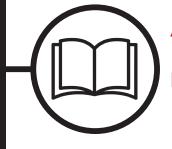
PERSPECTIVE

AUGUST 2023

THE WHAT & WHY OF CORPORATE PRAYER

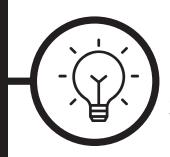
CONTENTS

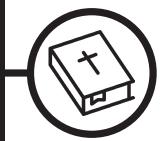


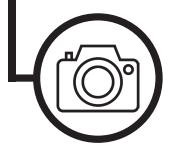
ARTICLE The What and Why of Corporate Prayer Kevin Vaughter



BOOK HIGHLIGHT 5 Our Hymn Writers and Their Hymns Written by Faith Cook Recommended by Mike Blackburn







The What and Why of Corporate Prayer

Have you ever wondered why we pray corporately?

If you have sat in a MVBC service, you would have heard an elder stand up before the congregation and say something like this, "Good morning brothers and sisters. We want to take a few moments to go before the Lord, corporately confessing our sins to him." For those in the business world, the term "corporate" may sound stuffy or even sterile. "Corporate" in that context refers to a group of people treated as a single entity for administrative purposes. But in the context of our gatherings, "corporate" refers to the whole body of Christ praying together. And this is not only a gift from God to his church—he also requires it of his people.

Of course, you won't find a specific text stating "you shall pray corporately" in the Bible. Yet Scripture is full of passages revealing a people that approach their God with one voice. The Latin word "corpus" means "body". We are the "body of Christ". Just as sound doctrine, communion and fellowship are important to the local body of believers, so is prayer. At MVBC in 2022, we thought especially about prayer in the life of the church. As we think about corporate worship in 2023, let's return to the topic of "corporate prayer."

WHAT IS CORPORATE PRAYER?

Prayer is an essential part of every believer's life. God has revealed himself to us in his Word, the sixty-six books of the Bible. He has also given us his Spirit, so that we can be convicted of sin and understand his revealed Word. The Father has given his own Son, Jesus, as an acceptable sacrifice for our sins, so that we can now approach God as *our* Father (1 Timothy 2:5.) Therefore, we should view prayer not as a "have to" but as a "get to". We can now approach the God of the universe in prayer. Think about that for a minute. Perhaps you typically think about prayer on an individual basis—your quiet time with God, for example. But God didn't save you to be a "lone ranger" Christian. Though individual prayer is essential to the Christian life, when we gather as a body of believers, God gifts us with the privilege of praying corporately.

John Piper defined corporate prayer this way: "Corporate praying is praying, or prayers offered to God in the hearing of other believers who agree with and affirm the prayers."^{*i*} There is something special about God's church gathered, under one roof, with a heart posture of worship and

agreeing in prayer that God's will would be done. Whether our prayer is one of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, or supplication, we go to God as one body, united by the blood of Christ. That's a grace of God.

On Sunday morning, we gather to worship our God. The Word is preached, sung, read aloud, and prayed. Though there are other instances where we meet to pray, such as Sunday morning class or covenant small groups, I will give the most attention to the prayers we offer to God during our main, Sunday morning assembly.

WHY DO WE PRAY CORPORATELY?

Ok, so you may be asking, "I get it, we meet corporately, which we are called to do, but isn't prayer more of a personal relationship between me and God?" You may even be thinking of passages such as Matthew 6:6, "But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Prayer is *both* personal and corporate. The passage in Matthew is dealing primarily with the temptation of praying for the purpose of public recognition, not with praying publicly. In other words, Jesus assumes we will pray publicly (and be tempted to pride) which is why he exhorts us to pray privately as well.

Your quiet time with God is vital for your Christian life, and a large part of that time is spent in prayer with our Father. But praying together as a church is vital too. Here are just a few reasons we pray corporately:

- I. It's ORDAINED BY GOD. In Mark 11:17, we read the account of Jesus cleansing the temple when he states "Is it not written, my house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations? But you have made it a den of robbers." Jesus calls their attention to Isaiah 56:7. In short, it has always been God's plan for his people to come together and pray. No wonder, then, we see throughout the New Testament the early church gathered in prayer (Matt. 18:20; Acts 1:14; Acts 2:41).
- 2. CORPORATE PRAYER GLORIFIES GOD (2 Cor. 4:15; Rom. 15:6). Though the church is for the Christian, we often have non-believers join us for corporate worship. In our gatherings, they see something of the gospel "played out" as they hear the body of Christ being led in prayers of thanksgiving and confession. God gets the glory as we pray together before an unbelieving world. What a stark contrast to the individualistic nature of our culture! It's not about me, or you; it's about God.
- 3. It edifies and unifies us as we share in the common faith (John 17:22–23; 1 Thess. 5:11;

Heb. 10:24–25). We ought to be encouraged when a brother leads us in prayer on Sunday morning and when we hear the prayers of our sisters every Sunday night. All these prayers bring us together as a church. We all struggle in many ways. Many in the church are hurting, sick, or lonely, and these prayers are a source of comfort to all. God uses these prayers to knit us together as the body of Christ.

- 4. IN CORPORATE PRAYER, WE CAN CONFESS OUR SINS TOGETHER AND EXPERIENCE HEALING THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST (see James 5:16 and the *Perspective* article by Darius Tuckerⁱⁱ). God wants brothers and sisters to be open about their sin struggles. We don't want sin to be kept in the dark. When we pray as a body, confessing our sins, we are reminded that every one of us need God's grace daily.
- 5. IT REMINDS US OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AS WE PRAISE GOD FOR KEEPING HIS PROMISES TO HIS PEOPLE. Corporate prayers of praise help us remind one another how great and kind and loving God has been and always will be to his church. Praising God together like this should lead us to great joy and thanksgiving!

In summary, if you read through the Bible, even long before the first church, you'll find God's people corporately responding to him. Early on, God's people collectively groaned (Ex. 2:23) and worshiped (Ex. 4:31; 12:27) as far back as the time of Moses. In Ezra 10, we see the people, being led by Ezra's prayer, corporately lamenting and confessing their sin. The Psalms have several prayers spoken in the first-person plural of "we" such as Psalm 44. The early church met regularly to hear the teaching of the apostles, to break bread and pray together (Acts 2:42.) Paul regularly exhorted the churches to pray for his ministry and that prayer always be done in a manner that builds up the church (1 Cor. 14:16–17.)

DOES IT MATTER WHO LEADS CORPORATE PRAYER?

As a local church, by God's grace, we gather in many ways as body—not just Sunday mornings. There's Sunday school, Wednesday evening classes, and covenant groups. So, does the timing of such prayers and who leads them matter? In short, yes.

The Bible prescribes how leadership in a church should look. We see that public preaching of the Word is the fundamental responsibility of the elders (2 Tim. 4:2, 1 Tim. 2:12.) Part of that authority granted by God is how prayer is led. At MBVC, we view the Sunday morning pastoral prayer, the prayer of praise, and the prayer of confession as times of teaching and shepherding. Thus, these prayers are reserved for men. The pastoral prayer and prayer of confession is reserved for elders.

Again, because we believe most corporate prayers during a Sunday morning gathering are a form of teaching and shepherding, we typically ask only men to lead us in prayer. But women clearly prayed in the early church meetings, and this is why they will occasionally pray on Sunday morning—for example, when we set aside new elders. The Sunday evening service is less formal, no one confuses the praying with elder leadership, and the prayers of men and women is a beautiful picture of the church at work.

The Sunday morning gathering is *the* essential gathering of God's people at Mount Vernon. As an elder leads the congregation in prayer, he will use words such as "we" or "us" or "our", as he confesses the many ways we have sinned as a body. "'We" represents the church. It may be counterintuitive during a prayer, especially that of confession, to have a mindset of "we" versus "I." It can be hard to not exclusively contemplate one's own sin as we approach God aware of our own failings. Nonetheless, when we pray corporately, we want to be mindful of the ways that *we* sin as a congregation. We want to focus on the sins we share. *We* have coveted things, *we* have lusted, *we* have been impatient, and so on.

During the pastoral prayer, you will often hear Aaron ask the Lord to heal sick members or to strengthen new parents as we give thanks for a baby. He will pray for matters of importance to our local church, as well as for other gathered saints across the city, the country, and the world. This is praying corporately for the good of the church and the glory of God.

HOW SHOULD CORPORATE PRAYER BE LED?

What about if you are asked to pray on a Sunday morning? Or a Sunday night? What about a small group?

You may have several questions:

- Is it okay to write down my prayer?
- Should I just get up and pray whatever comes to my mind?
- How long should I pray?
- What if forget something important?

It takes wisdom and discernment, of course, but I'll share a few points that I pray are an encouragement to

you:

- 1. INCLUDE SCRIPTURE IN PRAYER. In other words, "pray the Bible". You may want to jot down a few verses you'd like to reference as you lead others in prayer.
- 2. IF YOU CHOOSE NOT TO WRITE YOUR PAYER DOWN, BEWARE OF DRIFTING OR SOUNDING 'AIMLESS' OR EVEN 'DISORDERLY'. Ligon Duncan helpfully points out that 'disorderliness is a distraction for people who are trying to pray along with the one leading in prayer."ⁱⁱⁱ See 1 Corinthians 14:40. It helps to have a general idea of what you want to pray before you pray.
- 3. Avoid EXCESSIVELY LONG PRAYERS. For some (like me), it's easy to go on for a long time when it may not be necessary. For others, perhaps there is the temptation for your prayer to "sound" good in front of others (Matt. 5:7; 23:5). Pray God gives you humility as you pray publicly.
- 4. LEAN INTO ACTS. Many of us learned it as children, and it still applies. If you are asked to pray publicly, you may simply choose to focus on one of these themes (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving or Supplication.)
- 5. **REMEMBER YOU ARE PRAYING** *TO* **GOD AND FOR THE GOOD OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.** Care much about what God thinks and much less about what other people think.
- 6. PRAY THAT GOD'S WILL BE DONE IN ALL THINGS (as Jesus taught his disciples to pray in Matthew 6:5–14). It is good to make specific requests when you lead others in prayer. However, let's follow Jesus's example and always pray God's will would be done.
- 7. FINALLY, IF SOMEONE ASKS YOU TO PRAY PUBLICLY, DON'T BE NERVOUS OR WORRIED. Prayer is a sweet ministry, and God will help you glorify him and edify the church as you pray.

Leading a local body of Christ in prayer is sobering and weighty; yet, it should also cause great joy that we can come to our Father, through his Son, identifying as his people corporately.

How should we pray when being led in corporate prayer?

Think now about the brother or sister sitting beside you

in the church pew. How should they, as well as you, pray when being led in corporate prayer?

In the Puritan paperback book aptly titled, *Prayer*, John Bunyan defines prayer:

"Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to his Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God." $i\nu$

This definition points us as members to the right heart posture to have when being led in prayer. I know some Sunday mornings can be tough—your kids may be a handful, or you may simply be tired after a busy week. This can make even *listening* to prayers hard work. But let's fight the temptation to zone out. When our heads are bowed and our eyes closed, let's pray for the Spirit's help so we can pour out our hearts to God as one body.

Notice how in the Acts 2:42–27, the fellowship of believers is only possible due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in each believer's life. In other words, we can only pray as a "body" because God has made us such. It is because of his work that we should respond to him in prayer, both individually and corporately.

Back to Sunday night. Various members of the body pray at this service. It's an especially sweet time. We pray for each other in a variety of ways: for missionary partners, for evangelistic opportunities, for accountability in the fight against temptation, for reconciliation, for the elders, for the deacons, as well as praise and prayers of thanksgiving for all that God has provided.

Pastor and theologian, Jim Hamilton rightly stated the power of corporate prayer:

"A biblical theology of corporate prayer teaches us that God's people will become what they are—united in Christ—as we learn to speak to the Lord together. Speaking together, after all, trains the desires of our hearts to be united in faith, united in hope, united in love. Corporate prayer in the church requires the church to agree, to be without division, to be of the same mind and judgment (1 Cor. 1:10). It's one way the church "stands firm in one spirit" and "with one mind strives side by side for the faith" (Phil. 1:27)."

He's right. Corporate prayer is one way God has ordained

unity to exist in the church. When we are of like mind, by God's grace and by his Spirit, we are much more able to "contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

One small way we can show unity, is by saying "amen" at the end of a pastoral-led prayer or even in the middle! In the Old Testament, "amen" was first used as response to praise given to God and secondly as a response to prayer. When we say "amen," we are affirming that we agree with that prayer, the truth of God's Word and the sureness of his promises (2 Cor. 1:20). Amen means "let it be", "so be it", "verily" or "truly". When we respond as a church with "amen" we are saying, "yes Lord, let it be so, according to your will."

Brothers and sisters, when we go to the Lord together in prayer, let's fight the beast of hypocrisy! May every member of the body be putting sin to death, pursuing holiness, and loving each other well (John 13:35) before we sit down to pray together. Praying corporately reminds us that we aren't alone on an island. We are together in the city of God.

CONCLUSION

In his love for us, God has given us a way *to* him through his son, Jesus. Because we have the Holy Spirit, we can now pray to our heavenly Father—*both* personally and corporately. God has also given us the gift of the church where we can gather to worship him, fellowship, encourage, equip, send, and pray to our God and for each other.

Brothers and sisters, let me exhort you to not neglect to gather with the body (Heb. 10:24–25) but to be present and to come ready to worship and offer prayer to our great God as a church body.

"And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:31). May we boldly approach the throne of grace together in prayer, because of what Christ has done on our behalf, church. What a privilege we have when we gather as the body of Christ!

— Kevin Vaughter

^{*i*} John Piper, 'Corporate Prayer in the Life of the Church and in Worship', sermon dated April 18, 1990

ⁱⁱ December 2022 *Perspective* article, "How Should the Suffering Pray?", Darius Tucker

ⁱⁱⁱ 9Marks, Ligon Duncan, '32 Principles for Public Prayer', www.9marks.org/article/thirty-two-principlespublic-prayer/

^{iv} Prayer, John Bunyan, Chapter 1, 'What True Prayer Is' (pg.13)

^v 9Marks, 'A Biblical Theology of Corporate Prayer', www.9marks.org/article/biblical-theology-corporateprayer/

Our Hymn Writers and Their Hymns

Written by Faith Cook

As a lifelong lover of hymns, I thought I knew most great hymn writers and their music. I had played many great hymns in the standard Baptist hymnal (with the old blue cover) in my early years. However, encountering this book for the first time quickly set me straight! The author excels in laying out several poets who surely deserve to be included in this overview of hymnody and its history. From the early church fathers such as Ambrose, one of the first hymnists, the author reveals the incredible talents of these people of God. Faith Cook takes a subject that many a believer has glossed over and offers us a comprehensive study of the writings and lives of these remarkable men and women.

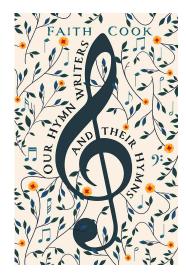
One thing I learned in reading this book is about Fanny Crosby, a blind woman whose faith was outstanding. Did you know she was not born blind? I encourage you to read the book to find the answer. She and many others suffered greatly throughout their lives. Many would recognize names such as the Wesleys, Crosby, Watts, and Luther. But how many of us know Bonar, Lyte, or Havergal? Even our well-known doxology from Psalm 100 was rendered by one unknown to me, William Kethe.

Cook does a credible job mentioning the writers and their works and aptly mixing backgrounds and fascinating history to paint the lives and trials of these gifted servants of God. She has done her homework and delved into many sources to produce this muchneeded work.

If one takes a small handful of the hymn writers in this book, we have a sort of "who's who" of the most frequently sung and loved hymns. From Isaac Watts to Stuart Townend, we have famous examples such as "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," "Joy to the World," "O God Our Help," "And Can it Be," "In Christ Alone," and many others.

Even if you are a younger believer, never brought up in a church that sang the great hymns of the faith, this volume should be on your "must read" list to introduce you to those who have gone before us and left an incredible legacy in both older and newer hymnals.

— Recommended by Mike Blackburn



Excerpts from the Book

"Charles Wesley's wife, Sally, asked, 'Do you need anything' as she saw his life slipping away. 'Nothing but Christ,' whispered the dying man."

– "Charles Wesley: Singing a New Song" p. 121

"Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in one of his lectures, said of William Williams, writer of 'Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah', '... I put him in a category entirely on his own. He taught the people theology in his hymns."

– "William Williams: Poet of the Revival" p. 129

3

"One writer noted of Augustus Toplady, composer of Rock of Ages,"...a good hymn can only be written by a spiritual person under the impressions of spiritual influence. They have divine unction upon them...which strikes a chord in the believer's heart."

– "Augustus Toplady: A Sinner So Signally Loved" p. 177

CONTENTS

Expository Listening A Handbook for Hearing and Doing God's Word

Written by Ken Ramey

How do you prepare for corporate worship? Do you listen to sermons like your life depends on it? (Crazy thought!) Do you pray to truly *listen* so you may profit from the faithful preaching of God's Word? To listen is to obey. You may be saying, "Of course, I listen each Sunday." Or maybe you're thinking, "Well, what are the Pastors for then but to preach the Word to us?" Ken Ramey combats this with the richness of Scripture and the reality of God's Word—a well-prepared and faithful pastor is not enough. Sitting in the services is not enough. As a congregation, we must be wellprepared and faithful listeners with receptive hearts to hear! In this book *Expository Listening*, Ramey emphasizes the powerful and devastating distinction between having and not having a receptive heart to hear God's Word and obey it.

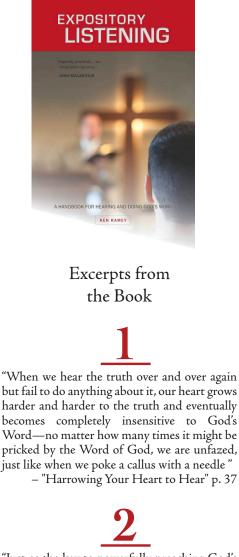
Although Ramey stresses discernment by "having your ears trained to differentiate between the voice of a true shepherd and the voice of a stranger" so that you are not led astray, he mainly uses biblical examples to outline the importance of having a receptive heart. He defines it as "the soil that's just right for the seed of the Word." It is not a blind acceptance of the Word but an active response. Christians hear and obey God's Word because they love God.

Ramey's reference to James is striking. James wrote to Christians forced to leave their homes and church due to persecution. In James 1:19-25, he challenged them to consider their response to God's Word, commanding them to "Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger." The eagerness implied in "be quick to hear" encourages what God's Word demands—that you are a careful and attentive listener! At the time, those Christians didn't have their own copy of Scripture to read. They depended entirely on hearing it read and explained in sermons. Imagine that! Their listening and obedience to God's Word were utterly dependent on their receptive hearts on the day of preaching.

Here are ways to practically "harrow your heart to hear": Read and meditate on God's Word every day; Pray throughout the week; Confess your sin; Reduce your media intake; Plan and schedule your week around the ministry of the Word; Be consistent in church attendance; Go to church with a humble, teachable, expectant heart; Worship with all your heart; Fight off distractions; Listen with diligent discernment; and Prepare the heart and soul to receive God's Word.

And with that, consider Ramey's conclusion— "So listen to every sermon in light of eternity, because every sermon is truly a matter of life and death."

— Recommended by Kayci Timmons



"Just as the key to powerfully preaching God's Word is proper preparation of the heart and mind of the preacher, the key to being powerfully impacted by the preaching of God's Word is proper preparation of the heart and mind of the hearer."

– "Harrowing Your Heart to Hear" p. 49

3

"If after listening to a sermon you do not have a better understanding of God's purpose for your life, then you have not heard biblical preaching."

– "The Itching Ear Epidemic" p. 56

AUGUST

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

August 1	Psalm 43
August 2	Psalm 44
August 3	Psalm 45
August 4	Luke 8:22–25
August 5	Psalm 47
August 6	Psalm 46:1–3
August 7	Romans 7:1–6
August 8	Romans 1:1–7
August 9	Romans 1:8–17
August 10	Romans 1:18–32
August 11	Ezekiel 3 <mark>6:1–</mark> 30
August 12	Romans <mark>2:1</mark> –11
August 13	Romans 7:1–6
August 14	Romans 7 <mark>:7</mark> –12
August 15	Romans 2:12–29
August 16	Romans 3:1–8

August 17 August 18 August 19 August 20 August 21 August 22 August 23 August 24 August 25 August 26 August 27 August 28 August 29 August 30 August 31

Romans 3:9–20 Deuteronomy 5:6–22 Romans 3:21–31 Romans 7:7–12 Matthew 6:19-34 Matthew 3 Matthew 4 Matthew 5 1 Kings 19:1–18 Matthew 6:1–18 Matthew 6:19-34 Matthew 18:1–20 Matthew 16 Matthew 17 Matthew 18

*Sermons in bold

CONTENTS

NEW MEMBERS





Joy Cook



Ornela Gjoni



Rosemary Hill



Esther Lambert



Jennifer Long



Austin Puckett



Katy Puckett



Trenton

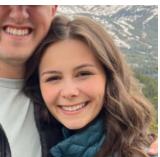
Roberts



Brianna **Roberts**



Jack Schutt



Olivia Schutt



Glenna Williams



Tyler Young



BAPTIST CHURCH