



leading prayer in church

the MINISTRY PAPERS

beyond the roster

"The roster? oh sure, just put me down for morning tea and maybe the odd prayer or Bible reading or that sort of thing..."

What sort of thing? What are we actually doing when we lead prayer in church? How can we think 'beyond the roster' about this vital ministry?

It's not that rosters are bad. In fact, they're a very good idea. They sure beat being asked on the way into church to lead the prayer, with just a few minutes notice. They enable more people to be involved in the ministry of prayer. And they give these people time to prepare to carry out this ministry well.

But that's the real point: ministry. Leading God's people in prayer isn't just a case of reading out the prayer points from the Sunday handout. It's ministry. It isn't just an afterthought in the meeting of God's people. It's a vital part of the ministry we all share in when we come together in Jesus' name.

As you work through this 'leading prayer in church' MINISTRY PAPER, you'll be encouraged and challenged about the importance of this ministry of leading prayer: what the Bible says about it; the best way to prepare for it; & some practical 'dos and don'ts'. In this way we'll step 'beyond the roster' into works of service that build up the body of Christ (see Ephesians 4:12).

LEADERS:...before taking someone through this paper, review the two key introductory MINISTRY PAPERS: 'the ministry training church' and 'meeting one to one'.

Connect. Grow. Serve. After **connecting** to God through trusting in Christ, a vital way we can **grow** is through a growth group and a vital way we can **serve** is through a ministry team.

This MINISTRY PAPER is designed to help us all think 'beyond the roster' as we serve through leading prayer in church. When you lead us in prayer in church you are very much part of a ministry team in service of Christ and his people.



read **Acts 2:42 & Acts 6:4**

1. As the ministry of the gospel was launched in Acts, both these verses show a tight bond between the ministry of the Word and the ministry of prayer. Why is this bond so important?



2. How might the prayers in our gathering as God's people reflect this link between the Word and prayer?



read **Ephesians 6:17-20**

3. Again we see the link between Word and prayer: if the Word of God is the 'sword of the Spirit' (verse 17), how does this help us understand what it means to 'pray in the Spirit' (verse 18)?

4. What chief prayer concern does Paul remind the Ephesians about in verses 19-20?



5. What are the implications of this passage for priorities in our public prayers?

gospel prayer

We've seen how crucial it is to link our prayers to Scripture. In this way we can have a conversation with God, with Him taking the lead. First we listen to God in the Bible. Then we respond in prayer. That's the gospel: God acts and we respond. And of course, all prayer is only really possible because of the gospel. We can approach God freely through his Son Jesus. All prayer is gospel prayer. Our prayers, private and public, should reflect that. We should pray the gospel.



read **Ephesians 1:3-14**

1. How does Paul celebrate the gospel in these verses?

2. How does he maintain the focus upon God and his actions for us in Jesus?

3. What are some of the "spiritual blessings in Christ" (verse 3) he lists through the passage?



read **Ephesians 1:15-23**

4. How does Paul model 'gospel prayer' in these verses, turning his celebration of the gospel in the previous verses into prayer?



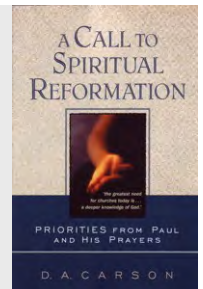
5. *Why is it important to keep the focus on Jesus in the way we pray for people?*

6. *How might reflection on the gospel of Jesus change the way we pray about all things?*

7. *How might we benefit from studying the prayers of the Bible?*

Paul's school of prayer

If you would like to take further the exercise we just did with



Ephesians 1, a great place to start is with Don Carson's very helpful book, 'A Call to Spiritual Reformation—Priorities from Paul and his Prayers'.

This is a book that changes both the way we pray and what we pray. Too often our prayers are limping, fragile things that fail to be caught up in the great plans and purposes of God. Because of this, we lack motivation, passion and direction.

Don Carson's solution is that we should pattern our prayers on the prayers of Paul. As we have just done with our brief study of Ephesians 1, Carson studies in depth a number of other prayers from Paul's letters. Chapter by chapter, he discusses the content and character of the Apostle's prayers. Showing clearly the gospel priorities of Paul's prayers, he calls us to make those priorities our own.

Against the backdrop of so many books on prayer that have a pre-occupation simply with technique, this book reminds us that the main issue of prayer isn't *how* -to but *who* -to. When we engage with the God of the gospel of Jesus, we are given motivation and direction for our prayer from God himself.



prepared prayer

We have seen how important it is that your prayer be gospel-focused. We have also seen that your prayer needs to connect strongly to the particular focus of the ministry of God's Word that it accompanies. All that points to the need for preparation. Of course, these principles also apply to our personal prayer. But there is a particular need when leading others in prayer to be thought through and prepared in order to lead effectively.

what's the big idea?

There's a well argued case that most people are only really capable of walking away from a sermon carrying one central theme. If the preacher doesn't give one, then the listener will make one up for themselves. No matter how hard the preacher might try to get five separate points across in a talk, generally when asked what the talk was about, a member of the congregation will convey the single concept they took out of the talk.

At church we try to cater for the listener by preparing messages that convey one big biblical concept or one Big Idea, that will be clear and challenging to all who listen. Indeed, not just the sermon but the entire meeting of God's people should be shaped around expressing that biblical concept, to try and ensure the seed of God's word is firmly implanted in the heart of the listener. Communication between all involved, therefore, will be vital, so that not only the words of the preacher, but of the person leading, of the songs selected... that every element is tied into that Big Idea. This is crucial with prayer.

As you lead us in prayer you are playing a vital role in helping God's people respond to God's Word. Whether you are leading us in prayer in *preparation* to hear God's Word, or in *response* to God's Word, or for various issues and events in our church family and our world, the connection of your prayer to what we are learning in the Word will be a great model and encouragement to all.

dos and don'ts

in preparation

- DO prepare thoroughly by reading over the bible reading(s) & big idea information, to prepare your prayer in the context of the ministry of God's Word.
- DO be clear what part your prayer is playing in the overall meeting of God's people (is it preparing us to hear God's Word, responding to God's Word, relating God's Word to issues in the church family/world?...see page 4).
- DO look over the prepared prayer points provided but DON'T just read them out. DO put them into your own words.
- DO think through a clear structure for your prayer. It's best to write out the prayer in full so that you start well, finish well, and are clear in between!

in writing

- DON'T prepare a prayer longer than about three minutes (or shorter if others are also praying). Writing out your prayer will enable you to be clear and concise and enable us to say a hearty "Amen".
- DO pray in the plural. Say "we" rather than "I". You're leading our prayer. Saying "our" rather than "my", "us" rather than "me" helps us pray with you. And DO say a clear "Amen" at the end so that we can add ours.
- DO remember to address God as "you" rather than in the 3rd person. e.g. a written prayer point asking "God to humble us" should be prayed as "we ask YOU to humble us". Remember you're talking to God, not to the congregation!
- DON'T preach. Pray! Again, remember that you are talking to God on our behalf not talking to us on God's behalf.
- DO practice the prayer aloud.

on the day

- DO arrive early for church to let the meeting leader know you are there.
- DO be ready at the microphone by the end of the previous item, rather than creating a distracting pause as you straggle to the front. If you're in doubt, check the program or with the leader beforehand when you'll need to step up.
- DO make sure that the microphone is well positioned for your prayer posture so that we can hear you loudly and clearly. DON'T mumble.
- DO give a brief word of introduction e.g. pointing out that the prayer points are listed in the handout, which can be helpful for further prayer during the week.
- DON'T just read. While it's important to write out what you are going to pray, make sure you pray with meaning and not simply with 'reading'. DO practise it a number of times and edit what you're saying.
- DON'T pray in a funny prayer voice. Pray as yourself, with your own voice, not someone else's. Don't try and sound 'spiritual', impressive or profound: we want you to pray in your normal voice. Don't say 'holy' as a very spiritual 'hoe-ly'.
- DON'T use filler words like 'just'. Praying "um, we just, like, wanna thank you because we just..." is tiresome, annoying and shows a lack of preparation. Again, writing out the prayer will help with expression.



private prayer public prayer

We have focused on the need to prepare your prayer thoroughly. But even more importantly you need to also prepare yourself!

Jesus talked about the enormous temptation involved in praying aloud. There is the temptation of pride. There is the temptation of 'seeking the praises of men.' Jesus speaks in Matthew 6:4-6 of the hypocrites who "love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full". Jesus instructed his disciples rather, "but when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you".

Now, of course, when it comes to leading prayer in church you are being asked to come out from behind closed doors to lead us publicly. But the warning against hypocrisy is important to hear. Our public prayer ministry should be the overflow of a consistent private prayer life. It's usually evident with people who lead public prayer effectively that they are able to do so because prayer is a 'native tongue' rather than a foreign language! The point isn't about being impressive or slick, quite the opposite: that the prayer reflects a humble, living relationship of one of God's children to our great Father in heaven.

Being spiritually prepared is being conscious of what you're doing and the motives you have in doing it. It is understanding that there are temptations involved in the vital task of praying aloud and preparing your heart for this act of service to God and your brothers and sisters.

which prayer is this?

In our private prayers it is generally a good idea to have a pattern that covers a variety of prayer 'elements' e.g. praise, confession, requests (see below for a general model). More often than not, however, church prayers focus on one particular element. It will be very important to be clear what particular part your prayer is playing in the overall meeting of God's people.

a general model

One helpful way of structuring public prayers is to think of 'ACTS'. Typically you would be asked to lead just one or two rather than all of these 'elements' of prayer. Even so it's worth having a sense of this overall 'shape' of prayer.

Adoration: (or Praise) we are addressing the sovereign triune ruler of the universe (not just our mate) who has become our heavenly Father through the saving work of the Lord Jesus, his Son. Adoration is being caught up in the greatness of God and his deeds (Psalm 150).

Confession: once we recognise that God is perfect and holy, we must acknowledge what we are like and 'come clean'. Remember: don't be trite about sin. It is real, it is destructive, and offensive. It is good to be specific about sin. "If we confess our sins", says the apostle John, "he (God) is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Thanksgiving: the heart of a prayer of thanksgiving goes beyond understanding God's gracious movement to us in creation and redemption. It is moving back to God with gratitude and a desire to give Him delight.

Supplication (or Ask): this is where we ask the Lord to supply our needs and the needs of others. Here we express our dependence on God and so glorify him. We pray for God working in people's lives and in the events of the world, for our lives to grow in Christ-likeness, for the problems and challenges to Christ-likeness in our daily living.

response to the Word

If you've been asked to pray after the Bible Talk, you have been asked to give expression to our response to God's word. This may involve all of the elements of prayer listed above, but a focus on confession, thanksgiving and supplication is typical. If others are also involved in this 'prayer of response' you may be asked to focus on just one element in particular. You can still do much of the preparation of the prayer before getting to church (see notes on the previous page). Then as you listen to the Bible Talk attentively you can fill out your notes and formulate any other points you want to pray. Do this being mindful of length, and the other issues covered in the dos and don'ts. Especially, don't summarise the whole Bible Talk again but lead us in prayerful response to God's Word.

communal prayer

Leading communal prayer also requires preparation. You need to be clear in your invitation asking people for prayer points. You need to write the prayer points down and think of what you need to ask God for. You may need to categorise and order the points. You don't need to pray all the information again. Everyone has already heard it. You need to ask God to do something about what we've heard.