

This Prayer Attitude Shakes Prison Doors Open

Imagine a master conductor gearing up to lead a large symphony orchestra in a beautiful rendition of Handel's *Messiah*. The strings are tuned. The woodwind section is ready. The brass section is in place. The percussionists are set. The conductor steps to his platform with the applause of the crowded concert hall. At the magic moment, he raises the baton. Musicians are at attention and the audience waits anticipation. Then comes the downward stroke signaling the beginning of the musical masterpiece.

Instantaneously, something goes wrong. Horribly wrong. Even though each member of the orchestra has a perfect copy of the score for *The Messiah*, each musician decides to simply play whatever personal refrain comes to mind. None is the same. Disconnected tunes from Bach to rock spoil the moment. The violins, violas and cellos compete in sounds of complete chaos. Individual percussionists pound random, incoherent beats. The horns blow a disarray of discordant notes. The woodwinds are just as disengaged with the score as the rest of the orchestra. The pandemonium that fills the air bears absolutely no resemblance to Handel's composition.

The audience is baffled at the excruciating sound coming from the stage. What was intended to be a glorious concert of exquisite coordinated talent is now a bungled, confused disaster with no harmonies, no order and none of the beauty that had been expected.

Dissonant, Disunited Prayer

Could it be that the scene I have just described represents the essence of many a prayer meeting? Directionless. Confusing. A display of independent and inharmonious thought

that is hardly uniting, edifying, or life-giving.

Let me be so bold as to suggest that when Christians gather to pray, the Holy Spirit is ready to serve as the conductor. He wants to orchestrate a beautiful rendition of heart-felt, united, passionate and God-glorifying prayer. He has also provided an inspired score for our praises and petitions in the pages of Scripture. He desires that our prayers are biblical, edifying and focused on the things of the gospel and the advancement of Christ's kingdom.

Instead, we often experience a jumbled and eclectic expression of detached thoughts that never seem to find the focus or beauty God intended. Everyone just prays whatever comes to their mind, with little thought of the unifying truth of the Scriptures. Many may pray with an indifference toward the will and prompting of the Holy Spirit. God, the audience of prayers, might even be considerably saddened.

Voices Uplifted in One Accord

I love the account in Acts 4:23-31 where we see the church in Jerusalem in a prayer meeting after Peter and John were released from the custody of the Jewish leaders. The two had been threatened to stop preaching the gospel and returned to the church to pray.

In Acts 4:24 it says, "they lifted their voices in unity to God." Other versions state, "they lifted their voices in one accord." The Greek word *homothoumadon* literally refers to a concert of voices that are whole and in a state of union. This was a harmonious prayer of beautifully coordinated hearts and minds.

Their subject matter was the character of God. Note the content of their worship-based prayer: "Lord, You are god, who has made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them." Commentators note that the content of this prayer reflected directly from passages like Exodus 20:11 and Isaiah

37:16-20. Then the praying believers quoted directly from Psalm 2:1-2 and prayed together in application of those verses. This prompted a united cry for Christ to display His power and for His Spirit to give them boldness to continue preaching the gospel. We find here a great example of New Testament prayer as it ought to be.

Admittedly, it could have been a moment of prayer chaos. Some might have naturally expressed fear and anger. Others might have prayed judgment down on the hostile Jewish leaders. It is not hard to imagine a whole array of disconnected prayers flowing from the minds and emotions of these persecuted early Christians. Instead, they prayed from the truth of the Bible and offered clear, united requests that were focused on the mission of the gospel.

A United Approach

Today, there are countless ideas about the approach we should take when we pray together. Some want to use popular acrostics. Others have created modifiers to describe some unique, and oftentimes obscure, approach to prayer. Imagine the members of an orchestra who decide to sit in randomly arranged chairs and hold their instruments in a variety of strange positions. They struggle to even look coordinated because of their independent ideas. Similarly, our prayer gatherings can suffer from too many unusual methods based on ambiguous Bible verses about how we should even approach prayer. Confusion abounds.

In Matthew 6:9a, Jesus said, "Therefore pray in this manner" and then gave us the model we should follow. This was not a suggestion or an optional idea. It was a command. He repeated this same pattern, but not the exact words, in Luke 11:2-4. This was not to be a prayer we simply quote word for word as a matter of religious ceremony. Rather, it is the pattern Christ wanted His followers to embrace in united fashion as the core approach to prayer.

That is why I teach often on the four core movements of this model prayer. I describe them as reverence, response, requests and readiness. ([click here for more information.](#)) In any case, it is clear that our union in prayer has suffered from deviation from this vital pattern of prayer.

A Common Score

We also must pray from the common score of God's word. The best way to talk to God is from His own Word. I have written extensively about this in my book *Transforming Prayer*. I am mindful of John Piper's words, "Where the mind is not brimming with Scripture, the heart is seldom brimming with prayer." I would suggest that in prayer gatherings where minds are not praying from Scripture, the hearts are seldom truly united in prayer.

A Perfect Conductor

The Holy Spirit is our prayer conductor, using the sheet music of the Bible. We are told to "pray in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:18; Rom. 8:26-28, Jude 20). This commitment to pray with the mind, heart and will of the Holy Spirit is not just for individuals but also for groups.

Beautiful, United Prayer

So, let us not just gather and pray whatever comes to mind. Let's not bring other agendas to our concerted efforts to pray. Rather, let us pray from open Bibles (preferably from the same Scripture passage). Let us consciously surrender to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Let us seek to follow the biblical pattern Jesus gave. Who knows what beautiful music we might make together for His glory and the advancement of His gospel?

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