

The Prayers of Many

The local church prayer meeting has been in decline in the Western church. Many churches don't even have one anymore! The ones that do often find poor attendance and lack in spiritual fervor constant challenges. Is this how it is supposed to be? What can be done about it? Mike believes that in the same way that collective worship in the past 30 years has massively changed in style and content in most local churches, so it is time to pour similar effort, energy, creativity, leadership and money into enabling local churches to witness the creation of a vibrant corporate prayer culture. This session will explore the 'why' and 'how' of 'The Prayers of Many'. Recommended: 'The Prayers of Many' book and online course (prayersofmany.org/course) by Mike Betts.

Mike Betts leads Relational Mission, a network of churches which is part of the global Newfrontiers family. He is the author of *From the Inside Out, Relational Mission: A Way of Life*, and a soon to be published book on corporate prayer. Mike is passionate about the church enjoying her inheritance in Christ, involving church planting, gospel expansion, corporate prayer, and seeing the next generation grow into all that God has for them. Mike is married to Sue, and they live in Lowestoft, Suffolk, UK. He is part of the eldership team at Lowestoft Community Church, which he, Sue, and a number of others planted over 30 years ago. At that time Mike and Sue sought help and advice from Terry Virgo, who had begun to serve emerging churches. Terry's work and relationships with churches became the start of Newfrontiers. In 2011, Terry handed over responsibility for Newfrontiers to a number of his spiritual sons, and Mike began to lead the network that is now Relational Mission. Relational Mission works predominantly in the UK and mainland Europe but with growing connections across the world. Its network includes some 75 churches of which 30 are church plant and pioneering situations.

2 Corinthians 1:11

'as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.'

1- Paul's first response to the challenges of mission

The West has lost this and self-reliance replaces dependence. The very thing that Paul notes 'this happened in order that we might not rely on ourselves but on God'. Dependency breeds the context for a prayer culture. Churches in the Global South and East are often more dependent on God, often facing more challenges and therefore often more invested in prayer!

2- Not specialists (Epaphrus) or departments but whole church engagement with corporate prayer

3- Renewal of this biblical emphasis

- First things first

1 Corinthians 15:3

'For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures'

- Christ dying for our sins is the 'first importance' **doctrine** for the local church.

1 Timothy 2:

'I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people'

- Corporate prayer is the 'first importance' **practice** for the local church.

- Do we line up with his emphasis on both **doctrine** and **practice**?

"The last 30 years revolutionized worship in the local church. Imagine what would have happened if the same energy, creativity and focus had gone transforming prayer."

Pete Greig (Founder 24/7 Prayer)

4- Numbers matter

The focus on church growth and numbers attending can take us into the wrong place. Paul comments *'the blessing granted in answer to the prayers of MANY'*. The numbers engaged seem to be related to the outcome received.

'Someone said that 2000 or 3000 had no more power in prayer than 2 or 3. I think that is a grave mistake in many ways. Have you never noticed that when many together praying, warmth of desire and glow of earnestness are greatly increased.'

Charles Spurgeon (English Theologian and Preacher)

90% of New Testament teaching on prayer is in the corporate context. It is anticipated that much prayer will be done together, not only on our own. The New Testament teaches us by example that we cannot do this on our own, we need others to pray with us.

5- Where are the experts to help us?

Romans 8:26

'In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans'

This reassures us that no one is good at prayer! Settle the matter. But the Holy Spirit helps us and makes up our deficit.

Help people settle the fact and then overcome their felt sense of inadequacy in prayer

6- Aids to renewal of the church prayer meeting

- Build a sense of occasion

- Teach and then model short prayer principles each time.
 - Prayer is asking.
 - Prayer is persistent. The Importunate Widow in Luke 18:1-8 shows 'Persistence to the point of annoyance'.
 - Praying the promises of God
'The things God makes the abundance of his promises, God's people should make the abundant subject of their prayers.'
Jonathan Edwards 'A Humble Attempt'

- Prayer is like fire! Tend to the building of the flame.
 - We can pray ourselves into prayer.
 - Faith often ignites in a corporate setting.

- Lower the bar so everyone can jump over it.
 - Example of 'One-minute prayers' in 1921 Lowestoft (UK) revival

- Vary the style; groups, one at a time, all together, invited prayers, all ages, creative spaces

- Keep it moving, invest in resources and leadership.

- Leading prayer meetings is the hardest meeting to lead, so ask those who can anchor or oversee a meeting who have the best public gifts at leading meetings.
 - It is worth noting that these are not necessarily preachers, as they can talk too much and stop the praying from happening!
- Good worship band available who are able to pick up songs easily
 - Sit in a circle as much as possible and avoid rows of chairs
 - Use technology to aid the presentation and engagement
 - Live link to pray for people
 - Gather with other churches, in person and online
 - Relational Mission example of ENOUGH, which builds on the model used by Jonathan Edwards of extraordinary prayer, explicit agreement, and visible union
 - Be flexible, but keep it moving unless you feel there is a moment to pause and linger
 - Build in biblical expectations.
 - Persistence and dynamics of prayer and answers.
 - Revelation 5:8 gives us examples of bowls of incense and Revelation 8:3 gives us examples of fire on the alter
 - Some ‘Epaphrus prayer warriors’ might feel the prayer meeting is diluted and less than they wish.
 - Help them see it is about getting everyone involved.
 - Help them to hold back on long prayers or ask them to do highlight corporate prayers speaking for everyone