

THE CALL TO CORPORATE PRAYER

Primers:

Economic Survey, John Moran, V4V and 101 class

Introduction:

One of my jobs at Harbor Light was to oversee the ethnic speaking congregations. We had four groups at the time: Korean, Spanish, Indian (from India) and Arabic. Some of you may not know but Fremont has **137 languages** spoken in its public schools (that's more than New York City). The brightest minds from all over the globe have come to Silicon Valley to work and live beside us. As these first generation immigrants come to our shores, I see two opportunities for Christ's church:

1. **We live at a unique Missiological moment.** Countries we cannot get missionaries into now live down the street or a cubicle away. Many of them are from Muslim settings who have never had the opportunity to befriend a Christ-follower. Many are looking for friends. (Turkey and AG missions).

2. The second one is something the Lord whispered into my spirit in prayer. It involves those Christ-followers who have come to us from other nations of the world - people who come to America from around the globe who already know Jesus Christ. I heard the Lord speak to me: **"Watch the immigrants...I have sent them here to revitalize the American church."** I knew from my travels and studies that the Church of Jesus Christ is growing everywhere around the globe except for North America and Western Europe. So I wanted to see what made these worshipping communities so successful.

So I ate their ethnic foods, drank their bitter coffee in their homes, attended their festivals and was introduced to their national leaders both here and abroad, As I entered into their worshipping community of Christians of these immigrants, **I noticed**

one common attribute found in these congregations but missing from our - CORPORATE PRAYER.

On Friday nights, the Spanish speaking groups from Mexico, Latin and South America would gather in homes to eat a meal and then pray for two to three hours.

The Koreans took over our chapel and prayed each morning at 5am. They were so intense in their intercession that our chapel had this “locker room” smell after they were done.

When I entered the Arabic church, it scared me at first. It had that Middle Eastern fervor and flavor that was so foreign to me. As they prayed and sang in their mother tongue, the Lord showed me that “this is how David prayed.” Watching them worship has revolutionized how I interpret the Psalms.

The Indians came to me and requested a day of prayer in our Activities Building **for America**. Though they love their homeland and are proud of their heritage, they are burdened for this land. We scheduled the event on Saturday from 7am to 7pm. They also wanted child-care for portions of the day. On a separate conversation, I noticed our nursery budget was falling behind so I told our coordinator to make up for it by charging a bit more for outside events. Without my knowledge she charged our Indian brothers and sisters \$500.00. I later told her to refund that money. But I had this thought. **Would white Americans pay \$500.00 for someone to watch their kids and give us their Saturday to gather to pray?**

Thus far, we have covered four area in our “This is Church” series:

1. Nature of the Church - “Jesus is the Christ”
2. Atmosphere of the Church Service - Visitor & the Presence of God
3. Conflict in the Church - Relationship w/each affect our access to God
4. Church and the Home - Home being a microcosm of the Church

5. Lost Art of Corporate Prayer

I must say that out of all the topics I have brought before you, I feel a sense of **caution and opposition**. **Caution** because this very topic can induce false guilt rather than a genuine calling. **Opposition** because I don't believe the evil one wants this sermon nor a prayer movement through it birthed in this church.

One of the primary tasks of any leader is choosing which topics to discuss, what agenda items to bring up, what headlines should we focus in on. And for many of us, prayer is one of those topics that bring **excitement for some**, especially the intercessors, and **guilt to the rest of us**. Intercessors are a different breed. They talk about going to a prayer meeting like riding "Space Mountain" at Disneyland. Their tone and excitement changes at the very mention of the very thought or corporate prayer. Without knowing it, they can also make the rest of us feel like novices when it comes to corporate prayer. **Prayer is also difficult because very few will openly dissent.** Rarely in church do I hear, "Prayer is a really bad idea Pastor." **Most people acquiesce or give verbal consent, but in reality they vote with their feet.** That is why I call this message, "The Call"

Jer. 33:3 'Call to me and I will answer you. I'll tell you marvelous and wondrous things that you could never figure out on your own.'

Joel 2:16 Get everyone there. Consecrate (or call) the congregation.

Make sure the elders come,
but bring in the children, too, even the nursing babies,
Even men and women on their honeymoon—
interrupt them and get them there.

This morning I want to discuss:

1. The Pastor's role in Corporate Prayer
2. Corporate Prayer FAQ
3. List for you several reasons why we need to prayer together.

Text:

Turn with me to Acts 6. This text is somewhat of a job description for pastors. Acts 6 is license for pastors to excuse themselves from some work and rightly so. It is often quoted by pastors to rightly show that some activities are to be handed off to God's people while others are meant to be held onto. We are not called to do it all. We are called to lead and empower others. But there are some things we are supposed to hold onto and two are clearly stated in the text before us.

Acts 6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

Acts 6:2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

Acts 6:3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them

Acts 6:4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Acts 6:5 ¶ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

Acts 6:6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Acts 6:7 ¶ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Now there are several insights regarding a pastor's role in corporate prayer from this text I want us to discern.

1. There ARE priorities in ministry.

A friend of mine considering a pastoral opening recently sent me an emailed me with a job description from a church seeking a senior pastor. Besides strong preaching, the search committee was looking for: leadership development, team builder, business administrator, community advocate, missions experience, family counselor, worship leader, school administrator, great with children and youth, tender pastoral care, speaks both English and Korean even choir instructor experience. PhD preferred, but will consider a DMin. He asked me how he should reply to the search committee. I told him to say, "I AM NOT THE CHRIST."

In his book "No Place For Truth" by David Wells shows how the changing tides of culture impact the pastorate.

In 1934, pastors had 5 clerical roles: teacher and preacher, worship leader and intercessor and administrator.

In 1980, the list swelled to 9 roles adding sociological and administrative demands.

By 1986, the list expanded to 14. Top priority was given to planning ability, facility in leading worship, sensitivity to the congregation, pastoral counseling, visiting the sick and support for the churches steward program. These were followed by three equally ranked activities: administrative leadership, involving the laity in church programs, and supporting the churches missions in the world. By the way, holding issues of social justice was last on the list.

Wells then showed us his personal analysis of Leadership journal. He read every issue from its inception to 1995, and discovered that over 90% of the articles helped a pastor become A BETTER MANAGER OR PSYCHOLOGIST. Almost every

article was taken from the world of business and counseling. He was shocked to see how few articles found their solutions from the Bible for a magazine whose primary audience was pastors.

THE EXPECTATIONS ON THE PASTORATE ON HIGHER TODAY THAN PERHAPS EVER IN OUR COUNTRY'S HISTORY. Not only are we called upon to preach like Chuck Swindoll and teach like John McCarther, but we are called to lead like Billy Hybels, worship like Jack Hayford , love Africa like Rick Warren and if you are Pentecostal, pray for people like Benny Hinn.

There is definitely a squeeze going on in the pastorate and with it comes the question, **“What are things that ONLY I CAN DO?”** and **“What are things THAT I MUST FIND OTHERS TO FILL?”** Now I am not talking about personality or giftings here, (I understand those have an influence) but rather **ROLES.**

Believe it or not this squeeze is not a new dilemma. It was felt by the leaders in the early church. In fact, it is one of the first issues faced by the fledging movement. In the 6th chapter of Acts, Dr. Luke records for us a similar dilemma we that we find ourselves. **THE ISSUE IS NOT AS IMPORTANT AS THE EXPECTATION.** The **ISSUE** is fairness over food distribution. The **EXPECTATION** is that the leadership will drop what they are doing and **PERSONALLY** resolve this issue. The people of the church are demanding that the leadership step in and resolve the conflict. I want you to notice their response. There is a crucial insight here that I believe should drive our priorities here today.

“It would not be right for us TO NEGLECT THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD OF GOD IN ORDER TO WAIT ON TABLES. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them AND WE WILL GIVE OUR ATTENTION TO PRAYER AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD.” (Acts 6:2-4)

Some things we do as pastors **ARE** more important than others. There are some things are things **ONLY** we can do. There are some things we lead by finding **OTHERS** to do it, such as in this task. This can be difficult at times. None of us want to be seen as elite or superior. Sometimes are personalities, giftings and interests take us deeper than we should go. But according to this text the two priorities for the Pastor are: 1) Prayer and 2) the Word of God.

This is why I gutted one hour from our Tuesday staff meeting and marched the pastors staff and principals into the sanctuary to pray together 8:30am to 9:30am. We are called not only called to plan. According to this text, we are first called to pray. I believe the two feed each other. Pray and Plan. It is not only bonding our team as we pray over each other, God is establishing the tone, conviction and direction of the pastors as we sit in His presence.

2. Prayer is given the same plateau as Preaching

In the book of Acts, the Apostles declared to the early church: ***“We will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4).*** 25x in Acts we see the word preaching. 33x we see the word prayer. 20x we see the word teaching. I find this fact quite alarming. It certainly is **NOT** the emphasis I received in my education. I have a Bachelor’s degree in Biblical Studies, a Masters of Divinity of degree and am finishing up a Doctoral Ministry degree over 80 classes for 3 degrees. All 80 classes, for the most part, reflect the call to preach. Not one of them the call to pray. Not one class on prayer. However, the text shows us that prayer is an integral link to preaching.

“We will give our attention to prayer and the word of God.” What I don’t understand is why we interpret one side of the phrase **PUBLICLY** and other **PRIVATELY**. No one debates the public expression of **THE WORD OF GOD**. Preaching is and should always be the prominent task of Christ’s church. However, on what basis do we interpret prayer as a “private” enterprise? If context is supposed to drive our interpretation, then the rest of Acts should show up how we are to fulfill this. Which brings up the question...

3. What type of Prayer is described here?

I see 3 types of prayer in the book of Acts.

Devotional Prayer - Ananais in prayer when the Lord called him to pray (Acts 9:10)

and Peter went to the roof to pray (Acts 10:9);

Ministry Prayer - Praying over others. Peter and John in Samaria (Acts 8 or Paul in

Ephesus Acts 19).

Corporate Prayer -

Important Decisions (Choicing of Matthais):

Acts 1:14 ***They all joined together constantly in prayer***, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

Tarrying for the Promise of the Holy Spirit:

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost came, ***they were all together in one place.***

Custom to pray corporately

Acts 3:1 ¶ One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon.

Acts 2:42 ¶ They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and ***to prayer.***

Acts 16:16 ¶ Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.

Gathered to celebrate in prayer the release of Peter and John

Acts 4:24 When they heard this, ***they raised their voices together in prayer to God.***

“Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

In times of crisis:

Acts 12:5 ¶ So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

In times of assignment:

Acts 13:2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Acts 13:3 ***So after they had fasted and prayed***, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Do you realize there is as more prayer in a corporate level on the books of Acts than any other type of prayer?

A case could be made that there is more prayer on a corporate level in the books of Acts than there is preaching? This emphasis causes me to conclude corporate Prayer deserves it OWN stage.

HOWEVER, it is my observation that the church is waning in this critical aspect of spiritual life. There are several reasons for this.

1. People don't want it, but they need it.

It amazes me what gathers a crowd in church and what does not. Motivating speakers, exciting concerts, classes that suite a specific needs. Corporate prayer is a hard sell and because it is, some decide to take it off the shelf as an option or relegate it to a basement ministry.

2. It is NOT part of our experience/understanding as a follower of Christ

We can only pass on what we know. For some here, this is a no brainer. Others, this is like changing my golf swing. Challenge your presupposition.

3. Pastors are more than willing to outsource it to the intercessors

Many pastor interpret Acts 6:3-4 as a private enterprise and "outsource" the public expression of it to a few ladies on Thursday night. **My friends, people follow the pastors, not the intercessors. If leading corporate prayer is NOT the job of the pastor, then whose job is it? What great priority is competing with this one?**

4. We learned to have church without it.

When I started realizing that my children are growing up in church without an appreciation and conviction of corporate prayer, I got concerned. We pray in our home each day as a family, but there is something powerful in a setting where corporate prayer is center stage.

Prayer meeting FAQ:

1. Will this prayer meeting be boring?

Prayer is a calling, not a concert. That being said we will put as much energy as leaders in this setting as we do Sunday mornings.

2. Isn't that what we pay the pastors to do?

No. You cannot outsource your spirituality and ministry to the pastors. Our job is create space for you to connect to God through your personality. Just as you should feel a calling, an invitation from God to gather with His people each Sunday morning for church, in the same way, we should respond willingly and eagerly to God's call to pray together.

3. Is this only a fad here today and gone tomorrow?

I have seen this before. People get excited. Things rev up and in 6 months everything will die down. Why start it or join it if it is going to end up this way. I might as well quit now. Like I said, corporate prayer has to be a calling, a conviction just like Sunday morning. If we want the power and impact of the Early Church, the I suggest we follow their pattern. They met for the Word of God and for prayer.

4. Will there be preaching?

If a pastor leads a prayer meeting, won't they end up preaching to us again. No preaching allowed. Just prayer.

5. What if we don't pray the way I like?

Just getting people to pray is a home run. That could simply be meeting in a room of silence for an hour, small groups, praying with each other or in front of everyone. Like the worship wars where people critique the music, let's not fall into that. That doesn't mean leadership is open to ideas. Let's agree the goal is to get people praying.

6. Will people embarrass me?

That is NEVER our intention. People need to connect to God through their personality. That being said, the Bible does say we should pray with one another. For some, that may mean joining with someone in prayer which may be new.

7. Will weird things happen?

We are not here to whip things up. Spiritual gifts may flow, but that can happen in a dignified and holy manner.

8. When will we pray?

First Sunday night of each month. I am out enough nights. I don't need to be out another one. Right now we are simply putting on the calendar one Sunday a month.

9. How long will we pray?

For roughly 75 minutes with a soft close.

10. Do I have to go the Pastor led meeting to honor the Scriptural call?

Absolutely not. Saints gather in the conference room each Wednesday to intercede for the needs of the church. There are some praying now in the conference for this service. If you want more information about these setting, see Carl Hardy.

11. What will we pray about?

We gather to meet with God and discern His needs for our valley as well as share each other's needs. We will also pray for our missionaries and send them a card telling them that we remembered them this evening.

12. Don't we pray on Sunday morning? Isn't that enough?

The pastors prayer after worship and before the message does not make us a praying church. The early church had prayer for its own setting. Yes, prayer should show up everywhere, but it should also have its own setting.

WE NEED TO PRAY TOGETHER

RESULTS OF THE ECONOMIC SURVEY...

Conclusion:

Where is the best place I can lead God's people. In my short life thus far, I have come up with 3 convictions: word of God, worship and corporate prayer. With the word, they receive wisdom for life. With worship, they experience the presence of God. With corporate prayer their motives and desires get aligned with God's priorities and power.

Before we go, let's have some corporate prayer time with communion.