

Disciples Pray: Helping God's People Learn to Pray

By Bob Young

Church leaders, preachers—what are you intentionally doing to help the Christians you work with learn to pray?

Prayer is a vital part of ministry. Prayer is a vital part of the Christian life. Unfortunately, many Christians do not know how to pray. Many are uncomfortable praying. Often our weakness and disorientation in prayer is visible in the words of those who lead public prayers. The prayers of disciples are never “fluffy.” Prayer must never become routine or forced. Prayer is the natural outgrowth of a disciple's heart when that heart is focused on the things of God with God's priorities, plans, purpose, and presence.

I ask the question again, what intentionally occurs in your church to help Christians learn to pray? As Jesus taught his disciples to pray, leaders today must help their members learn how to pray. They must help members learn the habit of prayer.

Here are some suggestions for learning prayer and growing in prayer, with some ideas for group prayer.

- One important item is to make certain that public prayers are not always led by those who are seen as “leaders.” Encourage various members to lead in prayer. Provide training and instruction. In this way, members are not only encouraged to pray but also to do things that help them increase their own faith.
- Instead of assigning someone to lead a group in prayer, members can be encouraged to pray in pairs or small groups for each other. People go from being passive listeners to proactive prayer participants.
- While some dislike the “disorder,” another method of prayer is praying together in agreement. Everyone prays together audibly, often in response to specific needs that have been mentioned. It is different to be a passive listener of a prayer worded by another and to say “amen” at the end than to be someone who prays with other believers at the same time. Praying together in agreement often becomes very passionate and that is much better than simply listening.
- In a group, another excellent alternative is to learn the model of “conversational” prayer, so that instead of praying “around the circle,” individuals can contribute to the conversation with God in brief thoughts and can participate repeatedly.

Here are some suggestions for helping Christians grow in individual prayer.

- Help Christians learn how to pray about things beyond the normal – to go beyond a limited focus on the sick and bereaved. Be prepared to give specific examples of how prayer concerns can be expanded beyond what is customarily heard in our assemblies.
- Help people learn how to glorify God in prayer, not merely to present a “want list.” A model like the ACTS model (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication) can be helpful.
- Teach people how to pray Scripture. Demonstrate this method, showing how praise is an integral part of our personal conversation with God.
- Teach people to pray intentionally about spiritual matters, and not only about the circumstances we face in this life. Help people attune their minds spiritually as they talk with God. Help them recognize that prayer always includes listening to God.
- Prayer is an integral part of the process of making disciples. Prayer provides power when we are trying to touch others with God's word. Prayer is also the power for maturing disciples.

I hope that in the local church where you attend, a combination of these resources will be useful for developing disciples who know how to pray – disciples who regularly experience the power and blessing of deep, meaningful conversations with God.