

5 Tips for Prayerfully Growing Churches



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by [Kim Butts](#)

Spiritual and numerical growth for churches has been under the magnifying glass for many years. There have been multiple strategies put forward to remedy the struggles and deficiencies associated with drawing people to Jesus and His Church...and then growing them into fully committed disciples of Jesus. However, all one needs to do is study the book of Acts to find God's solution: kingdom-focused corporate prayer.

After Jesus ascended into heaven, 120 believers obediently met

in an upper room to pray as their Lord had instructed them to do: "These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers" (Acts 1:14). This group of believers took Jesus at His word and waited prayerfully for the Holy Spirit that had been promised to them. The result, it was said, "turned the world upside-down for Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:28). Following the model in Acts, let's see how kingdom-focused corporate prayer is the blueprint for church growth today:

1. The Church must be devoted to praying with one another in one accord: On the day of Pentecost, several weeks after Jesus' resurrection, the 120 believers were still meeting together in one place...we must assume from Acts 1:14 that they were still in prayer. The promised Holy Spirit came – as Jesus had told them: "And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven" (Luke 24:49). The early disciples were committed to united, corporate prayer for the sake of the kingdom. As leaders, they were at the forefront of leading this movement of prayer as instructed by Jesus.

2. Leaders need to understand that prayer and the ministry of the word is their first priority: During a time when they could have been lured into other activity, the leaders of the Jerusalem Church said, "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). This is a very simple and straightforward job description for church leadership, yet, over time, its simplicity has been perverted by worldly expectations and business models. Training in Bible colleges and seminaries has reduced prayer to a devotional silo expected of every believer and therefore not deemed worthy of academic study or as the foundational strategy for guiding a church or completing the Great Commission.

3. Prayer must be the priority as leaders make decisions: Here

are two decisions that illustrate this point clearly: First, as described in Acts 1:21-26, Peter shared that the Scripture needed to be fulfilled and a new apostle needed to be chosen to take the place of Judas. After nominating two men, "... they all prayed for the right man to be chosen. 'O Lord,' they said, 'you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen as an apostle to replace Judas...'" Following prayer, they cast lots and Matthias was chosen to be the 12th disciple.

Another decision came in the midst of prayer: "While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2-3).

Neither of these decisions was made by a committee or after long discussions – they were made following or in the midst of corporate prayer by the leaders.

4. Preaching of the Word is prayer-empowered: In the midst of the activity of the Holy Spirit, the prayed up and prayed for unlikely preacher, Peter, stood up and boldly proclaimed the Truth of Jesus Christ, and those who received that word were baptized. God added three thousand souls to the Jerusalem church on Pentecost. This would have been impossible if Peter had preached in his own strength and power rather than through the power of the Word of God, and after much prayer.

5. God's people live lives devoted to the ways of Jesus Christ: "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2:42). As this lifestyle of Jesus was lived out "with gladness and sincerity of heart" (Acts 2:46), "...the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Praying communities of believers see God do amazing things for God.

The bottom line is that praying leaders will multiply praying churches filled with praying disciples! People follow leaders who follow Jesus. Prayer should be the foundational lifestyle for the Church of Jesus Christ.

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