

TTT377 - Hosting Sunday Worship Series. Part 4 - Leading Prayers

27 August 2024

Introduction

It is a tremendous privilege to lead a congregation in prayer. 20, 50, 200 people are listening to you intercede with God on their behalf. Who is worthy of such a responsibility? Certainly not me, and probably not you. However, leading others in prayer is a worthy activity. How do we do this in a way that honours God, and edifies the congregation?

Today, we continue a series exploring why we do what we do at a Sunday gathering. Last week, we focussed on “The Welcome”. This week’s topic is leading people in collective prayer.

Scripture

Historically, God’s people were often led in prayer and prayed for (Numbers 21.7; 2 Chron 30.18, 27; Nehemiah 11.17). Followers of Jesus prayed together (Acts 1.14, 24; 2.42; 4.31; 6.6; 13.3; 14.23; 20.36; 21.5). Instructions about prayer in the letters of the New Testament apply to collective prayer since most are written to churches and not individuals. With this in mind, here are a few tips on leading prayers in the assembly.

God

The main focus of our prayers is God himself, and especially our Abba father. Jesus prayed and taught his followers to pray to him (Luke 11.1-4). Help us to ‘see’ him as you lead us in prayer. Note how the prayer in Acts 4.24 begins.

“...they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.”

Relevant

Where appropriate, include contemporary societal, local, and church needs. The church prayer meeting in Acts 4 is a direct response to events:

Acts 4.23

“On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.”

We

You are praying on our behalf, so it is generally best to offer 'we' rather than personal 'I' prayers. There is nothing wrong with an "I" section to a Sunday worship prayer, but remember that you are praying on our behalf, and we are praying with you as you pray.

Content

You can make up a prayer on the spot, read a prayer someone has written, or use prayers from the Bible as a template (Psalms are helpful, as are the prayers of Paul — see here for inspiration: A Complete List of the Apostle Paul's Prayers. <https://www.kevinhalloran.net/the-apostle-pauls-prayers-in-the-bible/>)

You might find this collection of [prayers](https://www.ipibooks.com/products/amen-collected-prayers-and-hymns-for-the-journey) put together by Douglas Jacoby useful: <https://www.ipibooks.com/products/amen-collected-prayers-and-hymns-for-the-journey>

Common mistakes to avoid

- "Let's start the service with prayer." If we have been singing, we've already started. It's better to say, "Let's continue the service in prayer."
- Jargon - see the previous recording.
- Perfunctory prayers. Don't rush the prayer. Take your time. We are not in a hurry, and neither is God! There *are* times to offer a *brief* prayer, but *not* a *quick* one!
- Prayer-preaching. Be careful about preaching in prayer. There are times to help the congregation by praying about helpful convictions, but too much emphasis on this aspect of prayer risks putting you in the position of our judge rather than our intercessor.
- Repetitive phrases. Prayer littered with repeated phrases like, "Father God...Father God...Father God..." can be tolerated in younger Christians who are nervous. But, the more mature need to slow down, engage with God, and talk to him on our behalf, like he is really there, listening and attentive. He does not need much to convince him to listen.

Matthew 6.7

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.”

- Mumbling and shouting. Either extreme is problematic. A mumbled prayer is not one we can say a hearty "Amen!" to since we could not understand it. Speak up and use a microphone if available. A shouted prayer is hard to handle unless it is a spiritual emergency since, like a physical emergency, it creates feelings of fear. It feels as if we need to run, fight or hide!
- Human-focussed prayers. Have you noticed that the first half of the Lord's prayer is about God and his agenda?

Matthew 6.9-10

“This, then, is how you should pray: “ ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’ ”

The second half is about our needs

Matthew 6.11-13

“Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. ”

Prayer *for* the needs of the congregation is important, but setting those situations in the context of who God is takes priority.

See this video and the following episodes for more tips on public prayer. Praying Together Part 1 | Jesus and the early church |: <https://youtu.be/20-iUjHSIMw?si=Rkse9ySJEov0vlvg>

Questions for reflection & discussion

How do you feel about leading public prayers? If you could have an influence on the way public prayers are conducted in your congregation, what would you like to see happen?

Summary

If you are leading us in prayer, your aim is to help us collectively connect with a *real* God who is *really* present and interested in us and our concerns. For that, you do not need to be a super-saint or a prayer poet. Simply lead us in prayer, *with* us, *with* God, *with* your heart and mind.

It's time for the challenge of the week. The next time you have an opportunity to publicly pray on a Sunday, challenge yourself to make it more about God than anything else.

Next week

Next time, we will consider the purpose and practice of announcements and updates.

Please add your comments on this week's topic. We learn best when we learn in community.

Do you have a question about teaching the Bible? Is it theological, technical, or practical?

Please send me your questions or suggestions. Here's the email: malcolm@malcolmcox.org.

If you'd like a copy of my free eBook on spiritual disciplines, "How God grows His people", sign up at my website: <http://www.malcolmcox.org>.

Please pass the link on, subscribe, and leave a review.

"Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs." (Psalms 100:2 NIV11)

Keep calm and carry on teaching.

God bless, Malcolm