

Something to Talk About

A conversation guide for church leaders

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Prayer

Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/church-leadership/> or <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/something-to-talk-about-archives/>.

I was a pretty sarcastic high school student. I remember one Christianese phrase that frequently incurred my sarcastic ire – it was the phrase “open in prayer” and its partner, “close in prayer.” My friends and I, when a leader said, “let’s open in prayer,” would separate the palms of our hand as though they were hinged while making, under our breath, the sound of a squeaking door hinge. It was petty and immature but seemed like arrogantly clever fun at the time.

Fast-forward a few decades, and I still have some disdain for those phrases. I know that starting (or opening) our meeting with prayer is a good thing, but somehow the concept of opening and closing a meeting with prayer at times feels a little trite or ritualistic to me. That’s my bad, but for me it begs the question, what is the role of prayer when our church leadership team meets? That’s something to talk about.

It’s not my purpose to tell leaders of churches what they should do, but rather to help them ensure that what they do is done intentionally. Different teams may come to different conclusions about what to do and how to do it, but every team needs make a decision about how they value and approach prayer.

I think my fear is that the habit of viewing and doing prayer as an opening and closing to a meeting can lead to it becoming a rote exercise – something we do ceremonially to start and end our meetings – rather than something of great importance and opportunity, the opportunity to commune with Almighty God in relation to our stewardship of the Bride of Christ. Kind of like reciting the pledge of allegiance but not giving any real thought to it.

Here are some questions that may help us increase the depth and breadth of our prayers as leaders.

- Do our team's prayers fall into the opening and closing category and, if so, are they fresh and thoughtful connections with God or have them become routine tasks to do before we get started on our meeting? If fresh and thoughtful, how do we keep them that way and guard against trivializing it and, if not fresh and thoughtful, how can we make them so?
- Are one or more members of our team particularly "gifted" or oriented as pray-ers? How might our team leverage this person's giftedness to our team and church?
- What are our expectations for individual leaders to be "prayed up" before arrival at the meeting and how do we hold ourselves accountable to do so? What might we do to remind ourselves of the need to be prayerful before the meeting?
- Since scripture does not give us specific requirements for the frequency or length of our prayers, should we create targets for ourselves? If so, what should our targets be?
- Some churches have set up their meeting schedules so that meetings for focused and longer times of prayer are different from meetings for work so that focused prayer is not lost and does not become merely an opening ceremony for the conduct of business. Is this something our team might want to do?
- When engaged in a significant discussion in which leaders are divided have we stopped to pray? Look back to identify specific times when you did so or perhaps should have done so. What was the result?
- Without becoming judgmental and recognizing the individuality of the members of our leadership team, how might we encourage one another to be men and women of prayer as we serve our churches in the ministry of leadership?
- Have you ever had a person share a struggle with you, told them that you would pray for them and then failed to do so? Sadly, I have. One strategy I have undertaken to mitigate my forgetfulness and execute on my good intentions to pray for others is to ask the requesting person, "Can we pray together *right now*?" I've found that the experience of already having prayed for the person on-the-spot helps me to remember to pray for them during the week. How do our team members handle these situations?
- When a sick person calls the elders to pray for them (James 5:14-15), what do we do? How do we pray and for what do we pray? What is our expected outcome and what is the requester's expected outcome?

Prayer is such a simple thing that we sometimes take it for granted. Scripture is full of commands to pray and examples of leaders praying. Church leaders should take prayer seriously and do it intentionally. Deciding how we will do that at this particular church is something to talk about. We should include God in that conversation, too.

*Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.
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