

Team Ministry - Lesson 2

Effective Team Prayer

I. The Need for Learning Team Prayer ~ John 15:1-17 -- A Team Prayer

A. If we let ourselves go, there is a natural bent that we will not abide in Christ and the power of the Spirit; instead we will shift to relying on secondary means for accomplishing the work of ministry every time

1. Our training; our program (our vision//goal); gifts on the team; money; past experiences

2. At issue: a shift in focus from Christ alone and the power of the Holy Spirit to a reliance on human beings or another favorite idol [Gal 3:1-5]

3. This makes prayer a defining battle ground, because through prayer we humbly fellowship with the Father and the Son and receive the power of the Spirit [Luke 11:1-13; 18:1ff]

If we see the only power that adequately empowers the Church is the presence of the living Christ, prayer is worth the battle

B. We fully come to understand and experience the Lordship of Christ as we pray together in humble dependence on the Lord for his power -- Acts 4:23-31

1. God deliberately leads us into humble circumstances as we pursue the kingdom and minister his love, justice and mercy to the nations for specific reasons:

a. It helps us identify with the poor and oppressed, who are the focus of the kingdom [Cf Israel; Phil 2:5-8, cf 1 Cor 4:8-16]

b. It helps us rely on God alone for resurrection life [2 Cor 1:8-11]

c. It makes it clear to ourselves and everyone else that the power is from God [2 Cor 4:7-12]

d. It keeps us from giving into an oppressive, divisive spirit [1 Cor 1:26-31]

e. It is the most fitting way for the greatness of God's power to be displayed [2 Cor 12:7-10]

2. These circumstances provide for a corporate humbling and breaking of the will and pride of the team: Christ is Lord -- not us
 - Self-sufficiency -- the dynamic of sin pooled together has a greater effect than individually [Gen 6]; so must the corporate breaking [Compare Rev 3:14ff]
 - We must ask God to change the harvester first - and he does this again and again by stripping away every hope but Christ [Hebrews 12:27,28; I Peter 4:17] -- these are corporate humblings
 - This sometimes requires a crisis as severe as salvation. Must let God break us. Embrace it, though it is naturally the last thing we want
3. This kind of praying recognizes we need the supernatural work of the Spirit in building the team [Ephesians 4:1-8; 1 Cor 12:12ff]
 - Consider the 12 apostles and the diverse personalities/egos and natural barriers - fishermen with bad tempers, a tax collector for Rome and political zealots for Israel
 - The team needs to be seen as something flowing from Christ's power to do his will, or may as well stay home
 - The evidence of this comes to us strongly when we go out and mess up and realize we went presumptuously; we think we're spiritual, ready. The failure shows us that we must re-learn God again and again -- a change in heart attitude which results in actions that flow increasingly out of the presence and will of Christ

C. Prayer is the spiritual means for moving the kingdom forward through spiritual barriers -- Luke 11:2-4 cf 18:1-8

1. The barriers have an outward look and expression but are rooted in spiritual, invisible forces [Rev 13; Eph 6:12]
 - You can't see heart attitudes - but they affect everything we are/do
 - You can't see spiritual forces of evil at work - but their effect is all around us
 - Prayer is the means God has appointed for breaking through these walls

2. Without prayer as the central force for ministry you can only achieve what is humanly possible [Mark 9:17-29, cf Eph 3:20, Eph 1:15ff]

- Failure occurs, and we can always find secondary reasons. It is easy to analyze failure. But often the reasons are only superficial; the real issue may be because we never really moved into God's plane of existence through prayer. When God does answer prayer and move, we are often quite aware of all the points of weakness and failure that could have derailed the ministry, but they did not. Why not? Because God graciously hears the prayer of his people, and in grace gives us more than we could hope for
- Prayer is a barometer of a team's faith: faith that rests on the knowledge we can't do it. If we sense we can, there won't be much prayer

II. The Effect of Prayer: the Presence of the Spirit in the Team ~ Acts 4:23-31

A. It gives us a true sense of the powerful presence of the risen Christ through the Spirit

1. Christ's authority becomes tangible; real to us (he is LORD and Messiah)

- He is the Ruler of the Universe; we feed each other's faith as we express and believe the promises of God together; (gangs on Etzel - not really all that scary, but because of deception and lies made us afraid). A key issue here is to tie our faith directly to God's clear promises.
- He owns us; He is sending his Spirit to build the Church; He is the powerful intercessor [Isa 66:1-2; Acts 4:18-20]

2. He is the head of the team

- We are here to do his will: find out what it is and submit to it. Gain the sense of being a bystander/participant, watching the power of Christ at work. Prayer takes this seriously; He must move us forward [Acts 16:6-10]

B. The presence of the Spirit to cleanse and empower

1. Cleansing -- the honest, ongoing need for repentance and grace in ourselves first. Most folks want others to change first; Christ always wants to start with us—don't see that as an obstacle.

2. Power -- a ministry of the Word that comes in power, love and deep conviction
 - Comes out of fellowship with the Father and the Son [John 15]
 - Comes out of the Spirit's enabling power to do the work [Luke 11:1-13]
 - Remembering that this often takes a very humbling form [cf. Acts 4 or II Cor. 12:21]

III. Obstacles to Prayer

A. Yourselves as a team

Your success -- why don't we pray? An opinion you hold about yourself as a group. A quiet pride; maybe not loud boasting, just an absence of prayer, because successful and don't need it

Your busyness -- "so much to do" - as soon as we say that we are saying the kingdom work is not spiritual; it relies on me/us. We are central, now the CEO. The Risen Christ is not central to the ongoing function of ministry

Your wisdom - if teams don't work, can usually find common sense reason why; Those common sense reasons elude us because we are not listening in prayer. Not listening because proud people don't listen well [cf. Proverbs 2:1-11]

It is hard to pray when you don't have a lot of questions

B. Satan

-- is an accuser of God: feeds into self-pity so you are full of nothing but your own hurts and concerns (often why prayer meetings are boring): **If we don't focus on kingdom issues and the nature of kingdom promises, we will burn out. We need to have our hearts and minds captivated by the faithful commitment of God to bring his good to this world; through us as his chosen people**

-- is an accuser of the brethren [Rev 12:10] if we do the right thing, conflict will arise; your life will feel like it is falling apart; Satan will accuse all day, every day

Prayer is the place these things are resolved and put into perspective

C. The World

The expectations **are already there for what you do to be totally explained in human terms; it consternates the world to have you “spiritualize” something, so you must know how to stand your ground.**

IV. Getting into the Pattern of Effective Team Prayer ~ Acts 2 -4

A. Indoor - Outdoor

Pray / Go Out

B. Humility

In weakness

Don't gloss over difficulty – that is what makes prayer necessary

C. Believing the Promises

The Promises of God are God's means for feeding faith; don't substitute something else for them. You need a deep understanding of the Promises and how they apply [cf. Acts 4]

D. Asking for the Spirit's Power to Love

1. Being taken deeper into the love of Christ [Eph 3:13-21] - the focus here is not so much on his love for you, but on his love for the nations; his commitment to bring restoration and reconciliation through the gospel

We need an atmosphere of love and acceptance so we can deal honestly with all the issues that arise; if not, it will be hard for “sinners” and unbelievers to feel the reality of the acceptance we have in Christ

2. Asking for wisdom to work that love out, or get frustrated
[Phil 1:9-11, Eph 1:15ff]

3. Asking for boldness: or die because of failure of nerve
[Eph 1:19-20; Gethsemane]

E. Praise and prayer as you go -- 2 Chronicles 20:20-23

F. Preparing your mind for action, opposition and conflict -- I Pet 1:13ff, 4:12ff

G. Remember God's grace in Christ -- Romans 5:1-2