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T O G E T H E R  
I N P R A Y E R

*Coming to God in Community*



  
IVP Connect

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## INTRODUCTION

“FEED MY HUNGRY CHILDREN.” But there are so many!

“Make disciples of all nations.” I don’t even know where they are!

“Care for the orphan and the widow. Visit those who are sick and in prison.” How do I get started?

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” You mean, not just “don’t hate my neighbor,” but take actual steps to show love?

Over time, God has placed many different visions on my heart. Too many, in fact, for one person to make any significant difference in all of them. At times, I’ve been led to despair for all that I *couldn’t* do in answer to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. In response, God has led me to one consistent answer: prayer. I can’t reach all the unreached peoples, but I can get informed and pray for them. I can’t feed all the hungry children, but I can care enough to pray for them (and I can feed a few!).

Even so, the needs for prayer seem nearly limitless, and

I'm still just one person. Like many others, I struggle to pray consistently for all the people and situations I know God is leading me to pray for. But the good news is, I don't have to. I'm part of a body, with people and groups to whom God gives different lasting passions.

What if all those groups could pray more effectively together, both for their own needs and for the needs of the world around them? That's the passion behind this book. I'm convinced that God's call to prayer is a call not just to individuals but to churches and groups as communities. Consider the following commands to pray in the New Testament:

I urge . . . that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made . . . for kings and all those in authority. (1 Tim 2:1-2)

Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message. (Col 4:3)

Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. (Heb 13:3)

In the highly individualistic Western world, we personalize and individualize these commands, but originally these and other commands to prayer in the New Testament were given almost exclusively to *groups* of people. Just as being part of the body of Christ is a major component of what it means to be a Christian, so praying in community is a major part of what it means to pray.

Yet, praying in community is something that many Christians find very difficult, if they even try it at all. Many of us

have been in group prayer times that seemed to drag on interminably, struggling to merely stay awake (let alone contribute). We've been part of group prayer experiences that left us feeling preached to rather than lifted up into God's presence. We've seen our group prayer times devolve into sharing and counseling sessions. And we've concluded that group prayer is at best a necessary evil. Even those among us who have strong personal prayer lives often leave times of group prayer feeling disconnected and uninspired.

It doesn't have to be this way. The church of our earliest records was united, regularly experiencing God's miracles and leaning heavily on God in prayer. Together, the believers sought God's wisdom in making decisions (Acts 1:23-26), his intervention in difficulty (Acts 12:5), his blessing on ministry (Acts 13:3), his strength in trouble (Acts 20:36). Group prayer times can be dynamic, exciting, fulfilling experiences that draw group members closer to God and closer to each other. They can be times of sweet, impassioned prayer for those in the group and times of passionate mission as the group focuses prayer beyond its own walls. Such prayer times can build unity in a group as almost nothing else can. Most of us don't regularly experience group prayer like this. This is not an intrinsic limitation of group prayer; rather, it's an outcome of the fact that, as a whole, we don't know how to pray together effectively.

This book is an attempt to help group members pray more effectively in a group setting and to help group leaders set the stage for community prayer times that will be a highlight of a group's life together. It's born of a fervor to see people pray together consistently, passionately and effectively; and

of the conviction that concerted community prayer is the first step to solving many of the world's great problems.

Prayer in a small group setting is often referred to as “group” or “corporate” prayer, but I prefer the term “community prayer,” as it is a closer reflection of the nature of effective prayer in a small group setting. In this book we will take a look first at some of the principles of community prayer. Then we'll discuss specific ways to keep community prayer engaging and vibrant. After exploring ideas for casting a vision for community prayer, setting the tone and leading the time, we'll conclude by applying community prayer concepts to other prayer settings, such as corporate prayer and one-on-one intercession.

The principles and ideas for community prayer apply to any type of small group. Whether you are a small group leader or member, and whether your group is a church small group, a campus group or a neighborhood group: if your group is struggling to establish a vibrant group prayer life, this book is for you. My prayer is that God will use the ideas and suggestions in this book to transform your group's prayer life into one of the highlights of your life together.