

Becoming a praying congregation

It was very dear to Jesus' heart and also a command from Him that the church should be a house of prayer (**Matt.21:13**). He quotes **Isaiah 56:7** and so confirms that God's plan with His "church" (Old Testament) is also His plan with the church in the New Testament. It is still one of the greatest challenges for churches to be houses of prayer. The following are a number of guidelines that churches can use to give more momentum to prayer in the congregation:

1. A praying congregation starts with *individuals who pray*. The most important focus of spiritual leaders in the congregation remains helping individuals to pray with greater boldness and more faith. Individuals need guidance on how to enter into a deeper and more intimate and personal relationship with God.
2. Continuous, uncomplicated and practical *instruction in prayer* is necessary. Numerous sermons and books on prayer give wonderful spiritual content, but are mostly lacking in practical guidelines on how to plan your daily quiet time. Teach Believers how to use a prayer journal. Give them a simple layout of what to pray for, how to listen to God and how to pray the Word.
3. *Establishing prayer groups* in the congregation is of the utmost importance. Boost existing prayer groups and encourage the establishment of new prayer groups. It helps to get together businessmen, for example, in one or more prayer group, and also to encourage young people, children, women and specific interest groups to start their own groups. The different ministries of the congregation must be encouraged to establish a prayer movement or prayer group for their ministry, on the understanding that they also pray in those groups themselves and not expect others to do the 'prayer work' while they just do the other work.
4. The concept 'intercessor' can create many problems in a congregation. In many congregations the unhealthy situation sometimes develops where a few people in the congregation become known as the 'intercessors' or 'those who pray'. Intercession is a *type of prayer*, it is not a *type of person*. Should we limit the prayer ministry of a congregation to a number of *intercessors*, we exclude 98% of the congregation who could also be praying. The 98% could eventually feel their prayers are not good enough, they are not 'experts', God will not hear them so readily, and then a group of people start saying, "We'll do the work and you (the intercessors) can pray for it." This is not Biblical and the quickest way to immobilise an entire congregation. It deprives the so-called 'non-intercessors' from the *privilege and responsibility* to be involved in the prayer ministry of the congregation, as well as praying for their families, the community, the town/city and the world. The Word of God is clear; every member of the church should be an intercessor, one who prays – every child, young person and adult, irrespective of profession or position.
5. If you want to raise the level of prayer in the congregation, you must be involved as spiritual leader. Leaders cannot encourage the congregation to pray, but not be involved themselves. The apostles say very clearly in **Acts 6:4** that they (as spiritual leaders) have the responsibility to concentrate on *prayer* and the ministry of the Word. You cannot expect others to pray, to carry the prayer responsibility of the congregations, if you as leader are not involved.
6. Preachers can encourage people to pray by doing, among other things, some of the following:
 - Regular preaching on prayer or making prayer an important part of the message.
 - On a regular basis, tell real-life stories of answer to prayer from the pulpit as well as at other gatherings of the congregation
 - Present seminars on prayer – a Friday night and Saturday morning, for example, could work well.
 - Encourage church members to read books on prayer – give the titles of one or two at a time.
 - Choose a book on prayer and get members to work through it in Bible Study groups or cell groups.