

Help! My Prayer Group Has Gone Flaky!

✖ Corporate

prayer loses its effectiveness when intercessors get off track. Here's how you can stay in the flow of the Holy Spirit.

As I walked down the corridor toward the large prayer room, several women rushed past me in a panic. They had been praying with more than 50 intercessors from various denominations for pastors in the United States. Eager to find out what was happening, I hurried into the room.

An unbelievable sight met my eyes. Lying on the floor in the middle of the room was a woman intercessor, curled up in a fetal position and groaning as though she were being tortured. Crouched over her was a male intercessor, who was stroking her hair and speaking words of encouragement.

Standing around “the entertainment” were dozens of intercessors—watching. No one was praying now. Their faces revealed many emotions: Some were in shock; others didn’t know what to think; most were simply disgusted.

Asked to correct the situation, I bent down, asked the man to move away and softly whispered into the intercessor’s ear:

“Please stop what you are doing. This is not the way the Holy Spirit would lead.”

Gruffly the woman turned her head toward me and growled, “This is the Holy Spirit.”

These kinds of activities are becoming too common in prayer rooms across the nation. If the prayer movement does not establish biblical boundaries and acceptable corporate conduct within the next few years, the work of prayer could be drastically derailed.

Here are some of the flaky intercessory activities with which we should be concerned:

1. Competition in prayer. Moses’ and Aaron’s authority to lead was challenged by Korah and his band with the argument, “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord? So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face” (Num. 16:3).

Notice Moses’ answer to Korah and his rebellious associates: “Hear now, you sons of Levi: Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; and

that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord" (Num. 16:8-11).

Intercessors have a unique position. We are called to draw near to the throne, hear the voice of God and stand on behalf of others. We who occupy this position should set an example of love, grace, mercy and humility.

Yet I find that among intercessors there is sometimes strife, jealousy and competition, just as there was among Korah and his band. In some cases, the prayer room resembles the New York City stock market trading floor, with each participant trying to pray more frequently, prophesy longer and shout louder than the others do.

Why the spiritual tug of war?

No doubt about it—all intercession is war! But like all of life, intercession has its ebbs and flows. Our friends would wonder about Eddie and me if, after three decades of marriage, we were passionately kissing every time they saw us in public. You might see this type of thing in the movies, but meaningful, real-life relationships are developed in private. Eddie and I don't need to impress anyone or prove our love to others. Our outward

displays of affection are merely an indication of an already secure and stable private relationship.

There are times when, in the heat of battle, the corporate prayer room seems intense, loud, demanding and pushy. After all, Scripture says the violent take the kingdom by force! (See Matt. 11:12). But constant warfare should not be the way every prayer time is handled.

Effective, sincere corporate prayer should reveal all the attributes of God—His gentleness, His tender mercy, His unconditional love and His burden for the lost. There are times when the group will experience total silence before God. At other times, a deep travail for the condition of lost souls will be felt. Joy, expressions of love and celebration should occur occasionally among the intercessors. To reduce group prayer to anything less reveals our immaturity in the private place before God.

2. Emotionalism. Our emotions are a part of our soul (mind, will and emotions). They were given to us by God to serve His purposes. But to function properly, they must be brought under His dominion. Paul instructs us, “Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts [emotions] on things above, where Christ is

seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Col. 3:1-2, NIV).

Our emotions are as flexible and undependable as an elastic measuring tape. One minute we feel happy; the next, we're sad.

We can have a wonderful time of intimacy in prayer, and in five minutes

be yelling at our child for spilling milk on the carpet.

Emotional

expressions are not necessarily an indication of either the presence,

or the lack of the presence, of God.

Amazingly, some corporate prayer groups base their entire prayer time on emotions. Hebrews 11:1-2 tell us, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For

by it [faith] the elders obtained a good testimony." It is faith that

moves the heart of God, not emotion.

By faith the elders obtained a good testimony. Yet some of these giants of the faith were tortured, jeered at and flogged,

while others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, sawed in

two and put to death by the sword (see vv. 35-37).

Most of these mighty men and women didn't flinch when they were mistreated, misunderstood, persecuted or left destitute.

Hebrews 11:38-39 (NIV) says of them, "The world was not worthy of

were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised." Their mind-set was one of faith, not

feelings.

God knows I am emotional. Eddie calls me radical. In his book *Help! I'm Married to an Intercessor* (Regal) he describes me in his own terms:

"Alice is radical about everything! This woman would rather watch the Houston Rockets professional basketball team play than eat. She was a cheerleader in school when her father was the football coach. Alice is a Dallas Cowboys football fanatic as well. When the Cowboys game is being televised, everything at our house comes to a screeching halt.

"Now, I like football. I tend to watch the game casually from my recliner. I drink coffee, read the paper and talk on the phone during the game.

Not her! Alice watches the game on her feet—even in our living room! Pacing, lunging, warning and encouraging the players and coaches, my radical wife is not bothered at all that they can't hear a word she's saying!"

Being radical is not bad as long as you work to maintain balance in all areas of your life.

3. Inappropriate behavior. Intercessors have a responsibility to represent the Lord both inside and outside the prayer room. We need to learn that that which is biblical is not always appropriate. Ongoing "weird" activity in the prayer setting is likely

to be soulish, if not demonic.

An undisciplined mind confuses soulishness and spirituality, allowing the soul to rule over the spirit. An unruly mind has to be “renewed day by day.” The apostle Paul reminds us: “Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18, KJV).

To be filled with the Spirit is to exercise the qualities of the Holy Spirit. What are they? “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Egrates, the Greek word for temperance, is translated “self-control.” The Holy Spirit will not control you. You must control you!

One form of inappropriate behavior I am concerned about is an alarming manifestation I will call “ecstasy.” This manifestation is misdiagnosed as travail, but it is not genuine godly travail. When it occurs, a glazed expression forms on the intercessor’s face, and he or she voices utterances resembling expressions of sexual gratification. I have actually seen intercessors positioned in a manner that suggests a sexual act is happening.

Beware, women! We must ask the Lord for spiritual discernment concerning such matters. Proper travailing prayer will not

cause physical arousal.

Dutch Sheets makes an interesting point about travail in his book, *Intercessory Prayer* (Regal):

“First, I believe biblical travail is an important, if not essential, part of intercession for the lost. Second, I don’t

believe it is defined by groaning, wailing, weeping and hard work.

Natural travail certainly is, and spiritual travail can include these

things. I do not believe, however, it must include them, and I’m

convinced it is not defined by them.”

Dutch goes on to define travailing intercession. It is “a form of intercession that releases the creative the Holy Spirit into a situation to produce, create or give birth to something.”

Not long ago at a conference, I called for repentance by all intercessors who had ever experienced false travail such as I have

described. One woman who came forward for prayer told me that she was a

seasoned intercessor who had been praying for over 20 years. But

recently she went to a conference where a person laid hands on her for

impartation. Impartation is right!

After that incident, whenever she tried to pray she would see Jesus as her lover and experience a physical orgasm. She had opened

herself to a false spiritual experience she did not ask the Lord about

first. At the conference she received deliverance from the

evil spirit
that had seduced her.

It is clear that we must be discerning. Ephesians 5:15-16 tell us to “walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (NKJV).

Evil or not, these are exciting days in which to live, for spiritual awakenings are being seen throughout the earth. I pray we see one here in the United States! To help bring this about, we must be committed to maintaining our credibility in prayer. Decide now to keep a spiritual eye on what’s going on in the prayer room and be a Spirit-led—not a flaky—woman of prayer.

Alice Smith is co-founder and executive director of the U.S. Prayer Center in Houston. She is a member of America’s National Prayer Committee, the International Reconciliation Coalition, and the International Strategic Prayer Network. She is also an internationally known conference speaker and best-selling author.