

# Effective prayer groups

By Pastor Alan Utting



*'Small prayer gatherings have often been the birthplace of great revivals.'* J. Edwin Orr

We all know that prayer is important and especially effective when we come together as a group to pray. My most memorable prayer group experience was at a youth Easter camp when sensing the teenagers strong lack of interest in spiritual matters, we leaders decided to pray through the night. Early in the morning, John 4:35 inspired us 'Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields. They are ripe for harvest.' We claimed that verse with rejoicing and by lunch time many youths had wonderfully committed their lives to Christ. Later follow-up confirmed their decisions were sincere.

## **Scriptural basis for praying in groups.**

### **1. The Early Church (Acts 1:14; Acts 2:42).**

After Jesus' ascension, the early believers 'all joined together constantly in prayer' (Acts 1:14). Later, Acts 2:42 shows that corporate prayer was a key part of the early Christian community's rhythm.

'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.'

This communal devotion laid the spiritual foundation for the explosive growth of the church.

### **2. Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).**

On the Day of Pentecost, 'they were all together in one place' when the Holy Spirit was poured out. The united prayer and presence of the believers created a powerful spiritual environment for the coming of the Spirit, empowering them for mission.

### **3. Peter's Release from Prison (Acts 12:5-17).**

While Peter was imprisoned, 'the church was earnestly praying to God for him' (v. 5).

God answered their united prayers by sending an angel to miraculously free Peter. This shows the effectiveness of believers praying together with one heart and mind.

### **4. Jesus' Teaching on Agreement in Prayer (Matthew 18:19-20).**

Jesus said 'Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'

This affirms the spiritual authority and presence of Christ when believers come together in prayer.

## **Historical basis of the importance of praying in groups.**

### **1. The Moravian Prayer Revival (1727).**

The Moravians in Herrnhut, Germany began a 24-hour prayer chain that continued unbroken for over 100 years. This prayer movement sparked the first modern Protestant missionary movement, sending missionaries across the globe. The power of sustained, united prayer transformed the church's global witness.

## 2. The First and Second Great Awakenings (18th–19th centuries).

Both revivals were fuelled by corporate prayer meetings. In the early 1800s, the Fulton Street Prayer Revival in New York City began with just a handful of people and grew into thousands meeting daily for prayer, eventually sparking revival across the United States.

## 3. The Welsh Revival (1904–1905).

Led by Evan Roberts, this revival began with fervent prayer meetings. As believers gathered in unity and repentance, thousands came to faith in Christ, churches were packed, and even societal behaviour was transformed. Prayer meetings often lasted for hours and were characterised by spontaneous worship, confession, and intercession.

## 4. The Korean Church and Dawn Prayer Movement.

In the 20th century, Korean Christians became known for their early morning prayer gatherings. The strong culture of corporate prayer is widely credited with the explosive growth of Christianity in South Korea, now home to some of the world's largest churches

Scripture and church history both affirm that corporate prayer is a vital, Spirit empowered practice that strengthens the church, invites divine intervention, fosters unity, and often precedes revival and transformation. When believers pray together, they align themselves with God's purposes in a way that releases His power in unique and significant ways.

### **Models for creative prayer groups.**

Prayer groups at churches or missions often have low attendance, possibly because people lack motivation from the Holy Spirit or find the groups uninspiring. As a teenager, I still joined a prayer group, not wanting to miss a special encounter with the Lord.

Before joining a prayer group, prepare by confessing any sins, adopting an attitude of adoration, and seeking spiritual discernment.

Here are some creative ways to encourage prayer. These methods may feel unfamiliar to some, so be thoughtful in your approach and ensure it's sincere, not superficial. Providing scriptural references can be helpful when introducing new practices. While the spirit of prayer matters most, exploring different forms can deepen one's experience of God. Coming from a conservative prayer background, I initially hesitated to try new approaches but ultimately found them meaningful and enriching.

1. 'Traditional prayer' can involve leading a congregation or a small group, using either spontaneous prayers or those from a prayer book. It is helpful to keep prayers somewhat brief to maintain attention and encourage participation.
2. '24/7 prayer' refers to continuous, round-the-clock prayer 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It involves individuals or groups committing to pray in time slots so that prayer never ceases, day or night. This can happen in a physical location (like a prayer room or chapel), online, or even as a coordinated effort across multiple locations. The UK and Global 24/7 was founded in 1999 by Pete Greig. This grassroots movement began with a single prayer room in England. Then it

quickly spread to hundreds of nations. The movement encourages creative, non-stop prayer—especially among young people—and often focuses on justice, mission, and renewal. It is creative in the way prayer needs are displayed and prayers answered.

3. 'Prayer stations' are a creative and interactive way to guide people in prayer by setting up different physical 'stations,' each focused on a specific prayer theme or activity. They allow individuals to move at their own pace from one station to another, engaging in reflective, personal prayer using prompts, visuals, Scripture, or symbolic actions. Benefits of Prayer Stations is that it is suitable for people of all ages and stages of faith, helps those who struggle with traditional or verbal prayer, can be set up in churches, homes, retreats, youth camps, or outdoor settings and people pray together in the same space but have a deeply personal connection with God.
4. The 'Korean way of praying' typically refers to the distinctive, passionate, and communal prayer practices commonly found in South Korean churches, especially within evangelical and Pentecostal traditions. These practices have become well-known globally for their fervency, discipline, and spiritual intensity. Although they have a variety of ways one distinctive practice they have is all praying out loud at the same time.
5. 'Small group prayer.' Many using this method gather in a larger group first and then divide into small groups with various prayer items. This is very inclusive and useful for people too shy to pray in a larger group.
6. 'Mother tongue prayers' refer to where people pray in their own language in a group or one at a time. This helps with integration. Note however, some cultures are used to very long prayers while others listening may lose concentration.
7. 'Leadership meeting.' Initially, our monthly leadership meetings opened with a brief prayer and reserved the main prayer for the end, but late finishes meant only one person closed in prayer. At my next church, we began meetings with the main prayer, which proved more efficient and led to shorter meetings—a practice I continue today.
8. 'Speaking in tongues' was a practice reported in the New Testament church (1 Corinthians 14:26). According to Paul, if someone led in this way during a public meeting, it should be interpreted for the entire congregation.
9. 'Researching prayer needs.' In a monthly 'persecuted church' prayer meeting I run, I normally invite the participants to do research on prayer needs through the Missions website (I provide URL addresses) and bring them along to share. This enables them to share their passions and become more involved.
10. 'Prayer for the sick.' James (5:13-16) advises church Elders to pray for and anoint the sick with oil, trusting that faithful prayer can lead to healing. Use discernment and wisdom when praying. Jesus sent out his disciples two at a time to pray for people (Mark 6:7-13).
11. 'Physical expressions' in prayer include lifting hands (Ps 134:2), kneeling (1 Kings 8:54), lying prostrate (1 Kings 18:39), dancing (Ps 149:3), clapping (Ps 47:1), shouting and singing (Ps 33:1-3), groanings (Rom 8:26), tears (Ps 126:5), and affirmations like 'Selah' or 'Amen' (Psalms).

## Resources

Pete Greig, *How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People*