

Ten Prayer Nuggets



Leading others in corporate prayer

**Lloyd van Vuuren
The Concert of Prayer for Scotland
Livingston, Scotland**

Introduction

While the following nuggets relate primarily to corporate prayer, they also touch on private prayer. These nuggets were developed through hosting prayer meetings over several years, making many mistakes along the way, and in the process turning some of the lessons learnt into nuggets, with the intention of encouraging and strengthening others to learn to pray together. The nuggets are not a methodology, or a checklist, but instead intended as practical guidance that should encourage, embed and strengthen a culture of corporate prayer in any local church.

The priority of prayer: Jesus prioritised prayer [Matt 26:36, Luke 6:12, Luke 18:1] and sometimes this meant He even disappointed people in order to do so [Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35-37, Luke 5:15-16].

If we ask God to give us a greater desire to be with Him in prayer and prioritise time with Him personally and also corporately in a local church setting, very soon prayer will become the 'engine room' of the local church. This is where God can be allowed space to speak, individuals to mature, leaders can emerge and an entire community will be set on fire for God's plans and His great purposes.

Jesus said that His Father's house would be a house of prayer [Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17]. He could have pointed to many things that would characterize His people and their gathered community – but He chose to name prayer as the defining feature. In a similar way, prayer to our Heavenly Father is one vital activity from which most other aspects of church life can be nourished, flow from and grow in, as a wonderful side effect.

When a local church prioritises corporate prayer, the whole body begins to stir and awaken to what God is doing. Corporate prayer could be the single most vital activity that will synchronise hearts in a church community, clarify and impart vision, allowing a church to sense, hear and confirm corporately what God might be saying.

Private prayer fuels corporate prayer and devotion to God: Elijah was a great Old Testament prophetic character, known for his courageous and powerful ministry. Elijah mentions the LORD of hosts "before whom he stood" [1 Kings 18:15]. Evidently, he had spent enough time before God individually, that he was no longer anxious and afraid of what people thought of him or could do to him.



The problems that had previously discouraged him, he saw as dwarfed before the greatness and splendour of God Almighty. So too, when we have been with God in private and then come together in prayer, the gathered people of God tend to come alive to the things of God as their faith is stirred, God speaks, prophetic activity is given space, and the atmosphere is one of encouragement.

‘Unanswered’ prayers are not as disastrous as they may seem: Whilst a rapid response to prayer is encouraging or even faith building, a more subtle danger may be getting ‘answers’ too soon without meeting with God through persevering prayer and having our hearts warmed to His purposes and drawn into His presence. The glory of prayer is getting into the presence of God Almighty - our Heavenly Father. When we do not have an answer yet, there is still the need to keep pressing in together and as we keep praying, we hear God speaking about a multitude of other things ‘along the way’.

If we don’t put down the phone as soon as the business of the call has concluded, but tarry, we begin to see things from God’s point of view. God is far greater than an ‘answering machine’ – He wants our devotion, our hearts, even our lives. He wants us to see Him and to be changed from one degree of glory to another, to become more like Him, ultimately.

It must also be noted that we may never fully understand this side of eternity why God decides on a particular outcome or why some prayers are answered differently to how we would expect or strongly desire.

Nugget 1: Corporately pray the promises of God

Prayer feeds off the glorious promises which God has made to His people. By immersing ourselves in what God has said, times of prayer become journeys of discovery and wonder at what God might remind us about. By starting with the great and glorious promises of God, any corporate gathering to pray launches into the very throne room of heaven. Expectations are raised, faith is stirred, and everyone present becomes more alert to what God might be saying to His gathered people - where His presence is.

God works through promise-backed prayer to nurture, grow and mature our faith. By reading, declaring, and rejoicing in the promises God has already made, we are reminded that ‘Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD has made to [His people] has failed; all came to pass.’ ~ Joshua 21:45.



When we start a time of corporate prayer, immersed in the promises of God, the atmosphere will automatically be thanksgiving, soaked in praise and alive with wonder at who our God is, because of what He has said and done.

'A promise is a note written in His own hand, and He will acknowledge His own handwriting.' ~ Herbert Lockyer.

'The promises of God should be the basis of all our prayers, for they are alike our warrant for asking and our security for receiving.' ~ W.C. Proctor.

"I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." ~ Jeremiah 31:33-34.

Nugget 2: Corporately pray the truths of the Bible

Consider sections in the Bible that are rich in the glorious truths about our God, the Gospel, the Cross, the saving power of Christ and whose we are, along with who we are in Christ. Often, after hearing truth declared or prayed, people start to awaken and begin to soak and soar in all that God is to us, has won for us and is doing in us. By declaring the truths of scripture, a prayer time can be used to teach essential doctrine. The most illuminating moments of reading the Bible could be on our knees with others.

'Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.' ~ Romans 10:17.

If we believe this, we would do well to give space for God's word to be proclaimed and prayed as we meet to pray together to stir up one another's faith. Consider, for a start, that we are justified, have peace with God in Christ, have access to God's abundant grace which we stand in right now, we get to rejoice in hope, a hope that is grounded in the glory of God himself. These wonderful truths are for all of God's people to know and live in today.

'Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' ~ Romans 5:1-2.



Nugget 3: Corporately pray the prayers of the Bible

Many before us have been recorded in the Bible calling out to God in the depths of despair, ecstatic joy, and everything between. We can use their inspired words to launch us into a great trajectory and rhythm of prayer, by reading prayers (as they are) from the Bible, or else through making some aspects of prayers into our own words, through adapting them to our own circumstances and situation. E.g. placing our names, our church, or our families into the fabric of the prayers.

Use the prayers from the Psalms, which are a collection of prayers and songs, as a launch-pad for any corporate prayer gathering. The Psalms are filled with thanksgiving, praise and with an upward God focus, they guide our hearts to look up and become open to what God may want to say. The Psalms are especially helpful when everyone feels a bit 'flat' and we would do well to draw on the inspired words and historic faith of those who have run before us.

Jesus died on the cross praying Psalm 31:5 'Into your hand I commit my Spirit.' By doing so, Jesus directs us to make use of the prayers of scripture in our conversation with our Heavenly Father.

Nugget 4: Use any verse and adapt it into a corporate cry to God

Take any verses or portions of the Bible and make them into a prayer. (E.g. Psalm 23: 'The Lord is My Shepherd.' You can give thanks to God that he is OUR Shepherd, that he is leading US, and similarly use each phrase as a springboard for thanksgiving and praise).

When we use the Bible to pray, we are simultaneously preaching to ourselves, whilst reminding ourselves of what God has already said from his Word and also actually talking to God!

'The whole word of God is of use to direct us in prayer, and how can we express ourselves in better language to God than that of His own Spirit.' ~ Matthew Henry.

'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.' ~ 2 Timothy 3:16-17.



Nugget 5: Praying together ‘For the glory of God’

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he started off with ‘Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name.’ [Matthew 6:9, Luke 11:2].

When we start by considering God’s glory, it puts our gaze and our hearts on our all-good Heavenly Father, before we can even ask or mention a request or get going on our ‘list’, helping to remind us whose we are, who we are and what we are doing – speaking to the One who created and holds the entire universe in balance!

When we consider first the goodness, greatness and glory of God and begin to adore and love Him, longing to see his name exalted, his fame promoted and his kingdom extended, suddenly our hearts are stirred, and prayer moves from a task or duty to an incredible privilege and delight.

‘Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness.’ ~ Psalm 115:1.

Nugget 6: Instead of talking about it – pray about it

To ensure we spend most of our time praying and not talking to each other, consider cultivating a habit of turning any ‘update’ directly into prayer. Try to speak about any circumstance to God rather than launching into a detailed description to the gathered community. Notice, how it will be ‘explained’ through your prayer, enabling others to hear what is most precious, important or of greatest concern without needing to be given the precise details and they will be able to also pray over the situation. When do this, it avoids spending precious gathered time hearing about things that we could instead be praying for and potentially run out of time to adequately pray through.

There are exceptions to this, of course, where a brief update will serve the resulting prayer better, but make them the exception rather than the normal.

Introductions: Instead of feeling the need to have a lengthy time of small talk or an ice-breaker at the start of the prayer meeting to ‘warm’ people up or to get to know individuals, consider allowing time to chat at the end of a time of corporate prayer.



Nugget 7: Try to keep on the topic, allow space for others to participate and God to speak

Keeping on topic: When we pray with others, consider it a conversation we might have with a group of friends. By treating prayer as a group conversation before God, we move together and the discussion flows naturally, in the presence of, and with, God.

When we take time to pray through issues together before rushing on to another topic, prayer times will become alive and fresh and will not feel like a rushed conversation, enabling greater participation by all. Try to keep the theme moving in a similar direction, to avoid bouncing around between very different topics and going 'off-track'. Times of corporate prayer can be greatly enhanced and more powerful when time is deliberately allowed for individuals to 'linger' where God may be trying to talk into a particular issue, before gently moving on when the time is appropriate.

Allow space: Consider allowing brief (Note; only brief.) times of silence to enable others to 'jump in' and not feel shut out of the group conversation. If, as the prayer meeting leader, we sense that someone wants to pray but maybe just needs a tiny nudge, try inviting them to pray out loud with a bit of guidance (i.e. would you like to pray into a particular situation?) to grow their confidence. However, avoid embarrassing someone who you do not know well enough and who may not be ready to publicly pray before others.

Silence to listen and hear God: It must be noted that a 'comfortable' silence to listen to God and hear His gentle voice in a reflective and unrushed manner is a powerful way of inviting the Holy Spirit into a corporate prayer gathering. Listening to music can help create an atmosphere of near-silence and encourage individuals to seek God and engage in listening to Him, without the murmur of voices as a distraction. Allow such times of listening to worship music, silence (or near-silence) to be natural and then, in a gentle but confident way, encourage others to become comfortable with both short or more lengthy silence.

Whilst some silence is useful, try to avoid a prolonged and uncomfortable silence, which would be very unnatural and is often the reason why prayer meetings falter and fail to gain momentum. Additionally, don't try to 'drive' a time of corporate prayer or nervously fill silence for the sake of it by just saying anything.



Nugget 8: Try to keep corporate prayers short and punchy and encourage 'agreement' in prayer

Short prayers generally encourage wider participation and when everyone is contributing, it is engaging and 'alive', and no one is left out or behind. Long prayers in contrast can drone on and draw the energy, life and purpose from a corporate prayer gathering.

Caveat: There are exceptions to keeping prayers short. For example; when an individual with a recognised prophetic or prayer gifting begins an anointed prayer that everyone tunes into and 'agrees' with. Praying regularly with a similar group in our local churches helps us to learn and grow together and know when someone is hearing from God or under a particular anointing.

Encourage people to intentionally 'agree' in some way, maybe by saying 'amen' or 'yes Lord' or whatever is appropriate to keep involved, rather than just listening in silence as one person prays. By agreeing in prayer, we encourage the person praying and stir our own faith as we engage in the prayer conversation, making their prayer ours too.

'One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.' ~ Psalm 27:4.

Nugget 9: Simultaneous corporate prayer

Trying to all pray together at the same time, can be a great and 'economical' way to involve everyone and encourage participation by those less likely to pray aloud before others. One of the greatest fears about corporate prayer is having to pray in front of other people. By all praying together, everyone becomes lost in the hum of group prayer, in just the same way that an individual choir member's voice is drowned out by the overall choir singing and the volume of all the voices combined together.

Praying simultaneously could be the singular most practical and powerful ingredient to getting a church praying corporately (and privately as a result) and assisting individuals to conquer their 'fear of prayer' when done wisely and sensitively.



When a time of simultaneous group prayer is led well, people will often feel comfortable to pray out on the back of it, having really encountered God and heard Him speak.

Praying in tongues together can be a great way to start an early morning prayer gathering, when no one wants to 'break-the-ice' or all are still half asleep and they need the help promised by the Spirit.

'..they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them." ~ Acts 4:24.

Nugget 10: Corporate prayer helps us really get to know each other

A great way to really get to know people is by praying together and discerning through their prayers, their heart and concern for certain issues. There may be no other way more powerful, so uniting and conducive to growing a church's love, devotion and care for each member, than praying together.

When praying in a group setting, encourage natural conversational etiquette by, for example, praying in a normal voice rather than in a solemn or 'different' voice and being quick to pray rather than leaving long awkward silences. In general, consider what would be 'normal' and 'acceptable' when having an engaging conversation with friends and allow the same 'norms' to flavour times of corporate prayer. After all, prayer is simply talking to and hearing from God. The more natural and normal the prayer times are, the more the hearts and minds of the members of a local church are drawn together.

By praying together, a church comes together and stays together.

'But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.' ~ Jude 1:20-21.

Lloyd van Vuuren (The Concert of Prayer for Scotland)
Email: concertofprayerforedinburgh@gmail.com

