



## A PLEA FOR SMALL PRAYER CIRCLES!

\*This download is part of the text, "How To Do A Purpose Driven Evening Service."

A Catholic parish hosted a marriage seminar for the entire community. The speaker discovered that Sam had just celebrated his fiftieth anniversary. The speaker asked Sam to share how he had managed to stay married to the same woman for fifty years.

Sam told the audience "Well, I've-a tried to treat-a her well, spend-a the money on her, but-a, da best-a is-a dat I took her to Italy for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary!"

The speaker immediately commented, "Sam, you are an amazing inspiration to all of the husbands here! Please tell the audience what you are planning for your wife for your 50th anniversary."

Sam proudly replied, "I'm-a gonna go and-a get her."

That story describes many of our churches. *We know each other at a distance!* Someone wisely said, "The average seeker is looking for more than a friendly church. He is looking for genuine friends."

What is a friend? A friend is someone in whom I can confide. A friend is someone on whom I can count when I need help. A friend is someone who can laugh or cry with me. A friend is someone who will tell me the truth when the truth is absolutely necessary!

Most people have very few true friends. Therefore, most people live within the walls of their own creation.

Small prayer groups can make a big difference in this area, and therefore, a big difference in the health of the overall church! Small prayer groups create some of the most intimate moments in our entire church experience. It is hard to truly pray to our holy Father and yet remain isolated within the safety of our own walls.

In order for genuine prayer to occur, we must first lower our walls; in so doing we bare our souls to Him who knows every detail about us.

This baring of our soul occurs in private prayers, but it also occurs in small group prayers. This kind of praying makes us vulnerable and creates an intimate time for all. It is in this sort of atmosphere that God works in ways that are awesomely life-changing.

The greatest blessing anyone can do for you is not to give you money or a pat on the back. It is to say, "I will pray for you!" and to then call out your name to God while you are listening!

How strong is the prayer ministry in your own church? One church leader reported that he has surveyed 6,000 prayer leaders in his ministry. He asked how many of them had ever been trained in how to lead a prayer meeting. Only fifty-six people raised their hand.

I believe that the churches of forty years ago did better in prayer than the current churches. As a matter of fact, I am now around countless Christians who know the books of the Bible but who really stumble in the area of prayer.

If practice makes perfect in cooking, then practice will make us perfect or complete or mature in prayer!

The purpose driven concept rests on one simple premise: *purposely* organizing to accomplish the identified purpose. In many churches one part of the mid-week service is dedicated to teaching people how to pray and to turn them into authentic prayer warriors.

Someone (source unknown) wrote, "After speaking to hundreds of pastors and thousands of prayer leaders, it became evident that one of the greatest challenges you face is guiding people in praying **together**. The importance of conquering that challenge cannot be over overestimated. When Jesus taught on prayer, 33 out of 37 times He did so in the plural. For example, 'Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.' In Acts the Apostles constantly led the people of God to pray together and one of the hallmarks where God is moving around the world in incredible revival is corporate prayer."

The legendary football coach Vince Lombardi taught us, "Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work." Can we also add the words "a church work"?

Prayer! How much we need to pray! And to teach our people to pray!

## PRAYER CIRCLE OVERVIEW

Here are some important components to making these small prayer circles effective.

1. View the prayer circle as an experiencing God moment. We want our people to enter into a holy encounter with the God who moves mountains!
2. Include the children on an occasional basis. This may surprise you, but children need to learn how to pray too! One suggestion is to include the children in the opening session then divide them among age specific small groups. For example, through the years I have especially enjoyed praying with the junior age group. It has been my custom to take their prayer requests (that includes requests for little Fido) then some of the children will pray aloud followed by me concluding the prayer.
3. Identify the small group prayer coordinators in advance. The opening session of our entire group normally concludes at the forty-five minute mark. People then immediately move to their small prayer groups. People should complete their prayer request forms in their prayer circles within the next five minutes. The coordinators are preassigned in order to get the ball rolling as quickly as possible.
4. Organize your best prayer mentors. Every church has some excellent praying saints! Ask yourself, “To whom does my church go when they need prayer?” The answers represent your best prayer mentors. Prepare these folk in advance to look at these prayer circles in terms of a training ministry. Their ministry is to mentor others in the skill of prayer! We want at least one prayer warrior in each group.
5. Keep the number manageable. Six is a great size. This size provides enough time for everyone to pray a reasonable amount of time without anyone being rushed. Six is also large enough that it helps the shyest person to be involved (there is safety in numbers). Your church’s size may require an upward adjustment in this number. Put your staff to work in devising a workable plan! Have faith in their creativity!
6. Assign specific locations for the prayer circles to meet. How big is your audience? Make a complete list of all available locations. Multiple groups can meet in the sanctuary. Any available space, including hallways, can be used! Prepare these locations in advance!
7. Ask each person to briefly share his/her prayer request. These requests are purpose driven so they will be very specific to the theme of the service. No request should take more than thirty seconds since details are not necessary.
8. Ask each person to pray audibly *or* silently. Choose someone to begin and someone to close so there will be no confusion. Some may choose to pray silently. That is great! We are thrilled to have this

person join us rather than shyly going home. In such cases do not put any pressure on the person to pray audibly. Simply ask the person to pray silently then tap the hand of the next person as a signal for that person to pray.

9. Arrange a drop-off point for the prayer forms after the prayer time is finished. These forms are an excellent communication tool. Each coordinator is responsible to deliver these prayer forms to the drop-off point.
10. One of the church directors or the pastor will review all of the prayer forms to determine if any future action is necessary.

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PRAYER CIRCLE COORDINATOR:

1. Gather the prayer circle in the assigned meeting place.
2. Everyone should be seated within one arm's length of each other.
3. A prayer circle prays person by person in a circle or line. This encourages personal involvement and is much preferred to a single person being selected to pray on behalf of all.
4. Please follow this process:
  - a. Thank each person for joining you in this prayer time.
  - b. Point out that each person will be given the opportunity to pray in the way/length best suited for that person.
  - c. Some may prefer not to pray or to pray silently. In such cases they may indicate they are finished by touching/squeezing the hand of the next person (some prayer circles hold hands). That person can then pray and the circle continues.
  - d. Allow everyone to briefly share the names/information on his/her particular prayer form. Lengthy details are not necessary.
  - e. Assign someone to begin the circle prayer and someone to conclude. In most cases, the prayer coordinator should conclude the circle by thanking the Lord for everyone's involvement.
  - f. The prayer coordinator will return all of the prayer slips to the preassigned drop-off point.
5. The pastor/director will try to limit the size of each circle to six people. This will personalize the circle as much as possible.

John R. Rice often made the statement, “All our failures are prayer failures.” Those are staggering words, but they have much biblical support. The book of James teaches, “You receive not because you ask not!” Imagine what could be done if we *intentionally* got our people asking God on a weekly basis about worship, evangelism, ministry, fellowship, and discipleship. Would it change us and would it then change our community? I believe the answer is a resounding yes!

The well recognized anthropologist Margaret Mead (1901 – 1978) once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Just how big is your Sunday or mid-week evening crowd? It is probably a few more than Jesus called to be His apostles. It is indeed big enough to change the world so let’s do just exactly that!