

How to Minister in Prayer

THE
AWAKENING
LIBRARY

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The Awakening Library represents collected learnings from more than a decade of ministry as Seedbed and New Room. These pieces have been contributed by writers, leaders, and practitioners in fellowship with the goal of providing practical insights for individuals and churches desiring awakening—an encounter with God that both results from and leads to deep wholeness in people, renewal of the church, evangelization of a generation, and transformation of society.

With special thanks to Bud Simon for his contribution to this resource.

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INTRODUCTION

“My legs ache all the time, especially when I sit,” Diana shared as tears welled up in her eyes. “My work requires me to sit at a desk and I cannot sit for more than ten minutes because of the pain.”

The prayer team briefly discussed the details of the issue with her. Compassion rose in their hearts for Diana’s physical pain and her discouragement over the debilitating impact on her work.

Brief, direct, expectant prayers followed the discussion and were interspersed with feedback from Diana. After a short time, a smile formed at the corners of her mouth, “My heart feels lighter, that is for sure!” They parted ways with a promise to follow up soon.

It was not long before Diana reached out, “For the first time in years, I can consistently sit and work pain-free at my desk. I am deeply grateful to God for his goodness to me.”

How can we practice prayer ministry in a healthy way? What principles can be learned to pray well for others? How can our words and actions in prayer demonstrate the Spirit of Christ?

When spiritual awakening happens in our life and the life of our community, prayer ministry plays a central role. Awakening involves healing and holiness in all areas of our lives—body, soul, mind, spirit, emotions, and relationships. Prayer ministry is the primary way to invite the in-breaking of the kingdom of God through awakening into all areas of our lives. It both precipitates awakening as well as deepens it to affect every dimension of our hearts, homes, churches, and cities.

My hope is to provide guidelines for a relationship in prayer ministry that honors God and the person receiving prayer. These guidelines have been developed and adapted during my thirty years of ministry. They have also been applied over the last decade at the New Room Conference prayer ministry training and were used to train prayer ministers in what is known as the “Asbury Outpouring”—to train more than seven hundred people and minister to tens of thousands of people. Stories from these ministry environments are used to illustrate the principles of prayer ministry. Hopefully, what you read here will encourage and build you up as you minister in prayer for others.

ATTITUDE IN PRAYER MINISTRY: KINDNESS AND GENTLENESS

The man raised his head and looked me straight in the eyes, “I have never been prayed for with such gentleness and kindness—and I have received many prayers over the years!” Five minutes previously, he had difficulty looking anyone in the eyes. He came to receive prayer because he had been burdened for years with chronic thoughts of worthlessness, self-harm, and suicide. He left with his head up and eyes clear with the work of the Lord evident in his life.

Kindness and gentleness are keystone characteristics of prayer ministry because they are attributes Jesus used to describe himself. Matthew 9:35–10:15 tells the story of the First Commission of Jesus. In chapters 8 and 9, there are several accounts of healing, deliverance, and salvation. The

end of chapter 9 provides a turning point in the narrative and reveals that at least part of the motivation for sending the disciples was that Jesus “was filled with compassion” (9:36a). Jesus’s desire to heal the crowds, cast out demons, and bring salvation was stirred by compassion for the crowd’s distress, depression, and anxiety over life.

The only time Jesus provided a self-description is referenced in Matthew 11:29 when he stated: “I am gentle and kind,” a description of his essence and character. Gentleness and kindness are practices that allow the humility of Christ to become concrete in the world. This self-description of Jesus helps us realize that the way that Jesus acted and behaved in life affirmed his character—Jesus was, and is, gentle and kind. Whether he healed, cast out demons, or raised the dead, he displayed gentleness and kindness.

The way of Jesus is a way of gentleness and kindness. This understanding of Christ’s character informs how we minister in prayer for others. When we engage the ministry of the Holy Spirit clothed with the Spirit of Christ, we invite the kingdom of God to come. The demonstration of gentleness and kindness is part of the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God that allows the ministry of prayer to focus on glorifying God.

PREPARATION FOR PRAYER MINISTRY

Soon after the Asbury Outpouring, a podcaster interviewed a leader who had experienced the outpouring and several movements of the Holy Spirit. He commented, “What was going on at Asbury was different in many ways . . . This was an outpouring of the fruit of the Spirit.” Without knowing it, he put his finger on a spiritual exercise in the prayer ministry training that rippled out to impact thousands of lives: a prayer of exchange. This simple prayer is a practice of confession that trades our shame, fear, and anger for the fruit of the Spirit. This exchange is a form of consecration that invites Christ to bring holiness *as wholeness* into our lives so that we can be used effectively in prayer ministry.

One challenge in prayer ministry is to prepare our hearts and minds for prayer ministry which is a conversation including God and the person receiving prayer. Our involvement in prayer ministry can bring our own history, struggles, and pain to the surface, no matter how old. What we may experience is that as we enter prayer ministry, our issues may rise to the surface such as our sense of inadequacy, wrong behavior, wrongs we have suffered, or distance from God.

This prayer of exchange invites us to locate areas that we need to make right with God. This is especially helpful for doubts, questions, or difficulties we may not label as clear sin issues. These areas of our lives can be revealed through the inner conversation many of us face such as:

- I am a nobody.
- I am inadequate.
- I don't deserve to have God work through me.
- I don't feel God working or moving.
- Others have more faith, more of the Spirit, or more anointing.

Matthew 28:17–20 tells the story of the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the mountain where they had arranged to meet. The disciples arrived at the mountain, saw Jesus, and worshipped him "but some doubted." Jesus still gave these same disciples the great commission and the promise that he would never leave them! Jesus knew some of the disciples

doubted, the disciples knew others among them doubted, and the disciples themselves probably recognized their own doubts—but the doubts did not disqualify them. This is great news for all of us who are disciples! It acknowledges the fact that struggles exist in the midst of our ministry journey without allowing our struggles to become a place to get stuck.

One way to think about doubt is as the act of taking our eyes off Jesus to focus on something else. This prayer of exchange is a practical way to locate areas of our life that need to be confessed and healed so that we can return our focus to Jesus. The framework of shame, fear, and anger is used to locate areas that need confession. This triad is helpful to identify areas that may block my relationship with God and others because shame, fear, and anger are ways we respond to sin issues.

Shame is the belief that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love or belonging. Shame tells us that if others know who I really am, they will reject me. The voice of shame may tell us that we are fake, that we need to hide our past, that our failures should never be shared, or that the offense or abuse we suffered was deserved.

Fear is the opposite of love. We often identify hate as the opposite, but hate is a product of fear. Fear is the belief that a situation or person will bring harm, loss, or injury in some form and that we lack the power to prevent it. We may fear failure, an outcome for a family member or friend, rejection from others, or our own inadequacy.

Anger arises when a perceived or real wrong has not been set right. We can suffer anger when someone offends us—especially a friend, work associate, or family member. Anger can build up over unresolved issues, being overlooked, passed over, or ignored.

We can take our shame, fear, or anger and offer it to the Lord in exchange for the fruit of the Spirit. When Christ died on the cross, it was more than a one-time act. His sacrifice on the cross has ongoing results so that we can continue to bring sin and suffering to him to experience his redemptive purpose in our lives.

The prayer of exchange creates a healthy preparation for prayer ministry. Shame, fear, and anger are issues that we may not be aware of so it is helpful to invite the Lord to show us anything that may need to be addressed in our lives.

Prayer of Exchange

Lord Jesus, I bring my fear, my anger, and my shame. I confess any shame, fear, or anger in my life. I turn away from these things and exchange them for your redemptive narrative. (At this point you can be still for a minute to see if the Lord reminds you of any other issues.)

Lord, I come to the cross and offer up my shame, fear, or anger (name your issue(s) to God) and receive in exchange love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and all of the fruit of the Spirit. In your name, amen.

When we prepare ourselves for prayer ministry through this exchange, we can sense the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. This exchange affirms our need to come to the cross and be dedicated to his service. Ministry in prayer is an opportunity to examine ourselves and then invite holiness and healing into our own lives so that we can offer what Christ has to others through the ministry of prayer.

ETIQUETTE AND MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SPIRIT

A licensed counselor visited the Asbury Outpouring and joined the prayer team. This counselor had experience in many different prayer ministry contexts. One day they commented to me about the prayer ministry at the outpouring: “Never have I seen such a safe and healthy environment for prayer. When people hug or touch, it is anointed. Human love and compassion are mingled with the work of God in the healthiest of ways.”

One helpful way to think about prayer ministry is to consider it as joining with the Holy Spirit’s work in another person’s life. This requires us to listen, be sensitive, and aware of what the Holy Spirit wants to achieve as he is at work in the world and in the life of each person. In prayer

ministry, we want to cooperate with the invitation the Holy Spirit extends to the person receiving prayer.

A prayer ministry that cooperates with the Holy Spirit requires us to apply healthy etiquette. As previously mentioned, gentleness and kindness guide our actions toward others and there are several ways that this is displayed in our ministry.

One attitude that we carry into prayer ministry is a mindset of “do no harm.” Prayer for others invites healing so we do not want to act or behave in ways that may distance them from Christ.

Another key practice in prayer ministry is to be socially aware and gracious. We need to be inviting, welcoming, and accepting of others because we want to help connect the other person to God. We want to speak normally and avoid religious language, King James English, or terms like “thee” or “thou” or “thus sayeth the Lord.” We should use conversational language in our prayers.

We should ask for the person’s name and then use it appropriately when we address them. We should make eye contact and give our undistracted attention to the person receiving prayer. Do not argue, discuss, theologize, interrupt, raise your voice, or speak harshly. We also do not push, pull, or act in an uninvited manner that could be perceived as aggressive.

When possible, pray in teams and with someone of the same gender. We may pray for someone of the opposite

gender as long as they are comfortable and they do not share intimate issues. If in doubt, err on the side of caution and invite someone of the same gender to lead that prayer ministry moment. This is a way to honor others and affirm their level of comfort when they receive prayer. Honoring others in prayer ministry helps them connect with Jesus and receive what the Holy Spirit has for them.

Another key point is to pray with our eyes open. This allows us to observe if there is a manifestation of spiritual activity. God created us as integrated beings of body, soul, mind, and spirit. This can include emotions, relationships, mental health, and more. The areas of our lives are intermingled so it is not unusual for prayer to bring about a visible manifestation or demonstration of spiritual activity. These manifestations can reveal that our prayer is having an impact.

Manifestations of spiritual activity can range from benign to intense. Some examples are smiling, frowning, laughing, crying, goosebumps, increased or decreased pain, discomfort or consolation, changes in breathing, shaking, trembling, feeling warm or cold, sweating or glistening, rapid eye movement or twitching, rocking, weaving, unsteadiness, and falling.

This list is not exhaustive but these are possible signs that prayer is having an impact and helps us to focus our prayer.

Why do we believe that these manifestations are signs of the Holy Spirit? Acts shows us that in the early church (Acts 2, 4, 8, 10, and 19), various manifestations were considered by the apostles as signs of the Holy Spirit's presence

and work. Scripture also mentions people falling under the power of God including Paul (Acts 9), Daniel (Daniel 8, 10), and John (Revelation 1). John Wesley discussed miracles, signs, and wonders as outward signs that often accompany the inward work of God. Similar signs seem to have been evident during the Great Awakening in the ministry of others like George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards.

There is an important caution concerning manifestations of spiritual activity. The manifestation itself is not the person of the Holy Spirit—it is a sign that the Holy Spirit is at work. The warning here is to confuse the idea that *more* of a particular manifestation always means more of the Spirit or that a particular manifestation should be demonstrated by everyone.

Certainly, it *can* be true that increased intensity is a sign of increased presence of the Spirit. Nonetheless, a healthier way to understand these manifestations is to realize that everyone is created differently and that each of us interacts with God in unique ways with common threads. Some people may be more expressive or prone to visible expressions when the Holy Spirit powerfully comes on them. The external demonstration of a person is not conclusive evidence of the inner workings of the Holy Spirit. It often can be a sign or gauge, but it should not be considered as the goal of prayer ministry. The primary goal of prayer ministry is spiritual fruit which happens as the person connects with Jesus and receives what the Holy Spirit has for them.

A PRAYER MODEL

Models are helpful but they can lose their usefulness when they become rigid. Having a model for prayer ministry is helpful because it can keep us on track, create a healthy practice, and provide positive accountability. A model provides direction for both the prayer minister and the person receiving prayer. It allows more people to participate in prayer ministry and in the priesthood of all believers. A model can provide a path to hear and submit to the Holy Spirit. This allows us to walk in the authority given to us by Christ and for ministry to flow out of who we are in Christ.

It is worth briefly mentioning that deliverance can be part of and intertwined with physical healing. This prayer model can help to discern if demonic activity may be present

when praying for healing. While this is not a deliverance prayer model, this model can expose if spiritual attack is a part of the problem.

The five-step prayer model, instituted by John Wimber, has been a helpful practice in the church for several decades. The model below is based on Wimber's work:

- Interview—ask about the reason to receive prayer
- Diagnosis—practice double listening (to the person and the Spirit)
- Discernment—decide how to pray
- Engagement—pray and repeat the first three steps as needed
- Post-prayer orientation—provide help for the person to move forward in their healing process

The interview is a brief question-and-answer time when we ask the person why they want to receive prayer. This will be a simple, informative conversation so that the ministry time can focus on the person's primary need. It is helpful to gain clarity in identifying the prayer request and to focus prayer on one issue at a time. Some people may have several prayer requests and a conversation helps to focus our prayer ministry on a specific request. A helpful question to ask is "If you could have Jesus do one thing for you today, what would that be?" Be brief and courteous in the interview process so the focus remains on prayer.

Diagnosis is when we listen to what the person shares and also listen to what the Holy Spirit may tell us about the person's life. This is double listening. When we sense a prompt from the Spirit, we ask the person if it resonates with them. If the person agrees with the prompt that we share, then we can add that to their original request as we pray for them. If what we sense from the Spirit does not resonate with them, then we honor them and focus our prayer on their original request. We do not want to obligate a person to receive a certain type of prayer if they are not in agreement. We must allow space for the Holy Spirit to work in their lives without pressuring the person receiving prayer.

Discernment joins the person's request with the prompting of the Spirit to gain clarity about direction in prayer. We then pray for the person accordingly. What does it mean when the Spirit prompts us during the prayer diagnosis and discernment? For some of us, this may be a new way to pray. For us to give attention and space for the Holy Spirit to direct our prayer ministry, there is a need to slow down and still ourselves. Even though there can be lots of activity around us, we need to find an inner quietness that allows us to focus on the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand that the Spirit dwells within us and his prompting will mostly likely be internal. An inner prompting can mean that the Spirit is directing us to pray in a certain way. This prompting is discerned with the feedback of the person receiving prayer as well as the input of your prayer

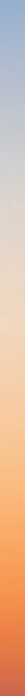
ministry partner. A sensitivity to the Holy Spirit can help us diagnose clearly and discern how to pray in alignment with how the Holy Spirit is at work in a person's life.

Engagement is both iterative and conversational. We pray, check in with the person to see if they sense God's work, integrate their feedback, and continue to pray. We can repeat this process two or three times. Some situations require deeper and longer prayer but this model does not address those cases and they are not discussed here. Generally, we should pray briefly. This form of ministry in prayer is designed for clear, brief prayers in the way that Jesus approached healing situations (for examples see Matthew 8:3, 13, 32; 9:6, 25, 29). We should also pray expectantly. God is concerned with the requests of those receiving prayer and we expect that he will act in their favor. We keep our focus on God during prayer and have compassion for the people receiving prayer. God wants to move us and the person receiving prayer toward him so be expectant that he will act kindly in prayer ministry.

Post-prayer orientation affirms that prayer is part of God's comprehensive work in a person's life, a step in the journey rather than the final destination. Post-prayer orientation should be done with gentleness and compassion to help move the person toward God's plan and how the Spirit is at work in their life.

CONCLUSION

Prayer ministry is meant to be offered in gentleness and kindness so that both the person who prays and the person receiving prayer can experience more of Christ. Be expectant and clear—our God is bigger than we can imagine. We can embrace prayer ministry as a spiritual practice to be refined, honed, and developed as part of our journey with Christ. Prayer ministry as a gentle practice will keep our eyes and the eyes of those who receive prayer focused on Christ.



Sow righteousness for yourselves,
reap the fruit of unfailing love,
and break up your unplowed ground;
for it is time to seek the LORD,
until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.

Hosea 10:12

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