section repeat the name out loud to help them remember it.
- **Volunteer topical prayer leaders** - If the situation is such that a person standing in the group can be heard by everyone, and the group's accustomed to topical prayer, ask people to voluntarily stand, one at a time, and pray topically.
- **Appointed topical prayer leaders** - Call on a few individuals to pray out loud on a topic that you give them.
- **Personal needs** – Ask people to stand or come to the altar who want to be prayed for. Then ask others to come around them and pray for them. Depending on the situation, you can call on someone to pray out loud or just let those gathered around them pray for them.

- ✓ Another version of this is to make prayer request cards available to the whole group. These are collected then dispersed in some fashion for immediate prayer. They can be dispersed back to the group or placed at the altar for volunteers to come and pray for.
- ✓ In large congregations, they may be turned over to a prayer ministry or to the deacons who pray for each one as the worship service continues. In some services, after praying over them, the deacons bring these cards back to a special place in the altar area.
- **Common needs** – Name a particular need and ask those with that need to stand or come to the altar. This could be folks who've lost jobs, are separated from their children, have cancer, or some other specific situation. Just do one at a time so there's no confusion. Then ask those whom God has helped through a similar problem to go and pray for them.

There are a thousand ways to involve God's people in topical prayer. Once you get in the flow, you'll be surprised how the Holy Spirit will guide you.

It's important to stay within the *acceptance* zone of your group. It's not helpful to make prayer a controversy. You don't have to stay in their *comfort* zone all the time, but be careful. There's a mathematical formula in the church that looks like this:

$$\text{Change} = \text{Conflict}$$

The greater the change, the greater the conflict, so make changes gradually.

Now, let's assume you have the opportunity to lead a Bible study group of fifty in a ten to fifteen minute prayer time. We'll imagine that they're accustomed to having a prayer time, but in the past have only had monologue prayers. They want a more intimate encounter with the Lord and just need a little guidance.

The following outline focuses on using the four techniques discussed in chapters 11 - 14. Most of the time is given to prayer by suggestion because this is the easiest and most effective way to guide everyone into an encounter with God. A brief time of volunteer topical praying concludes the prayer time.

Preparation:

Before the meeting checklist:

- ! Pray for God's blessing and direction during your daily devotional time.
- ! Have your notepad and pen close at hand.

- ! Locate a scripture to use for meditation (chapter 13) and mark it in your Bible.
- ! Write down and practice a Biblical situation to use if there will be time for visualization. (chapter 14)
- ! Make arrangements for copies of the group's prayer list to be printed and distributed. (chapter 15)
- ! Prepare an outline of the prayer time. Include any notes you'll need like the rules of topical prayer, etc.

When its time to pray:

If you aren't the person that normally leads the group in prayer, a leader of the group should introduce you and explain that you've been asked to lead the prayer time. This is important because you'll be leading them differently than they're used to. They'll be more inclined to follow your lead if you've been introduced.

For instructional purposes, the rest of this chapter includes a sample prayer in the right column that follows along with the instructions in the left column.

Instructions

- Don't waste time. Get straight to the matter of prayer.

Sample Prayer

"I will be your prayer guide for the next few minutes. Instead of me saying the prayer or asking some of you to lead, I'm going to guide each of you into the presence of God and encourage you to encounter Him personally.

- Guide them into the presence of God using Biblical visualization.

Salutation:

- Say a brief monologue prayer of salutation to the Lord.

Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth **agree** about anything you **ask** for, it **will** be done for you by my Father in heaven. **For** where two or three come together **in my name**, **there** am I **with** them.

Before you begin your conversation with God, I would like for you to imagine that you're in the Heavenly throne room. The Bible says it's so big that a hundred million angels can gather there to praise the Lord. As you step through the entry, it's so immense that looking across the floor toward the throne is like looking out across an ocean.

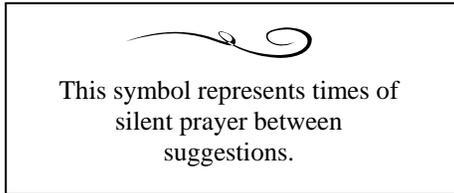
As we all walk across this great expanse we get closer and closer to the throne. In front of the throne you come to a great golden altar with the smoke of sweet incense rising above it. This is the altar of prayer and the smoke represents the prayers of God's people from all around the world going up before Him continually.

The throne room of heaven is a real place. It's the place you go spiritually every time you pray. Can you see yourself there, now? The Creator of the universe has granted you an audience. What are you going to do? What are you going to say?

Dear Heavenly Father,

It never ceases to amaze us that you welcome us into your presence. You're so holy and righteous and powerful. We love you and love your creation. Please protect us, bless us, and even guide us as we talk to you today.

- Guide the group to give personal praise and thanksgiving to God silently using prayer by suggestion. (Remember to pace your suggestions by praying silently for the same thing you've suggested to them.)



Petition:

- Continue prayer by suggestion to bring them into a time of confession. Don't rush. Allow enough time to do each thing you suggest.

- Guide them to pray for kingdom needs.

Right now, would you praise Him silently? Begin by praising Him for something beautiful in His creation.



Now praise Him for something wonderful He's done. Perhaps something from scripture or something He's done for you or someone you know.



Now, would you give thanks to Him for the blessings in your life? Be specific. The Bible says that all good things are from the Father.



As you continue in silent prayer, would you ask God to reveal anything in your life that's not pleasing to Him? Nothing's hidden from Him. Be humble and honest. He doesn't accept excuses or passing the blame to someone else. Confess your sin to Him. Put a name on it.



Now, ask your Heavenly Father what He wants you to do about your sin. Is there some restitution or apology that needs to be made to another person? Perhaps He just wants you to except His forgiveness and put it behind you.



Thank Him for His forgiveness and promise Him that you'll do anything He's asked you to do.



Jesus taught us to pray for His kingdom work around the world. Do you know any missionaries or ministers personally? Pray for the specific needs of their families and ministries. If you don't know their needs, ask the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer.

- Guide them to a new topic when you hear a prayer that's repetitious, usually the third or fourth prayer. Continue to prompt them in this way if necessary.

- Bring the prayer time to a conclusion at the appropriate time. You want them to look forward to the next time.

Benediction:

- Thank the Lord for His presence.

- Conclude with a benediction of your choice. (chapter 5)

I'd like to pray first. Dear Father, I want to lift up my friend _____, who's having a real struggle. Please help him right now to know that we love him.

Now, would two or three of you continue this prayer for our friend _____?

I'm sure there are many issues that we want to agree on in prayer and our time's limited. Would someone continue our prayer now about a different issue? It can be someone who has already prayed or someone who hasn't. It doesn't matter, but someone continue our prayer by leading us in prayer about a new topic.

Our time's running out, but we don't want to prevent someone from praying that has a need. If there's someone else that needs to pray, and hasn't had an opportunity, please do so now.

Dear Father, we are so thankful for the privilege to talk with you about these needs. We love you and praise you.

It's in the name of Jesus that we pray, amen."

The more you lead a group this way, the less you'll need to intervene in the topical part of the prayer. It is, after all, the way we carry on our day to day conversations. With practice, it becomes very natural.

STUDY GUIDE:

1. A prayer time is usually less than _____ minutes.
2. Of the four techniques, _____ is the only one that has to be modified for large groups.
3. When introducing new ways of praying, it's important to stay within people's _____ zone, but OK to nudge them out of their _____ zone.

Discussion question: This chapter contains a detailed sample prayer time using the prayer guide techniques. In the circumstance where you most often experience group prayer, do you feel that this way of leading prayer would be more or less beneficial to your group than the round-robin methods described in chapter 10? Why?

