

5 ways to pray for your church family By Erik Raymond

As we turn our calendars to a new year, we instinctively make plans to give attention to what matters. As Christians, we know that when we think about our priorities, prayer is right at the top of the list. I was reading through Nick Batzig's helpful post on how to pray for our pastors and thought about how we could pray for our churches. Here are 5 ways that we can be praying for our own church family and other churches as well.

1. Pray for a Hunger for the Bible.

If the goal of the church is Christlikeness, then the diet for the church must be the Bible. After all, it is the Bible that God uses to make the child of God more like the Son of God (John 17:17). Therefore, we can pray that the church would be filled with people who hunger for hearing from God in their private devotions, public gatherings, and conversations with other believers. Imagine the impact of a church full of people who wake up eager to come and hear the Word preached on Sunday morning. Imagine a church that longs to open the Bible each morning to discover anew the truth of God's character and conquests. Imagine hearts so overflowing with the Bible that their text messages, conversations, and meditations just drip with the Scriptures. Everything pivots on what we do with the Bible.

Our Father, give our church—give me—an abiding delight in your Word. Cause me always to hunger for the truth while being ever satisfied with the truth. Lord, make our church a Bible-saturated church.

2. Pray for Thankfulness.

A thankful church should not be taken for granted, and an unthankful church should not be left alone. The Apostle Paul identifies being unthankful as a footprint of unbelief (Rom. 1:21) while noting thankfulness as a mark of a believer (Col. 3:15-17). One way we can be praying for our churches is to plead with God that we would be thankful.

But thankful for what? And thankful to whom?

The Apostle shows us that the thankfulness we are after is God-centered and gospel-wrought. In other words, we want to see churches enveloped by a real joy in God because of what He has done for us in Christ. You see this in Colossians 1 as Paul, himself in prison, prays for a church full of people whom he has never met—that they would understand the greatness of God and joyfully respond to the gospel with thanksgiving to God (Col. 1:9-14).

God, make us to be a church that is thankful to You and for You. May Your worth and work captivate our hearts, minds, and wills so that circumstances are transcended by the fact that You are for us in Christ.

3. Pray for Gospel Growth.

The gospel is intended to advance. Jesus commissioned His disciples as missionaries (Matt. 28:19-21) and churches have been advancing the gospel ever since. This cannot happen, however, with churches full of people unmoved by the gospel. The truth of the gospel must get down deep into the marrow of our beings, our very souls. It is a truth that must color every thought, action, and reaction. As we grow in our understanding of the gospel (and its implications), we find ourselves growing in our knowledge and application of the Bible. We become mature. Now, please understand—there is a difference between knowing about the Bible and gospel growth. The Pharisees knew a lot about the written Word but they rejected the incarnate Word. You have to do more than graduate with a degree in Bible Trivia. To grow in the gospel is to have one's identity, mission, security, and hopes all built on what Christ has done. A church that is growing in the gospel is filled with people who are joyfully loving, serving, and sacrificing for one another as they demonstrate the gospel. They are also tactfully, winsomely, and zealously declaring the gospel to each other and the world around them.

God, strengthen us in the gospel. Draw us deeply into the glory of Christ. Make us more and more impressed with Him this very day. Cause us to grow in the gospel and walk in a manner worthy of it.

4. Pray for Holiness.

The Apostle Peter exhorts us to be holy because God Himself is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). Before the church is anything else, she is set apart to holiness. Therefore, one of the prevailing burdens for us in prayer is to walk in holiness that corresponds to the reality of being positionally set apart by God. This is a challenge because we live in the midst of a world that is not holy. It does not regard holiness as a virtue. It, quite frankly, mocks holiness. As a result, we need to continually pray for our church family that we would be a holy people. The Bible tells us to pursue, or strive, after holiness with an intense effort (Heb. 12:14). This unwavering burden to reflect the divine character to one another and to the world around us must be an ongoing prayer.

Our holy God, make us to prize and pursue Your holiness. Strengthen our burden, commitment, and endurance to strive daily after holiness in our lives.

5. Pray for Unity.

The gospel brings people together. What's more, it brings sinful people with various backgrounds (geographic, ethnic, economic, etc.) together. The gospel takes selfish people and causes them to love one another. However, we know from reading the New Testament and from experience that selfishness constantly attempts to overthrow unity. How do we combat this? We are told to preserve unity (Eph. 4:2) by walking in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. This is a humble, gentle, enduring, and loving walk. It tends toward preserving unity rather than fracturing it. As long as selfishness exists, we must find ourselves praying for unity. We get there by asking for believers to walk this gospel walk, leaving footprints of humility.

Father, You are one God in three persons. There is such a loving, happy unity in the Trinity. Make this church—make me—to feel this happiness. Cause us to be united in and through the Trinity so that we might be united together, as a church, in love.