

Praying aloud in a group



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PREFACE

This booklet was put together along time ago when I was youth Minister at Melton and there were increasing numbers of people who found it very difficult to pray aloud, especially in a group setting. I realise there are many mistakes in it, it may also be contextual in places and it may be too straightforward and basic to respond to some of the questions you have. None the less, it is a resource you may benefit from in some small way.

WHY IS PRAYING ALOUD IN A GROUP IMPORTANT.

My first challenge to pray in a group came when I was 16. Myself and a few others I knew went to a Bible study with a large group of people who I had never met before. We were thankfully given an easier option of saying "Amen" when our turn to pray arrived. I took the option but as the prayer meetings continued I felt that I was missing out. I was still praying in my head but I had no influence over the group's direction of prayer and because of that, much of what was prayed was inappropriate for me. As well as this I felt that my prayers were lacking spiritual power, they were just my prayers and no one else's. The problem was, I knew God heard my prayers but were they as powerful as they could be or could I pray with more spiritual power?

The point to this is that I believe that at one time or another all people who have ever prayed aloud in a group had similar fears to those which are listed above. What follows is a guide to overcoming your fear of praying in a group. The church was born out of the people getting together and praying together (Acts 1:14; 1:24; 2:24; 4:24; 4:31; 6:6; 8:15; 12:5; 12:12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5) and the effect this had on the world was enormous.

Why pray out loud? Well, because God says that when two or more ask for something of me they will be blessed and rewarded (Matthew 18:20). When we pray out aloud others in the group will be able to hear our

prayers and can pray for us as well. The initial prayer may spark off other thoughts that need prayer in relation to the topic,

i.e. The first Prayer: That the Church may grow in number,
Second person's thought and following prayer is: Let's pray for the leaders and their strength and energy. Third person's thought and prayer is: Let's pray for the people who come along that they will be touched. Fourth person's prayer is: Let's pray for strength and wisdom within the Church to support these people.

Praying in a group allows us to experience something that can be easily overlooked. When we pray together in a group, often a powerful sense of unity develops between the individuals praying and God, to whom they are praying. God seems to bind together those who are praying with a common goal and quest to draw closer and step into the presence of God.

WHY IT IS DIFFICULT TO PRAY ALOUD

There are many people who find the task of praying in a group scary and rather daunting. The reason why it maybe hard for you to pray aloud in a group is that you lack the confidence to do it, perhaps feeling:

- Uncomfortable praying in the presence of others.
- A fear of saying the wrong words.
- A fear of sounding silly.
- Insecurity because you have no idea what to pray.
- Unworthy in the presence of 'better' prayers.
- Intimidated by 'better' prayers. (let's get this straight now that there are no such thing as a 'better' prayers!!)
- Inexperienced in praying in a group.

FEELINGS THAT ARE OK

We often put ourselves down for having negative feelings but I want to list a few feelings here that are completely OK. In fact these feelings are so normal, that when you first start praying in a group you can expect to feel some, if not all of them:

fear	discomfort	inferiority
guilt	impatience	unworthiness
silliness	restlessness	speechlessness

IT'S TIME TO SPEAK UP AND PRAY.

1. LENGTH IS NOT IMPORTANT.

We are often conned into thinking that when we pray we must pray for a long time. In fact Jesus when he taught about prayer summed up all that we should pray in ten short sentences. In Matthew 6:9-13 Jesus teaches us the Lord's prayer. He tells us that this is what you need to cover when you pray, just this and finish with Amen. The point is do not be worried about how long you pray for, length does not matter. One sentence is a good start.

2. IT'S WHAT GOD THINKS THAT'S IMPORTANT.

Our perception of what people think of us often stops us being who we are. This includes the words we say. If you sit in a group that is praying you have two options: Do you worry about what other people think of what you say and how you say it or are you concerned what God thinks of what you say and how you say it? I think that it is high time we take into account what God thinks of us and not what other people do. When you grasp this, a huge freedom accompanies it, both within yourself and within your relationship with God.

3. PRAY TO GOD.

Whenever you pray, regardless of any of the surrounding circumstances, pray to God. Sounds remarkably simple doesn't it? Even blatantly obvious, but how many experiences have you found yourself in where (if you were to admit in all honesty) you are in fact praying to the group and not to God. God clearly knows and understands which words are said to him and which ones are misguided.

4. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO FLOW.

Because we live in a fast paced society where we are continually talking, it becomes natural to us to be able to throw a sentence together and blurt it out at the drop of a hat. Prayer is some what different however because you will, if you have not already realised find times when you are momentarily lost for words. You know kind of what you want to say but you're not sure how to say it. You need to know that it's OK to stop and start and 'umm' and 'ahh'.

5. THERE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A POLISHED ENDING.

In school we're taught how to write a conclusion to an essay, in life conversations always wind up before the 'good-bye'. Prayer finishes with an 'Amen'. You may perhaps feel the urge and pressure to round the prayer up (neat and tidy), if so, you may want to try "Lord, we lift these things up to you now and in your powerful name, Amen."

6. FORGET THE BIG WORDS.

Why would you use large complex words in a prayer time? 1) To sound good? 2) To impress others? 3) To say exactly what you mean? 4) Because they are part of your vocabulary that you speak daily? If it is either of the first two options then you need to release yourself from the pressure that accompanies trying to say the right words. Jesus, when he prayed, did not use large complex words. He spoke what he felt from the heart, language that was common to him and those around him.

The Pharisees were told off by Jesus himself for standing on street corners and praying out aloud. (Matthew 6:5 - 8) When they prayed they used such long words and went on forever so that everyone was very impressed, except the one person who really mattered..... God. Jesus wants your prayers to come from a part of your heart, don't say what you think God wants you to say. Say what you really want to say and you will find that it is exactly what God wants you to say.

7. SILENCE IS GOLDEN.

As a kid I had to write "silence is golden" 500 times, usually on a weekly basis as punishment for doing something wrong in class. It is not until writing this booklet that I have realised how much wisdom is in that line. Silence is not something to be scared of, it is to be enjoyed. Don't allow yourself to feel the pressure of filling in the space when everyone else isn't praying. The sign of a good relationship is when both parties can sit comfortably in silence and still enjoy each other's company.

Being still and quiet in the prayer time, in other words enjoying the silence allows God the opportunity to speak to us. If you are in a conversation with someone who talks non-stop, you gradually turn off and do not listen to what they have to say. God never turns off but what respect are you showing him, talking all the time and then ending the conversation.

In the silence it is also important for you to focus on God. To picture him hugging you, talking with you, helping you out, whatever seems to work best for you. God will in turn use this time to change your heart, to prompt you what to pray and to be refreshed by his spirit. Silence is to be embraced not pushed away.

8. WHAT TO PRAY.

Here is some cool advice, "We do not use prayer to change God, God uses prayer to change us!" When we come before God you need to be expecting him to lead you in your thoughts to areas that desire prayer whether it be your life, family, friends, etc.

If you find yourself in a group and have no idea what to pray, but feel that you'd like to contribute, this is what you do. Think of what you want to thank God for, now this can be anything, anything at all. In fact it's the best way to pray to God, how wrapped would he be that all you want to do is thank him. The other option is to locate an area of your life where you would like God to work and invite him to do so.

It is important for you to know at this stage that it is GOOD to just sit in God's presence that means focusing on God though, not sitting with a group who are praying while you are day-dreaming. A method you might find useful here is to associate God with a word, e.g. "Lord". When you find yourself slightly losing concentration, repeat the word to yourself quietly. If you use this word as a gesture of praise and worship then you will find yourself drawn into God's presence.

9. FEEL FREE TO PRAY ANYTHING.

You can pray about absolutely anything you want. Don't ever let yourself think that you can't say that to God. On this point I'm very serious, God hears everything you say, he knows you better than you know yourself and knows all your thoughts. When you say things aloud it brings them into reality, which then allows your heart to be open to how God may wish to change or work in you. Remember that if you open up your heart to God, He will open up His heart to you, His heart that knows no end.

10. WHAT DO YOU SOUND LIKE.

We all sound differently and by now surely you are used to your voice as is everyone else. A common fear when praying in a group is "I'll sound silly, people might laugh." This thought doesn't occupy your mind in conversations with others so why should it when you are talking to others and to God. Don't be worried about what you will sound like when you have your chat with God.... Who cares? I know God doesn't. God gave you your voice, your mind, your heart. He wants to receive the benefits that you have to give, such as your voice.

11. EVERYONE STARTED HERE.

Everyone who has ever prayed a prayer out loud in a group started at this place where you may find yourself now. A place where they were unsure what to pray, where they were unsure how it would be received, where they were unsure about the whole experience. Everyone you see as a confident prayer has at one stage or another found themselves in the position you are in now. Therefore everyone who confidently prays also knows how difficult and perhaps scary it can be getting to the stage where you feel confident to pray aloud in a group. Those people who you look up to as strong prayers realise and understand what it is like to feel the way you do, therefore ask them for tips and listen to what they both say and pray.

12. THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A GOOD PRAY-ER.

Often we categorise those people who pray, we say "wow they are a 'good' prayer", or "they are able to pray 'better' than me". If you feel like this I want you to take a second to define that 'good' or 'better'. See, praying to God is exactly that. It is offering your heart up to God, including your thoughts, hopes, dreams, hurts, struggles, pain, joys, happiness, needs, desires. There is no good or bad way of doing that. Therefore you cannot be bad at doing it. Don't look down on yourself thinking that you can't pray because you don't feel that you would be as good as the other people who are praying. We're all good prayers.

13. AGE ISN'T AN ISSUE.

Some of you who are reading this, are probably younger than a lot of people who you may be praying with. To that I say "so what", as I hope you do too. David who was an extraordinary man of God and spent many long, joyful afternoons praying to God. God actually said that David was a man after his own heart... This means that David had an excellent prayer life. How else do we know this? Well he wrote many of the Psalms. That's right he wrote down his prayers and shared them with the world. Now how old do you think he was when he started? David was probably out in the fields with his older brothers or the other servants at the age of 5 or so, learning the tricks of the trade, developing the correct skills. It is possible that at the age of 12 or so he was shepherding the sheep by himself. That means that as young as the age of 12 he might have been writing prayers, songs of worship and praises to God that would later effect the whole world. As you can clearly see age is no longer an excuse.

This also implies for the other end of the age spectrum. Moses would have been eighty when he was first placed in a position to pray aloud on behalf of the people. He too at the beginning found it very difficult and uncomfortable, especially seeing as he had a speech impediment, but enabled him to succeed and he became a powerful man of prayer.

14. OBEY PROMPTINGS.

Have you ever experienced a prompting when you are praying? For me it feels like I know what I should say, or just a thought about something I should pray for. It may not be much at all but I sit there thinking 'Oooooohh I should say that, I feel like saying that.' A prompting is when you feel as though you should do or say something because God wants you to. How often would you obey this prompting? This is a key question and stretches across your entire Christian walk how many promptings from God would you step out and obey.

It is by faith that we step out, that we obey these promptings and it is by faith that we honour God, that we draw close to God, we believe he is real, that he works, that he is listening and that we have to do all that is necessary to conquer our fears and worries, to beat the obstacles that stand in the way of us both growing closer to God and building his kingdom.

15. YOU DON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO PRAY.

In some instances you are not meant to pray out loud. This cannot be used as a continual excuse, but sometimes you will not be given anything to pray about, you will not have anything on your heart that you wish to share. If this happens to be the case then you are to enjoy just sitting in the presence of God. The goal of all prayer is for us to draw close to the heart of God.

16. DON'T FORGET TO ENJOY GOD AND HAVE FUN.

What an honour it is to be able to pray, to be able to share our hearts with Almighty God. Nehemiah 8:10 says that "the joy of the Lord is my strength". See it is *enjoying* God that allows us to grow stronger in Him, that enables us to grow closer to Him. Praying aloud in a group should be a fun experience, you should totally enjoy it. So above all make sure you enjoy being with your friends and being close to God with them. When you feel this the reward of praying aloud in a group will bless you beyond your wildest dreams.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE.

You have now read how to actually pray in a group and why you should, and that you have nothing to be fearful of but there is one other thing that I feel I need to let you in on.

How do you start? Let's go right back to basics.

PRIVATE PRAYER.

This is by far the most important factor in beginning to build your confidence in prayer. How do you expect to feel comfortable praying in a group setting if you are not used to speaking with God alone, just the two of you? So you must get into the practice of praying on a regular basis, daily speaking to God at a specific time (now whether you just say 10 minutes each day, at night or half an hour at 7.30am, is your decision). This says that you are willing to put aside time in your day to meet with God. You see your time with him, as important and a priority.

By practising this on a daily level you will feel God closer and more intimately not only during the prayer time, but also throughout your day. If you are persistent at this, if you get into the habit of praying on a regular basis, you will slowly develop a hunger to know God more, you will feel more encouraged to pray to him throughout the day as well as in the specified time.

This next section is what I have adapted, changed and developed, from Bill Hybels book, "Too Busy Not To Pray"

Here is an acrostic guide that may help you to know what to pray for:

A-Adoration. This means that I spend time praising and worshipping God, just enjoying how awesome he is.

C-Confession. It is not necessary to be sitting in a confessional box in a Church, to tell God that you've been wrong and that you seek his forgiveness. Confession is simply coming before God and saying you are sorry.

T-Thanksgiving. Saying thank you to God is vitally important. He gives us so much so make it a priority to thank him for all that he has given you.

E-Expectations. This is the area that usually occupies a large percentage of our prayer time. It shouldn't but it does. It features those things we would like God to do or give us. I have called it expectations because we need to pray with faith.

D-Discernment. This is when we allow for God to speak to us, on issues in our lives, on the direction we are going, or a ministry/Church we are involved in, on our current behaviour or for others who we may know.

If you use ACTED in your daily prayer time you will be making sure that you are praying in line with the way he has instructed us (Matthew 6:9-15). The other benefit of this is knowing that you are praying correctly. The rest of the day can be spent with the freedom of experiencing God.

A PRAYER PARTNER.

Next approach a friend who is a Christian and who you feel comfortable with. When you have identified someone with whom you are comfortable (and of course this includes right timing, place, the relationship, etc.) ask them whether they would mind praying with you on a regular basis.

There are two benefits of doing this. The first is that your relationship with God and with this other person will be strengthened. The second benefit is that you will be able to experience what it is like to pray aloud in an extremely safe environment. You will be able to hear someone else pray aloud and you will start feeling comfortable praying aloud in the presence of another.

It may be beneficial to inform the person with whom you are praying that you have a fear of praying aloud in a group. Tell them that you want to feel more comfortable in praying aloud and that you would love their support.

PRAY IN A GROUP OF CLOSE FRIENDS.

Next step is the inevitable progression from praying by yourself and praying with another. It is important now that you place yourself in a group of close friends who you trust and feel comfortable with and whom you can pray with. This may not happen naturally, you may need to suggest it to a couple of your close friends, you may need to see if you can join a group of people (whom you trust) who are already praying and would welcome your company, to experience group prayer.

If you place yourself in a position where you are surrounded by encouraging and trustworthy friends then you will really start to feel the joys of praying.

If you have successfully managed to conquer your fears; developing your own prayer life; praying with a trusted prayer partner; praying in a small group of friends with whom you feel comfortable, then the last step is not at all scary. You have developed the skills you need, you have experienced what you needed to experience to know longer struggle with praying aloud in a group. You should now be able to pray aloud in a group of any size and any mix of people.

With the confidence of God on your side you are more than equipped and ready to tackle praying aloud in a large group. What does it take? Faith on

your behalf and a willingness to step out. God gives peace, confidence and His presence. After you have done it once, it's easy. The way to get started is that first step as God is already there waiting to catch you if you fall. Be strong and courageous and pray aloud. God wants to hear you.

COMFORT ZONE.

From the start of this process to now you will be constantly faced with the pressure and challenge to step out of your comfort zone, that place where you feel completely safe. It is good to be challenged like this and when you overcome this you will really grow in your faith. The nature of Christianity is God continually challenging us to reach new highs and break new boundaries by stepping out in faith.

COMFORT COMES.

You may be feeling that after having come this far, you feel confident but not comfortable. It is important that you distinguish these two things as separate feelings. Being confident while praying aloud means that you now believe within yourself that you can do it, and also that you are now willing to give it a try. Comfortable means that you feel completely at ease praying aloud, you feel great comfort in sharing with a group, your needs and your prayers. There comes a time when you will transition from confidence (alone) to possessing both confidence and comfort. This comes through experience in praying aloud, through consistently and persistently praying aloud when the opportunities arise. Praying in a group is a journey with different treasures to be obtained along the way, comfort is but another treasure.

OTHER TIPS.

- When the prayer time starts, try sitting in the quietness and prepare your spirit, soul, heart and mind before God. There is no rush. Silently ask God for his patience, his confidence, his wisdom to direct you and focus you while praying.
- Sharing a prayer request at the beginning of a prayer session can be a helpful starting point to feeling comfortable and to building the trust you experience.
- Paying attention to other people's prayer requests allows you to know what to pray for.
- Pay attention to how other people pray, the words and phrases they use the excitement and passion they communicate. Use this as a guide to praying with more accuracy and as a reassurance.
- Don't be scared that you're going to cut someone off if you pray because it is unlikely that two people are going to start praying aloud at the same time. Even if two of you happen to pray at the same time, have a chuckle and then try again. If you are nervous about it so much that you can't pray, just add a little cough before you pray so everyone is warned.
- To get into the practice of praying aloud in a group you may want to try praying aloud in your private prayer time with God. By doing this it allows me to feel comfortable with what I am saying and how I say it which cuts down my anxiety in a group.
- It is vitally important to enjoy praying, whether it be aloud or silently, publicly or privately.