



THE  
Potential  
and Power  
of Prayer

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How to Unleash  
the Praying Church

**Chuck Lawless**  
THOM S. RAINER, SERIES EDITOR

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*The Potential and Power of Prayer: How to Unleash the Praying Church*

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## Why No Power?

I STARTED MY FIRST pastorate when I was twenty years old. As you might imagine, I had no idea what I was doing. That small country church knew me through one of their previous pastors, and I suspect I was the best they could afford at the time. The nineteen people who made up the congregation that first Sunday could hardly pay anything close to a full-time salary, but I was willing to take anything for the opportunity to preach.

I had become a believer at the age of thirteen, and I faithfully attended church. But attendance didn't mean I was strongly or intentionally disciplined. I did the best I could to walk with Christ, but with very little equipping for the task. Still, I was certain that God was calling me to preach, and the invitation from that little church in southwestern Ohio lit my fire for ministry.

I wish I could say that the lay leaders in that church were



thoroughly equipped and ready to help their young, rookie pastor do his job, but that was not the case. They were great people who loved the Lord, but no one had intentionally discipled most of them, either. In many respects, I was a baby believer leading other baby believers. And though most of the congregation was older than I was, they didn't know much more than I did about following Jesus.

However, there were three things we knew we had to do: *preach the Bible, tell others about Jesus, and pray*. I cringe to think about my sermons in those days; in fact, I'm glad I preached them at a time when cassette tapes were state of the art rather than internet streaming. Still, I was convinced I needed to preach the Word, and I did the best I could. The church members were gracious enough to affirm my preaching even as they prayed for me to improve.

Those same members, despite their own lack of training, loved telling others about Jesus. They told their family members, their coworkers, their neighbors, their classmates, and anyone else who would listen (and, I'm certain, some folks who did *not* want to listen). Every Sunday, they told me stories about evangelizing people in our community, and our church began to grow. Week after week, we had the privilege of baptizing new believers. Within two years, our little church of nineteen saw more than one hundred baptisms of new Christ-followers. I found it especially exciting that many of these new believers were parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, and cousins of our church members. So productive were our evangelism efforts that we grieved as a congregation if a week passed without someone coming to Christ.

How did we get there? We prayed. A lot. Together and individually. Passionately and persistently. Faithfully and fiercely. We prayed because we didn't know what else to do. And God blessed our efforts.

## **The Motive behind Our Prayers**

Looking back, I realize that we prayed for at least four reasons.

First, we were desperate for God to do something among us and through us. The church had been through tough times for several years prior to my coming as pastor. The congregation of nineteen people had once listed more than a hundred regular attenders, but strife and division had decimated the church. We knew that only God's intervention would enable us to survive and thrive. Desperation is a good thing when it drives us to our knees before our heavenly Father.

Second, we realized we had no idea what we were doing as a church. I certainly did not—and I was the pastor! I had never performed a baptism, led the Lord's Supper, offered premarital or marital counseling, created a church budget, or moderated a business meeting. So I prayed. The few remaining members were wearing many hats, tackling multiple responsibilities, and giving their all to tasks for which they were not always gifted. So they prayed. Just like desperation, recognizing our inability pushes us to pray.

Third, we wanted our loved ones and friends to get saved, but we knew we could never change their hearts on our own. We didn't spend much time thinking theologically about their separation from God, yet we knew from experience the hardened hearts of some of the people we loved. We knew them well enough to know that God would have to intervene if they were ever to respond to the gospel. In some cases, we knew how many times in the past they had refused to even listen. So we prayed. And we kept praying until God answered. Like desperation and inability, a deep burden for nonbelievers compels us to pray.

Fourth, prayer was something that every member of our church family could do. Men prayed together. Women prayed

together. Men and women prayed together. Young believers who knew nothing about prayer talked to God the best they knew how. In fact, their passion for God sometimes exceeded that of others in the church who had been believers far longer. Teenagers prayed, sometimes challenging their parents with their heartbrokenness for nonbelieving classmates and friends. Even the young kids prayed at times—and there is nothing like hearing a preschooler or a grade schooler talk to God with childlike openness and honesty. In our congregation, kneeling in prayer (literally and figuratively) put us all on the same level, regardless of our status in the community or in the church. Praying together made us even more like a family.

I am a strong believer in teaching people how to pray more effectively, but I am thankful that no one requires significant training to simply talk to God. The youngest, least-trained believer can pray, and the smallest, least-trained church can see God work when they pray faithfully and persistently. When prayer becomes part of the DNA of a church, God's power is released.

You will hear me speak often about getting prayer into the DNA of our churches. By DNA, I mean a fundamental commitment or foundation that characterizes the church. When something—such as prayer—is so ingrained in a church that they (and others) equate the church with that commitment, that's DNA-level stuff. I want people to know your church as a congregation that takes prayer seriously, continually turns to God for guidance, and sees answers to their prayers. For now, ask yourself these probing (perhaps even uncomfortable) questions:

“Is prayer in *my* DNA?”

“Is prayer in the DNA of my church?”

## **The Struggle of Prayer**

In my mind's eye, I can still see those folks from my first church, even though my ministry with them was several decades ago. Since then, I have pastored another church in Ohio for more than eleven years, taught at a seminary for more than twenty-five years, worked with a mission agency, served as an interim pastor in several churches, and studied church growth in North America and around the world. Through all those roles and responsibilities, I've learned that my experience with prayer in that little church is more the exception than the rule. In fact, I have drawn several conclusions that led to the writing of this book.

- Becoming a praying church is not as easy as it sounds.
- As churches seek to grow, they often focus more on demographics and internal issues than on spiritual matters.
- Many believers have never learned to pray because no one intentionally taught them to pray.
- Many who once leaned on God in prayerful dependence now too often lean on themselves.
- A lack of prayer goes hand in hand with a lack of knowledge of the Word of God.
- Prayer ministries usually start small, grow slowly, and seldom involve every church member.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

### ***Becoming a praying church is not as easy as it sounds.***

In my first church in Ohio, we did not know how to pray well, but we did make our requests known to God with great abandon.

We simply did what the apostle Paul commanded: “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done” (Philippians 4:6). When I moved to my second pastorate, I went to a larger church with more staff and more activities, and I learned that ministry can sometimes get in the way of prayer. Even those of us who know better can preach and teach about prayer without really praying. We talk about it more than we do it.

In my years as a church consultant, I’ve been surprised by the number of churches seeking outside assistance who have not made it a priority to *pray* about their needs. I often ask these churches whether they have a prayer team who will support us as we work together. Rarely is there a team already in place. Some churches have a prayer ministry leader (and it is seldom the pastor, which we’ll discuss later), but they have not made the connection between their recognized need for outside consulting and their more important need for God’s power. Their praying as a church has been largely limited to praying for the physical needs of the congregation. That is *not* DNA-level prayer.

One problem, I suspect, is that congregations often lose the passion for prayer that drove my first church to their knees. As a church sees steady growth, develops programming and structure, and hires staff to do the work, their desperation for God wanes. In turn, a lack of desperation undermines the second thing that pushes us to pray: recognizing our inabilities. When we start to believe we can do ministry on our own, we think we don’t need to pray as much.

Next, losing a sense of burden for the lost decreases our urgency to pray. I suspect that many members of evangelical churches today are not entirely convinced that a personal relationship with Christ is necessary for salvation—even though Jesus

says in John 14:6 that he is the only way to God. In fact, a 2020 study showed that 48 percent of adults in America believe that “if a person is generally good, or does enough good things during their life, they will ‘earn’ a place in Heaven.”<sup>1</sup> The same study showed that 41 percent of evangelicals believe in a works-based salvation by “being or doing good.”<sup>2</sup> If good people can go to heaven apart from an encounter with Jesus, evangelism is hardly necessary. If evangelism isn’t necessary, why worry about praying for those who claim no relationship with Jesus? Seemingly capable, self-dependent congregations with little or no burden for nonbelievers simply do not pray well.

To be honest, even those of us who long to depend on God, who recognize our inabilities and carry a burden for the lost, still sometimes struggle to pray consistently. Our theology may push us toward prayer, but our practice lags behind. Several causes (noted below) contribute to this failure, but the conclusion is the same: Praying as a church is seldom as easy as it seemed in my first days of ministry.

***As churches seek to grow, they often focus more on demographics and internal issues than on spiritual matters.***

In church growth circles, we often refer to three sets of factors that affect a church’s growth: *contextual factors*, *institutional factors*, and *spiritual factors*.<sup>3</sup> Contextual factors are outside issues—political, sociological, cultural, and environmental—over which the church has no control.<sup>4</sup> For example, changes in population or demographics may contribute to a church’s growth or decline. Globally, persecution is another contextual factor, though history teaches that persecution of the church often leads to growth rather than decline.

Institutional factors are internal issues over which the church

has some control. These might include such things as church polity, leadership direction, financial commitments, and unresolved conflicts. Institutional factors in nongrowing churches are often wrapped up in unhealthy traditionalism.

Spiritual factors, on the other hand, are factors “in the heavens”—that is, governed by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, who is “not subject to contextual or institutional factors.”<sup>5</sup> An emphasis on prayer (or lack thereof) may be an institutional factor, but the *power* of prayer is a spiritual one. Apart from prayer, we can tackle issues in the church only on an earthly level.

Churches who are focused on growth tend to address contextual factors (such as demographics) and institutional factors (such as programming), but they give little attention to the spiritual factors of individual and corporate prayer. If they do address prayer, it is often because they know they *should* rather than because they see it as a lifeline for the congregation. Part of my purpose in writing is to address the need to do something different.

***Many believers have never learned to pray because no one intentionally taught them to pray.***

Many churches are guilty of *telling* believers to pray without *teaching* them how to do it. The result is frustration—Christians who want to be obedient to God in prayer but are not certain how to do it. Even many courses on prayer are more focused on the transfer of information than the practice of prayer. And then pastors and other church leaders become frustrated with their members for not doing what they haven’t taught them to do!

Most churches *talk* about prayer. Churches with prayer in their DNA actually *pray*. Which of these comparisons best illustrates your church?

- Churches that *talk* about prayer schedule prayer meetings (which relatively few members attend). Churches with prayer in their DNA *pray* at their prayer meetings.
- Churches that *talk* about prayer may *preach* about prayer. Churches with prayer in their DNA *preach* about prayer and *pray* about preaching.
- Churches that *talk* about prayer may have a prayer list. Churches with prayer in their DNA consistently and intentionally *pray through* their prayer list and report God's answers.
- Churches that *talk* about prayer may have a prayer ministry—among others. Churches with prayer in their DNA have a prayer ministry that *covers in prayer* every other ministry.
- Churches that *talk* about prayer have leaders who *talk* about prayer. Churches with prayer in their DNA have leaders who *model* prayer.
- Churches that *talk* about prayer respond *reactively* to the enemy's attacks. Churches with prayer in their DNA *pray proactively* in preparation for the enemy's attacks.
- Churches that *talk* about prayer *hope* God will do great things. Churches with prayer in their DNA *expect* God to do great things.
- Churches that *talk* about prayer do *not* threaten the enemy. Churches with prayer in their DNA *make the devil shake*.<sup>6</sup>

Because our churches have not done a good job of teaching people how to pray, many Christians have learned only by observing



others. Unfortunately, one thing they've learned is to pray *reactively* rather than *proactively*.<sup>7</sup>

Think about prayer in your church. If you have a prayer list, what does it usually take to get your name on it? In many cases, it takes a sickness or tragedy. When we learn about the problem, we pray. Likewise, we pray for families when they are struggling; for young people who are wandering; and for other churches when we hear they are fighting or when their pastor leaves. Responding to needs in prayer isn't *wrong*, but how much stronger would our churches and our families be if we consistently prayed for one another *before* trouble sets in?

Seminary students I have taught over the years most often tell me that prayer is the most difficult spiritual discipline to maintain. They know they should be praying, but that knowledge doesn't always translate into disciplined action. When I ask these future church leaders about their role models—about the people who taught them how to pray—few are able to name *anyone*. They have learned to pray on their own, if they've learned at all.

I fear that the leaders in our churches, our Christian universities, and our seminaries are not only struggling with prayer themselves, but are also sending out the next generations of believers who share the same struggle. I'm concerned that we are producing prayerless pastors who are shepherding prayerless and powerless churches. One consequence is that we are sending missionaries to the front lines with only superficial prayer support.

***Many who once leaned on God in prayerful dependence now too often lean on themselves.***

As an educator, I believe wholeheartedly in training, but I fear we may educate our students out of dependence on God. Even the best church leaders who ran to God in prayer when they first

entered ministry now sometimes rely on their education, their experience, and their track record more than they rely on God. That kind of prayerlessness—to which we all are susceptible—is simply “idolatry of the self.”<sup>8</sup>

Prayerful dependence on God—both for churches and individuals—is not our default setting. Individually and corporately, we may start out leaning on God, but then retreat into self-dependence and only perfunctory prayer. We may mask our prayerlessness with busyness for God, but unless we halt it early, spiritual decline sets in.

Far too easily, we become like the disciples of Jesus in Mark 9:14-29, who tried to heal a demon-possessed boy. The boy’s father had brought him to the disciples, surely because he had heard they had the power to exorcise demons. Jesus had previously sent out the twelve disciples on a ministry tour, and “they cast out many demons and healed many sick people, anointing them with olive oil” (Mark 6:13). On another occasion, he sent out seventy-two other disciples, who were so successful that, when they reported back to Jesus, they said, “Lord, even the demons obey us when we use your name!” (Luke 10:17).

However, that was not the case this time. The grieving father’s words to Jesus were simple, clear, and tragic: “I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, *but they couldn’t do it*” (Mark 9:18, italics added). Despite their previous success, something was different this time. Whatever it was, it left the boy in agony and the father struggling with his faith. His plaintive words to Jesus, “I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24) revealed not only his internal conflict, but also the disciples’ failure to strengthen this man’s faith when they had the opportunity.

Later, when the disciples asked Jesus privately about their failure, he told them, “This kind can be cast out only by prayer”

(Mark 9:29). Apparently, they had tried to cast out the demon without praying.

Matthew 17:20 tells us they also lacked faith—“even as small as a mustard seed”—so they had entered this encounter without much going for them. Whatever the reason, they didn’t pray, which meant they tried to cast out a demon in their own power. Perhaps because of their previous success, they relied solely on their own ability in this case to try to do life-changing ministry. But they failed miserably and would have left the boy in bondage had Jesus not intervened.

I’m afraid this is the way, too often, we do ministry and lead our churches. Early in our Christian walk, we relied on God and his power. But sometimes, over time, the tensions and struggles of Christian living and ministry weaken our faith. At other times, we unintentionally rely on our own strength to do God’s work; after all, if we were successful yesterday, we will surely be successful today. Prayer loses its place in our lives, and we fight today’s battles based on “yesterday’s power.”<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, we fall into the trap of prayerlessness, which the late Jack Taylor defined years ago as “that state in which one prays less than he ought, less than the Father desires, and less than [he] himself knows he should.”<sup>10</sup> Even though we know better, we still do not pray like we should. And as John Onwuchekwa writes in his 2018 book on prayer, “Prayerlessness is spiritual suicide.”<sup>11</sup>

***A lack of prayer goes hand in hand with a lack of knowledge of the Word of God.***

A 2019 Lifeway Research study found that 32 percent of those who attend church at least once a month read the Bible daily, and a majority of churchgoers (59 percent) read the Bible at least a few times a week.<sup>12</sup> In my years as a pastor, however, I observed

that merely reading the Bible doesn't necessarily lead to increased, retained knowledge of the Scriptures. For some people, Bible reading is a "check the box" discipline that includes little meditation or memorization of the Word.

But when we dig into God's Word regularly, it is difficult not to see *prayer* throughout the Bible. Some years ago, I looked for every reference to prayer as I read through the Bible in a year, and I highlighted each one with a blue highlighter. I saw prayer mentioned so often that I finished my reading most days with a deepened burden to pray more. Sometimes I immediately set my Bible aside, buried my face in the floor, and prayed because of what I had read.

I wish I could list all the references here, but maybe this sample from a portion of the Old Testament will whet your appetite to search the Scriptures for more. (We will cover examples from the New Testament in later chapters.)

- Abraham intercedes for the righteous in Sodom (Genesis 18:16–19:16)
- Moses prays for the people who created the golden calf (Exodus 32:11-14)
- Moses prays for the complaining people (Numbers 11:1-3)
- Joshua prays when his warriors lose the battle at Ai (Joshua 7:6-9)
- Gideon asks for signs from the Lord (Judges 6)
- Hannah prays to have a child (1 Samuel 1:9-16)
- David seeks direction about attacking the Philistines (2 Samuel 5:19)

- Solomon prays at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:22-53)
- Hezekiah prays for a longer life (2 Kings 20:1-11)
- Jehoshaphat prays in a time of war (2 Chronicles 20:3-13)
- Nehemiah prays as he mourns the distress of the people in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:4-11)
- David prays about deliverance from his enemies (Psalm 3:1-7); about thirsting for God (Psalm 63); about God's knowledge of us (Psalm 139); and about our need for God's help (Psalm 142:1-7)
- David prays for forgiveness for his sin with Bathsheba (Psalm 51)
- Jeremiah prays about purchasing a field (Jeremiah 32:16-25)
- Daniel prays on behalf of a rebellious people (Daniel 9:4-19)
- Jonah prays from the belly of a fish (Jonah 2:1-9)

I could list many other examples of prayer in the Old Testament, but for now, simply allow this truth to sink in: The God of the Bible is a communicating God who invites us to come to him in prayer. He hears the cries of his people, even though sometimes we do not recognize that truth. When we study the stories about prayer in the Bible, we learn a valuable lesson about God's power and faithfulness.

***Prayer ministries usually start small, grow slowly, and seldom involve every church member.***

As one who has a PhD in evangelism and church growth, I naturally think of *numbers* as one way to evaluate the growth and health of a church. Though I reject an idolatrous fixation with numbers, I agree with a hero of mine from the past, Charles Spurgeon:

I am not among those who decry statistics, nor do I consider that they are productive of all manner of evil; for they do much good if they are accurate, and if men use them lawfully. It is a good thing for people to see the nakedness of the land through statistics of decrease, that they may be driven on their knees before the Lord to seek prosperity; and, on the other hand, it is by no means an evil thing for workers to be encouraged by having some account of results set before them. I should be very sorry if the practice of adding up, and deducting, and giving in the net result were to be abandoned, for it must be right to know our numerical condition.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to prayer ministries specifically, I am less concerned about growing large numbers of participants. I certainly want all members praying, but I realize that raising up God-dependent prayer warriors takes time. We must be willing to persevere and run the race well to become a praying church. We must keep running when the work gets hard, and press on toward the finish line together as a congregation.

Prayer ministry is also typically behind the scenes, with little recognition or praise for those who pray. If I determine that I must have a large group to have an effective prayer ministry, it is likely I will not get there easily. On the other hand, a few people who can

touch heaven in prayer are better than dozens of participants who are not truly committed to prayer.

If the Lord gives you only a handful of prayer warriors to launch your group, rejoice! Thank him for what he has provided, rather than becoming discouraged because more people are not participating. Start with the faithful few, if necessary, and let the prayer ministry grow at its own pace. Embers of prayer may eventually produce a flame in your church, but you must be patient and persistent.

### **Hope Forged on Our Knees**

I realize the previous section may sound pessimistic. It's hard to read about churches that only talk about prayer but don't teach it, and believers who do not know what the Bible says about prayer or who live in self-dependence, without becoming discouraged. Believe me, that is not my goal. I want to deal honestly with the challenges, but I also see glimmers of hope that make me excited about the potential to create churches with prayer in their DNA.

For example, the seminary where I teach made a commitment several years ago to not only be a great commission seminary, but also a praying one. That's how we responded when two prayer-warrior leaders in our denomination challenged us to make sure we were graduating men and women who know how to pray. Our commitment to address this issue led us to restructure our executive leadership team to free me up to oversee these efforts. Today, we have student-led prayer meetings, faculty prayer gatherings, chapel prayer moments, online prayer meetings, a National Day of Prayer emphasis, weekly classroom prayer requests, and prayer training in our curricular and cocurricular activities. We are just one institution, but I pray others will join us in this effort.

I have also seen a growing attention to prayer in increasing numbers of mentoring relationships among older and younger believers alike. I know many young leaders who want mature Christian mentors, and they are seeking older leaders to show them how to walk well with God. Particularly, they want to address the weaknesses in their lives—which often includes prayer. Having felt the lack of adequate role models, as they admit their need, seek guidance, and strive to grow in grace, they gravitate toward older believers who know God. As long as we can help them connect with prayer-warrior mentors, I have nothing but hope for this young generation as they learn to pray.

I am privileged to have a pastoral mentor, Tom Elliff, who is the most prayerful man I know. I have learned from him by listening to his prayers and reading his books on prayer.<sup>14</sup> I am in my sixties, he is in his upper seventies, and he himself has mentors who are in their nineties! He still learns from them, and I get to learn from him.

When I think about young leaders, my concern is the difficulty of finding prayer mentors like Tom who have time to invest in them. I long to know church leaders who pray in such a way that others come to them to learn their discipline of prayer. My hope is that this book will help produce more prayerful leaders to serve as strong role models—and perhaps you will be one of them.

Through technology and other means, accessibility to believers around the world has made it possible for us to learn how to pray from other brothers and sisters in Christ. Some live in risky places, where desperation, inability, and burden are part of daily life, and prayer is a matter of spiritual survival. Prayer is in their spiritual DNA in ways I seldom see among evangelicals in North America. Three stories come to mind that illustrate this point.

First, a group of believers in Eastern Europe invited me some



years ago to lead a prayer training conference in their country.<sup>15</sup> I spent many hours preparing for the training, and I felt equipped and ready to go when the conference began. As we began the meeting, the national leader called us to prayer. Everyone then stood (which was customary, I learned) and began praying aloud one by one. I understood their prayers only through a translator whispering in my ear, but I didn't need to know their language to recognize their passion. They took the privilege of speaking to God on behalf of themselves and others quite seriously. Two hours later—*two hours!*—the leader finally said “amen.” Then he invited me up to teach everyone how to pray. What would *you* have said? I may have been the professor in the room, but those Eastern European Christians were *my* teachers.

Second, on the wall in my office across from my desk, I have mounted two prayer mats from a church I visited in East Asia years ago. During their worship service, I watched the believers place their mats on the floor, kneel down, and pray to God as if they were the only person in the room. I had heard about their focus on prayer before I arrived, but experiencing it was something else entirely. I don't have the words to describe the sense of unity and power I felt in that room that day. Now, whenever I see the worn, dirty spots on those two prayer mats on my wall, they remind me of a people who were seeking God with all their heart, soul, and strength. And I want to pray like they prayed.

Third, during the lockdown days of COVID-19 in 2020, our seminary sponsored online prayer meetings, where I was able to meet prayer-focused international believers. Some were feeling isolated and alone, and they welcomed any opportunity to join with other believers in prayer. I am grateful that digital technology offers us all the gift of connection with missionaries and internationals around the world. I encourage you to think of ways that

your church might connect with believers overseas simply to pray with them.

A student from Central Asia who participated in one of our prayer meetings stayed awake until the middle of the night to join us live, and I'm glad he did. Prayer matters so much to this young man that he prioritized prayer over sleep. His presence among our students was both refreshing and convicting. In addition to verbalizing prayers on behalf of others, he encouraged us with his faith and challenged us with his trust in God in a most difficult situation. Not many would have made the commitment this brother did to join us for prayer, but I know several people from around the world who would.

### **Where We're Headed**

Before we continue, I want to share with you my presuppositions and my plan for the remaining chapters.

First, I stand on the Word of God. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV). By the time you finish this book, I want you to have made a stronger commitment to prayer *and* have a deeper desire to read the Bible. One without the other is insufficient for Christian growth. I make no apologies that the rest of the chapters are filled with Scripture.

Second, every believer and church I know—beginning with myself and my congregation—has room for improvement in prayer. Even the most persistent prayer warriors long to pray more; the more they know God through prayer, the more they want to pray. Likewise, the most prayer-centered churches know they still have room for growth.

Third, everyone can grow in their prayer life, even if that growth is slow or sporadic. Prayer should be a natural and central

part of the Christian life. Most of the time, though, we have to *practice it as a habit* before it becomes part of who we are.

If you were to evaluate your prayer life on a scale from one to ten, I assume you would like to move up to a ten as quickly as possible. But it seldom happens that way. Moving up the scale *at all* is a step in the right direction. If you move from even a one to a two as a result of reading this book, I will be pleased. The goal is *progress*, not perfection.

Fourth, this book will address your personal prayer life, but I am most concerned about getting believers to pray *together*. I want to see prayer become embedded in the DNA of churches everywhere. My emphasis on praying with other believers is quite intentional. No one learns how to pray well on their own, and there is tremendous power in corporate prayer as believers agree together and seek God together.

Ultimately, it isn't as important *how* prayer happens or *where* it happens. What matters most is that it *happens*. And the first step in making it happen is for individual believers to commit themselves to prayer. To that end, my approach in this book is *personal*—not because I'm such a great prayer warrior, but precisely because I'm not. I am a fellow traveler with you on this journey, and I still have a lot to learn.

Finally, let me lay out the plan for the rest of the book so you'll know where we're going.

In chapter 2, we'll talk about what prayer is and why it matters. I will give you my definition of prayer and introduce you to a description of prayer that really speaks to my heart. My hope is that you'll finish the chapter with a greater desire to pray.

Chapter 3 will take us into the Bible in a concentrated way. We will examine Jesus' prayer in the Gospel of Luke and the early church's prayer in the book of Acts. These two books are not the

only ones in the Bible that address these topics, but they provide a good example of history-changing prayer. Studying the prayer lives of Jesus and the early church should produce a strong conviction and a heartfelt desire to pray more.

Chapter 4 focuses on the relationship between prayer and spiritual warfare. Paul warned us in no uncertain terms that we are fighting against supernatural principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12). He didn't want us to miss the reality of the battle, but neither did he want us to fear it. This chapter focuses particularly on praying for the work of evangelism.

Chapter 5 addresses leaders in general, but focuses specifically on pastors, who are typically the primary role models in a praying church. As I wrote this chapter, I thought of ways I might have prayed better when I was a full-time pastor. The churches I led probably would have prayed more if I had led the way more intentionally.

Frankly, I am grateful for any opportunity I have today to help churches pray, because I look back with some regret. If you are a pastor, I hope chapter 5 challenges you to pray more. But even if you're not a pastor, I hope this chapter will inspire you to pray more for your pastor and other church leaders. Everyone will be stronger when we intercede for one another.

Chapter 6 broadens the focus to include the entire congregation. Praying together matters, but many churches lose their intentional focus on prayer. They must then choose to restart their prayer effort. How they do that will vary by congregation. This chapter offers several practical ideas for churches who want prayer to become part of their DNA.

A brief final chapter concludes with a caution to prayer warriors and a challenge to church leaders. These closing thoughts may surprise you in a book about prayer, but I trust they will make sense to you by the time you arrive there.

## Conclusion

As we conclude this chapter, this is my prayer for you:

*Father, I praise you for who you are: a personal God who communicates with us and invites us to your throne in prayer. I thank you for praying role models—even if we have only a few of them—who push us and equip us to pray more. I pray that some who read this book will be role models in prayer for multiple generations.*

*I thank you, God, for my readers. Wherever they may serve in your Kingdom's work, teach them to pray so that they might teach others. May they find so much peace and power on their knees that they continually want to meet you there. Father, let it be for all of us!*

*In Jesus' name, amen.*