



Christian Book Summaries



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The Prayer Saturated Church

A Comprehensive Handbook for Prayer Leaders

A Quick Focus

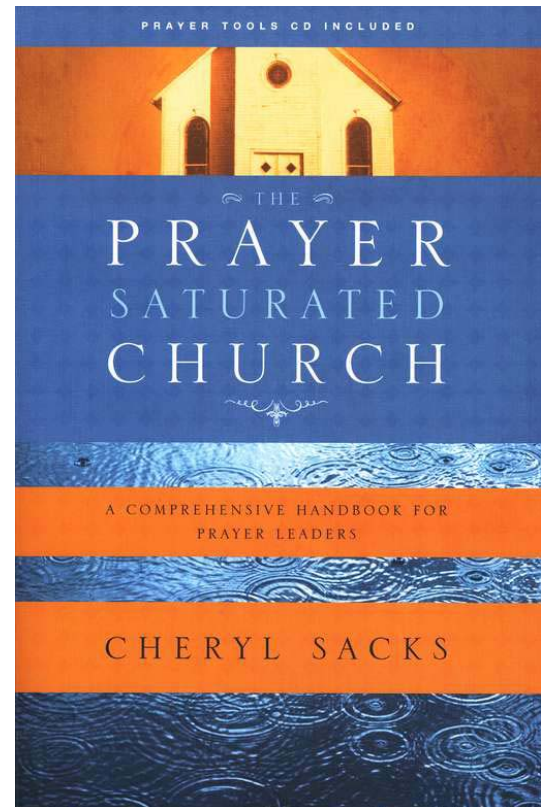
The Book's Purpose

- Call the Church to return to her first love and provide a road map for how to get there
- Provide a comprehensive and practical resource for mobilizing prayer in the local church
- Motivate congregations to turn their churches into houses of prayer
- Show how prayer has transformed lives, churches, and entire communities

The Book's Message

No one would argue that prayer should undergird every aspect of church life. No one would dispute that God's power is displayed in those churches that prioritize prayer. Then why is prayer relegated to nothing more than a mere token in churches across America?

Could it be that leaders long for their churches to be saturated with prayer, but they simply don't know where to begin? It is possible for a church to become saturated with prayer. By assessing the needs, building action teams, and developing a comprehensive strategy, churches can actually become houses of prayer.



by Cheryl Sacks
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Building a House of Prayer

We hear a lot of complaining about the need to return prayer to the classroom. A better move would be to return prayer to the church. Christian bookstores have shelves lined with books on prayer, but very few of them address prayer in the local church. While many pastors and prayer leaders know how important prayer is, many are lost when it comes to organizing a strategy and finding the tools needed to build houses of prayer.

The Story of Biltmore

Could an outsider notice that your church prioritizes prayer? Anyone observing the Early Church or any of the Great Awakening churches would have noticed the prominence of prayer.

Members of the Biltmore Baptist Church will tell you what happens when a church decides to pray. In the early 90s, this congregation had dipped in attendance from 600 to 175. These desperate, broken people began to ask God to send them a pastor with a vision to lead them. They prayed for God to do something so big that only He could get the credit for it.

Today, ten years later, Biltmore is thriving. Membership has reached 5,000. Prayer was the key for the turnaround. Now the church has 825 intercessors serving in one of 89 prayer groups.

Why Pray?

God can do anything He desires, but He chooses to operate in partnership with His people. Why does He tell us to ask for our daily bread? Why should we pray for more workers in the harvest? Very simply, because ***“God does nothing outside the realm of prayer and intercession.”***

God Himself declared that prayer should be the very thing that marks His Church. Isaiah 56:7 says, “For my house will be called a house of prayer.”

If prayer is so important, then why does it play such a secondary role in so many churches? A survey of 200 pastors and church leaders cited several reasons: busyness, apathy, self-sufficiency, and lack of leadership.

What a House of Prayer Looks Like

Jesus quoted from Isaiah 56:7 and added “house of prayer *for all nations*” (Mark 11:17). What does a house of prayer look like? If a restaurant were called “House of Fish,” what would you expect to find there? Fish, of course. If church is to be a house of prayer, then what should you find there? A place saturated with prayer.

When we invite Jesus to turn our churches into houses of prayer, we are giving Him free reign to control and direct everything that takes place there. Houses of prayer welcome and embrace people who are broken, displaced, and lonely. They are places of power, places where lives are transformed.

Characteristics of a Praying Church

Just because a church has a prayer ministry doesn’t mean it is a house of prayer. Praying churches saturate every aspect of ministry with prayer. Prayer must never be seen as simply another church program.

“Having a praying church is not just a good idea; it is the foundation from which everything else flows.”

What are the marks of a praying church?

- First, members have a strong devotional life and invest time praying for others.
- Second, they understand who God is and how they can relate to Him through prayer.
- Third, leaders model the importance of prayer before the congregation.
- Fourth, prayer permeates total church life and is not viewed as another program.
- Fifth, high priority is placed on corporate prayer meetings.
- Sixth, investing time in God’s presence results in humility, unity, and Christlikeness.
- Seventh, and the most distinguishing mark, the presence of God fills His house.

Selecting a Prayer Coordinator

A prayer coordinator is one who oversees and leads the prayer ministry of the church. Is such a leader really necessary? Yes. As important as prayer is, it doesn't just happen on its own. Just as every other ministry in the church needs a leader, so does the prayer ministry. If a person leading demonstrates not only a passion for intercession but also a gift of administration, the chances of success are greater.

Attributes of a Prayer Coordinator

First, and probably most important, the person must be called by God. Sometimes a church member may sense the call to lead in this capacity; other times fellow members recognize the potential for leadership in that person. The person who senses God's call must be very cautious about trying to attain power or status.

Second, the coordinator has a healthy, personal prayer life. One cannot lead people to a depth of prayer that she has not experienced. Prayer ministries are not built through creative strategies alone. They must be led by people who are passionate about prayer.

Third, spiritual maturity is a must. There is no rule of thumb, but the leader should be a seasoned Christian, not a recent convert. Fourth, the coordinator should have the ability to lead, organize, and mobilize. Other prerequisites include expertise in speaking and teaching and the ability to lead prayer. Finally, most successful prayer coordinators are team players who enjoy serving others.

Once the person is selected, she must be given ample opportunities to convey her vision for this prayer initiative.

Three Myths to Dispel

There are three common myths that need to be dispelled.

- The first myth is that it is the coordinator's responsibility to pray for all the prayer requests. By virtue of the position itself, people will make a beeline to the coordinator to share requests. The coordinator must learn to pass these requests on to the other prayer team members and the church family.
- The second myth is that the coordinator is responsible for getting people to the prayer meeting. Ultimately, it is the role of the Holy Spirit to prompt people to attend prayer gatherings. A road to burn-out is taking personal responsibility for making sure people attend. Only God can cause growth. That is why it is so important for the prayer teams to spend time asking God for His favor and anointing.
- The third myth is that it is the coordinator's responsibility to personally provide funding for training, resources, and supplies. Whether the person is paid member of the church staff or a volunteer, the church needs to develop a budget to cover the many expenses this ministry will incur.

The Coordinator's Responsibilities

The prayer coordinator and pastor should work together to develop a job description. The list of possible responsibilities can be daunting, but the coordinator must realize that many can be delegated to prayer team members.

Examples of responsibilities for the prayer coordinator include:

- Identify others in the church who are passionate about intercession and who are willing to serve.
- Organize a prayer action team and serve as its leader.
- Set up a prayer room in the church facility.
- Develop prayer chains.
- Organize a library that provides prayer resources.
- Provide the many ministry teams in the church with resources and training.
- Act as a liaison between the pastor and church leadership and the prayer action team.

“Don't let this list overwhelm you. If yours is a new prayer ministry, you may be able to take on only two or three of these activities.”

Organizing a Prayer Action Team

It doesn't take long for the coordinator to recognize that building a prayer ministry is not a one-man show. To become a prayer-saturated church requires the full support and engagement of the senior pastor. If he is not on board, turning a church into a house of prayer most likely will not happen. Assuming he is on board, one of the coordinator's first strategic steps is to organize a prayer action team.

Why Build a Team?

Why does the coordinator need to build a team? And what is a team? A team must not be confused with a committee or a work group. A leadership team is usually made up of four to six people. The players represent a balanced mix of skills and gifts; they are committed to helping each other grow and succeed.

Scan through the Bible, and you will see many teams at work. Moses, accepting his father-in-law's advice, built teams to help carry the huge counseling load. Nehemiah built a team and strategically organized them to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. The apostle Paul frequently gave credit to those on his team. Traveling with him were the likes of Timothy, Silas, and Barnabas. Of course, the greatest example is Jesus Himself who built a team of twelve disciples.

Building a team will broaden the gift mix and provide some of the skills the coordinator might lack. Teams share the load and take their influence into more arenas of church life. Moreover, focused teams build a synergy of working and thinking together.

Why leaders don't use teams:

- It is easier to do the job alone.
- The leader would feel less significant.
- The leader lacks the ability.
- There is an absence of vision.

What Is the Team's Role?

The primary role of the prayer action team is to communicate the benefits of communing with God to every group in the church. This action team is not the same as the Wednesday night or Tuesday morning prayer group. In fact, their primary role is not to pray but to call the rest of the church to pray and to equip them to do so. So, it is very helpful to find men and women who are passionate about prayer and who have the ability to lead.

Depending on the size of the church, the coordinator may also build a team of prayer captains. The goal is to have a captain assigned to every ministry. These captains may or may not also serve on the prayer action team. Assuming that a church has a well-organized prayer ministry, possible roles of a prayer captain include coordinating corporate prayer, the

prayer room, prayer shields for the pastor, the prayer chain, training, and care prayer.

What Qualities Are Necessary?

When recruiting a prayer action team, look for people of character and influence, those with excellent people skills. Prayer action team members should also be able to maintain confidentiality and communicate clearly. Consideration should also be given to their having a balanced gift mix. George Barna suggests that the ideal team will consist of a visionary, a problem solver, a people person, and an administrator.

“The broader the sphere of influence of your team, the more people the prayer ministry has the potential of serving and impacting.”

Remember, Jesus spent the night in fervent prayer before he selected His disciples. This serves as an apt example for us to emulate as we prepare to identify our leaders.

Once the team is selected and commissioned by the church, the coordinator would do well to focus on three things: casting vision, building relationships, and leading team meetings.

Taking Prayer to a New Level

Every church has at least some form of prayer ministry. But no matter where the church is on the spectrum of prayer saturation, it is always possible to move to a new level of prayer. ***“Just as a body of believers grows in other aspects of their spiritual lives, so God expects the prayer life of a church to grow. First we crawl, but at some point we begin to walk and then to run.”***

Growth Levels for a Prayer-Saturated Church

The foundational level of a prayer-saturated church begins with a unified leadership base. Each leader, beginning with the senior pastor and the pastoral staff, must lead the way. Sometimes the pastor may hesitate to take the lead because he knows that his own prayer life is weak. There are plenty of resources available to help pastors in this area.

At the motivational level, the congregation must be awakened to the importance of prayer. Again, the lead pastor plays a critical role if this level is to be maintained. He must consistently and passionately cast the vision that God draws near to those who spend time in His presence. He must model an intimate relationship with Jesus, as he prepares the congregation for a prayer-focused ministry.

At the preparation level, prayer leaders need to be trained. If the foundational and motivational levels have been successful, then God has already been priming the hearts of those who need to step up into prayer leadership roles. Even if you begin with only a few, train them and train them well. Then do everything possible to identify more potential leaders.

At the initiation level, a beachhead is established. Begin praying with those who are willing to pray. The leader must keep the vision of a prayer-saturated church before the group. Pray specifically that the ministry will expand. Satan will do everything possible to keep this beachhead from being established.

At the ignition level, the prayer ministry starts up. At some point, the church must move beyond a single prayer focus to a multifaceted approach with many opportunities for the church to pray. The starting point depends on resources, space, leaders, and those willing to pray. Additional prayer points may include things like prayergram writing, prayer chains, prayer partners, or a prayer library.

At the expansion level, the prayer ministry is broadened. Expansion doesn't mean just adding more prayer meetings to the calendar. It means motivating members to pray more. It means training people how to pray effectively. And it means developing multiple entry points for people to get involved in prayer.

At the invasion level, the prayer ministry becomes a mobilized command and communications center. At this level, the prayer leaders develop long-range strategies for prayer ministry that might include such things as crisis and healing teams, prayer conferences, citywide gatherings, and 24-hour prayer times.

Finally, at the saturation level, the church becomes a house of prayer. In a church that is truly a house of prayer, all the leaders take responsibility for casting the prayer vision. Training opportunities are presented at all levels of one's spiritual journey.

Breaking the Enemy's Barriers

Satan makes every attempt to create barriers that prevent congregations from taking prayer to new levels. He confuses believers. Sometimes he simply rocks the church to sleep.

Probably the most common barrier is sin. One of the things that inevitably happens when a church gets serious about prayer is that hidden sin is revealed. When we ask God to take us to new levels, He reveals the things that stand in the way. Unfortunately, it is easier to maintain the status quo than deal with the barriers. And that's the route many churches choose.

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Developing a Prayer Strategy

Just as building a house requires a blueprint, establishing a prayer ministry requires a plan. No matter the size of the church, a written strategy is essential.

Four Strategic Phases

Assuming the pastor is on board and a leadership team is in place, the church is now ready to develop a strategy. The first phase is prayer and preparation. To raise the priority of prayer in your church, the best place to begin is prayer. No matter how good the plans are, unless they are bathed in prayer, the plans will be of little value.

The second phase is defining the vision. Vision portrays a picture of what a house of prayer looks like. This vision may come to the leader through a dream, a book, a sermon,

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or an inspired idea. The more time a person spends in God's presence, the better God is able to download His vision into the person's heart.

An effective vision has clarity. It can easily be communicated to others. It may not have all the pieces in place yet. But the leader can pray over it and ask the Lord to reveal the missing pieces. The leader can collaborate with others to help refine the vision.

The third phase is the involvement of church leadership. Only one or two of the staff pastors may be directly involved in the process. But it is critical that every pastor and leader feel as if she is a part of the process. A retreat setting will do wonders to help leaders understand the vision for building a prayer strategy.

The fourth phase is drafting a written document. Writing the strategy will provide a tool whereby everyone can understand the vision. Included in the written document should be a mission statement, practical goals, clear objectives, action plans, job descriptions, organizational charts, and a simple budget.

Use good common sense when drafting the strategy. Be deliberate and careful. Following the steps in this book may take a year or more. Keep the plan simple, using language that reflects the culture of your congregation.

“I know of no church that has become a ‘praying church’ in less than five years.”

Next Steps

The key leaders of the church should make a formal recommendation for the congregation to approve. Once this draft is finalized, it is time to present the strategies to the congregation for adoption. The next step is to share the strategy. Setting up a launch weekend is helpful. On launch day, be sure to be prepared with a system to sign up volunteers and an orientation session to train them.

Timing is critical when implementing the strategy. Be sure God is in it; and be sure the timing is right. The right idea at the wrong time can generate negative momentum that is hard to overcome.

Finally, it is important to renew the strategy. After implementation, it is common for the number of volunteers to drop off. Anticipate this and be ready for some renewal strategies. Keep casting the vision. And be ready to tweak where adjustments are needed.



Praying for the Pastor

One of the best ways to begin building a house of prayer is to strategically pray for the pastor and his family. A “pit crew” must be motivated to pray consistently for the pastor.

The Need for a Pit Crew

Most people don't have a clue about the pressures facing their pastor every day. He is on the clock 24-7. He has to deal with a constant barrage

of criticism as he carries the pressures of unrealistic expectations. Being a pastor can be a lonely task. In addition, Satan loves to target him. Most people don't understand the intensity of spiritual warfare a pastor faces every day.

Peter Wagner states several reasons that pastors need more personal intercession than others. God holds them to a higher level of accountability. In addition, pastors are more vulnerable to temptation and spiritual warfare. Moreover, they have more influence over others; consequently, when they fall, they take others down with them.

God's Plan of Defense

Intercessory prayer for pastors and other leaders is not a new thing. In Exodus 17, we find Moses, Aaron, and Hur interceding for Joshua in battle. In Acts 12, we read about the church gathering to pray for Peter. In fact, in Luke 22, we read that Jesus prayed for Peter.

Taking these cues from the Bible, prayer team members can be certain that God's plan of defense for pastors is intercessory prayer. To be thoroughly protected, pastors need several lines of defense. They need an inner circle consisting of just a few people who are truly faithful in praying. They need an outer circle like the nine disciples who served as Jesus'. They also need a larger team consisting of members from the congregation. Finally, pastors need crisis intercessors who will pray from beginning to end during times that are especially trying. ***“Surveys show that pastors who are prayed for regularly by trained intercessors experience a positive impact on a ministry's effectiveness.”***

The Role and Qualities of the Pit Crew

Members of the pastor's intercessory prayer pit crew should pray daily (but not feel guilty if they miss a day). They should pray as the Holy Spirit directs. Some may feel led to pray more for his family, while others pray more for moral purity.

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PRAYING FOR THE PASTOR

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They should never entertain gossip from anyone about the pastor or his family. And they should not expect the pastor to pray for them personally. He cannot make the same commitment.

As far as qualities of the pit crew are concerned, they need to be concerned for the pastor and his family, as well as his ministry. They certainly need to keep matters confidential. Obviously, their Christian character should be strong, and they should be faithful to the local church.

Organizing the Pit Crew

When people volunteer, they want to know what's expected of them and how they are to carry out their agreed-upon responsibilities. Formal or informal training will help each intercessor understand how to pray for a ministry leader.

A very important aspect of getting organized is to establish clear communication guidelines. How will the pit crew know specifically how to pray? What are the pastor's personal needs? What about the needs of his family? Is there a big event in the near future? These specific requests should be delivered by the most efficient means possible, whether by letter, email, voicemail, or through a password-protected website.

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Motivating Every Member to Pray

If a church is truly to become a house of prayer, it must seek to involve every member. Many pastors have the feeling that they have tried everything but still have trouble getting the congregation interested and engaged. There is no greater thing a pastor can do for his people than to pray that their hearts will be filled with the desire to spend time with the Father.

Taking Advantage of the Worship Service

There is no better venue to promote the importance of prayer than the weekend worship services. Unfortunately, in most churches very little prayer takes place. However, pastors are in a unique position to put intercession on the front burner of the church's agenda. He can preach a series of sermons on prayer. He can prioritize announcements that relate to various prayer opportunities. He can encourage public testimonies of answered prayer. Each week he can spotlight a certain ministry to pray for. All of these ideas can move the church toward putting a greater emphasis on becoming a house of prayer.

Other Prayer Venues

People love diversity when it comes to creating various ways to promote prayer. Some like small, intimate settings. Others enjoy large corporate gatherings. Others prefer receiving requests via email. Start with a few opportunities and constantly seek ways to expand.

Another possibility is to consider special interest prayer. Get people to pray for things that stir in their souls. For example, get parents who have experienced the pain of teenage drug abuse to pray for other parents going through the same thing. Others may have a passion for praying for orphans or AIDS victims. Consider inviting affinity groups-like school teachers, medical personnel, or single parents-together for prayer.

The possibilities are unlimited. Why not use the calendar as a way to organize special prayer events? In late summer, gather the church to pray for the new school year. In October, during Pastor Appreciation Month, launch prayer for the pastoral staff. On the Fourth of July weekend, have a special prayer service for the nation.

Include Every Ministry of the Church

Successfully transitioning into a house of prayer, in many ways, does not involve a lot of new organization. It simply involves making prayer a central focus of the church's existing organization.

“Praying churches not only have strong prayer ministries but they also make prayer a part of every ministry in the church.”

Does the church staff place a high priority on praying together? What about the leadership board? The worship team and choir? In many houses of prayer, even the teams of parking lot attendants, nursery workers, and custodial teams gather for a time of intercession before the weekend services begin.

Children and youth need to be taught the importance of prayer. In fact, why not invite them into the adult worship gathering to lead in prayer? What role does prayer play in men's or women's ministries?

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MOTIVATING EVERY MEMBER TO PRAY

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What about involving older adults in prayer ministry? If your church has men's ministries or women's ministries, what role does prayer play in these groups? Older adults or homebound adults may no longer be able to serve in capacities like they formerly did. But what a mighty, untapped resource for prayer!

To mobilize every ministry successfully will require many forms of training. Every member needs to learn the answers to simple questions such as What is prayer? How long do I pray? What do I say? Members can learn to pray in their small groups, in prayer retreats, and through specialized training events and prayer conferences. Utilize every means possible to equip the congregation to pray.

“We must make prayer exciting. This requires thinking outside the box, planning, and creativity. Look what’s happened with the use of music, art, and drama in the church in the last decade. It’s time to take prayer out of the dusty back room.”

~Thetus Tenney

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Moving Prayer Outside the Walls

The church that limits its prayer ministry to its own four walls is shortsighted and lacks a healthy kingdom mindset.

Praying for Spheres of Influence

God, by His own special design, has placed church in individual communities. Through the lives of His people He wants to transform the places where we work and live. We tend to forget that the church is not the four walls of a building. The church is the people of God called to carry the presence and power of God everywhere we go.

Pastors can help every member develop a lifestyle of praying for every person in his sphere of influence. People can pray for their unsaved co-workers, neighbors, and friends. There is a wide array of material available to equip members to know how to pray for those within their spheres.

Praying for the Community

God cares for communities. Jeremiah 29:7 reminds us that believers prosper when the community prospers. God opens the windows of heaven when His people pray for their city. Prayer breaks down walls so that the lost are more receptive to hear the gospel.

Disturbed by the ungodly drug activity in the city of Cali, Colombia, where up to 15 people a day were murdered by drug lords, pastors began to meet together to cry out to God for His intervention. Then they called their congregations to an all-night prayer vigil in which more than 20,000 believers showed up. Two days after the event, newspaper headlines read that no homicides had taken place the previous 24 hours—the first time that had happened in recent memory.

Uniting with Other Churches

Many churches pray for their communities. But imagine the power when prayer-saturated churches come together for united prayer for the community. Some communities have created houses of prayer that are staffed with volunteers from area churches 24 hours a day. Other communities have organized multi-church prayer and worship gatherings.

“When prayer is absent, the heavens are closed and demonic and worldly influences have free rein. However, when Christians in a given community begin to pray, a canopy of God’s presence and protection is raised.”

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MOVING PRAYER OUTSIDE THE WALLS

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Praying for Special Target Groups

One effective way for a church to pray for its community is to adopt special target groups for prayer. For example, a church can plan an "in honor of" service or banquet for teachers, firemen, or law enforcement officers. Or the church can adopt a government leader and his family for special prayer.

Another strategy could be to target specific neighborhoods through prayerwalking. The prayer-walking can be casual, organized by the church, or systematically planned by the community of churches.

Praying for the World

A truly prayer-saturated church will not stop at praying for just the church, community, and nation. It will develop strategies to pray for the whole world. The possibilities are endless. Some accomplish this objective by praying for its mission-aries. Some pray for unreached people groups. Others highlight special weeks when they pray for the persecuted church.

Do we really fully understand how prayer can work to transform cities, nations, and society at large? When we pray, we unleash the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of those for whom we are praying. The Holy Spirit is capable of building walls of protection and neutralizing the work of evil forces. These facts hold true whether we are praying for a church, police officers, the president, or school teachers. Who can change the climate over a community? Who can transform lives? Only God can. And He has chosen the Church to be His instrument in unleashing His power.

"Revival will come when we get the walls down between the church and the community."

~Jack Graham

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