

**PRAYER
MINISTRY
VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

PRAYER MINISTRY

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Equipping You to Serve

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CHURCHLEADERS
P R E S S

Colorado Springs

**PRAYER
MINISTRY**
VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Equipping You to Serve

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Mark A. Taylor

CHURCHLEADERS
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INTRODUCTION

to the *Outreach Ministry Guides Series*

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms
(1 Peter 4:10).

This handbook is part of a series designed to equip and empower church volunteers for effective ministry. If you're reading this, chances are you're a church volunteer. Thanks for your willingness to serve!

Several things make this handbook unique:

- The content is specific and practical for your given area of ministry.
- The information is compiled by experienced ministry practitioners—folks who've worked, served, and helped to train others in this particular area.
- It's written with you—a ministry volunteer—in mind.

Within these pages, you'll find three sections. The first gives a brief overview of fundamental principles to provide you with a solid foundation for the ministry area in which you're serving.

Section 2 unpacks various roles and responsibilities. Understanding your role and the roles of your fellow teammates helps the ministry team serve together well.

Finally, Section 3 provides a multitude of practical ministry tools. These ideas and tips will help you demonstrate Jesus' love to the people you serve at your church.

INTRODUCTION

Whether you're a first-time volunteer or a seasoned veteran, my prayer is that the information and practical tools in this handbook will encourage and assist you. May God bless and guide you in your ministry!

— **Matt Lockhart**, Project Manager

INTRODUCTION

to the *Prayer Ministry Volunteer Handbook*

*R*ead this book to decide how your prayer ministry should look and what it should seek to accomplish. Use the variety of practical tools and guidelines you'll find here to be more effective in your ministry.

But before all that, read this book and learn how to pray.

The authors, Dave and Kim Butts, have a prayer ministry that spans the globe, but perhaps their most effective work has been with local congregations like yours. They have a passion for prayer and how it can transform a congregation, impact a community, and enliven individual believers. You will pray with more purpose, greater joy, and deeper effectiveness after adopting the approaches to prayer they describe here.

You will see how to lead others to enjoy their own enriched prayer lives, too. Most of all, you will prepare yourself to help your congregation become “a house of prayer for all nations,” and watch as God responds in ways you might not have imagined.

Throughout this book, Dave and Kim Butts challenge us to view prayer not as one more church program, but to make prayer flow through every initiative, every activity, and every “department” in our churches.

And yet their advice, while always founded on lofty principle, is consistently usable and real. Start small, they advise. Move slowly. They'll show you how, even as they motivate you never to stop.

INTRODUCTION

If your congregation has already established a prayer ministry, this handbook will give you resources for shaping and growing it. The “Tools” section alone is worth the price of the book.

But you’ll do well to start at the beginning. Your prayer life—and your prayer ministry—will likely never be the same.

— **Mark A. Taylor**, General Editor

SECTION 1

PRAYER MINISTRY FOUNDATIONS

*T*he content found in this Section provides you with the biblical basis and fundamental principles of a prayer ministry. Knowing and understanding the role of prayer will help equip and empower you as you participate in the prayer ministry at your church.

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CHAPTER 1

THE SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR PRAYER MINISTRY

“When Jesus built the church, he built a praying congregation.” — Armin Gesswein

It’s an uncomfortable picture of Jesus. Whip in hand, he overturns the tables of moneychangers and drives out the animals for sacrifice in the temple. All the while, in a loud voice he proclaims the words of the prophets: “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers’” (Mark 11:17).

There is no doubt Jesus came to the temple desiring it to live up to its God-given name, A House of Prayer for all nations. What he found instead was a lot of pseudo-religious activity and no prayer.

Any name is important, regardless of who gives it. There is special significance, though, when God himself steps in to name someone or something. The Bible tells us that God has chosen a name for his own house. In Isaiah 56:7, the Lord says, “These will I bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

We Are God's House

As we begin to understand that the church today, both corporately and individually, is God's house, it is critical that we comprehend what it means to live in/be a house that has been named by God as a house of prayer. Paul made it clear that we are God's house in Ephesians 2:21-22, "In him (Jesus) the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Paul really emphasized this fact to the Corinthian church.

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19).

"For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people'" (2 Corinthians 6:16).

Peter continues this teaching in 1 Peter 2:5, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood." The apostle John records the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:12, "The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God." In the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus say to us: "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them" (John 14:23). Can there be any doubt that the church is the house of God?

We often call Pentecost the birthday of the church. Have you considered the correlation between the events of that day and the day when the first temple was dedicated? As Solomon stood before the people and finished praying his great prayer of dedication, there came from heaven what we often call the Shekinah glory of

God. Fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifices and the glory of the presence of the Lord filled the temple. It was clear: God had come to dwell in his house!

On the day of Pentecost as the disciples gathered to pray, God once again dedicated his house. Again, fire fell from heaven. But this time the fire didn't come to a building—it separated and came to rest over the heads of the believers. A new temple was dedicated! And you are that temple. God's house is now his people, both when we are gathered in assemblies as well as individually. What hasn't changed is the name. God's house is still a house of prayer for all nations.

Arms Lifted Up

When a congregation begins to understand that God has named them a house of prayer for all nations, questions begin to arise regarding what prayer is and how we are to pray. One of the most important questions a prayer ministry team must consider is: How does prayer integrate into other ministries happening in a church? To answer, consider the following story from Exodus.

What an old man does with his hands on the top of a mountain shouldn't have any effect on the battle in the valley below. But in the economy of God, it is the work on the mountain that determines the outcome of the battle in the valley. Exodus 17:8-16 gives us the biblical story.

The children of Israel, soon after their exodus from Egyptian slavery, are attacked by the Amalekites. Joshua leads the Israelites in a battle that gives us great insight into the place of prayer. Moses stands on a nearby hill with his hands stretched out to heaven. As long as his arms are lifted, Israel is winning. But when 80-year-old Moses gets tired and lets his arms drop, the battle turns against Israel. Aaron and Hur come to the hill and hold Moses' arms up, and the battle is won.

Arms lifted up is always a picture of prayer. The apostle Paul teaches this in 1 Timothy 2:8, “I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands.” Israel’s victory over the Amalekites is a powerful picture of the place of prayer in the work of the people of God. It was not just prayer that won the victory—Joshua and the army still had to fight. And it certainly wasn’t just the fighting, for when prayer stopped, the victory stopped. Our work, with dependence upon God’s power in prayer, is the picture of how God wants to advance his kingdom.

“Time spent in prayer will yield more than that given to work. Prayer alone gives work its worth and its success. Prayer opens the way for God Himself to do His work in us and through us. Let our chief work as God’s messengers be intercession; in it we secure the presence and power of God to go with us.”

— **Andrew Murray**

It is so easy for a church to lose sight of the critical place of prayer in every aspect of ministry. Yet, when we consider the effort that goes into church work, and often, the meager results, we should realize something is missing. We should be desperate for the power of God to be poured out in our midst as we serve God. Scripture tells us, “You do not have because you do not ask God” (James 4:2), and that is never truer than in the life of a congregation. When prayer is integrated in the life of the people of God, they will begin to see the intervention of Heaven on their behalf and on behalf of others as they minister and serve.

A Critical Foundation

It is this biblical principle that forms the basis for a church prayer ministry. When prayer becomes the foundation for everything

that happens in the ministry of a church, God's power is poured out and a whole new level of effectiveness is experienced. Beyond effectiveness in ministry, this biblical process brings increased honor and glory to God and teaches the church to depend fully upon the Lord. Prayer is a key way in which God teaches us to fully trust him.

“God’s cause is committed to men; God commits Himself to men. Praying men are the vice-regents of God; they do His work and carry out His plans.”

— **E.M. Bounds**

The purpose of developing a prayer ministry in the local church is twofold: to raise the level of awareness, knowledge, and participation in prayer within the church, and then to seek to advance the kingdom of God by praying individually and corporately for those things on the heart of God as revealed in his Word and through the working of his Spirit.

Paul Billheimer writes in *Destined for the Throne*, “Any church without a well-organized and systematic prayer program is simply operating a religious treadmill.” This means prayer must be the cornerstone of every program and activity in the church. We must ask for the Lord’s blessing, his presence, and the working of his power—praying for his almighty protection and guidance. Otherwise, we’re undertaking ministry in our own strength instead of God’s.

A praying church will look much like the church in the New Testament. Perhaps the predominant characteristic of the church in the book of Acts was their prayer life. The church was born on Pentecost, after ten days of continual prayer, and prayer was woven into every aspect of the early church’s life. When Luke described the four foundational aspects of church life in Acts 2:42, prayer

was one of them. That devotion to prayer expressed in Acts 2 is demonstrated throughout the rest of the book.

When two church leaders were arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 4), the immediate response of the church was to gather and pray. When individuals were needed to take care of distributing food in Jerusalem, the apostles demurred, asserting that they must give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Peter's escape from prison in Acts 12 comes as a result of the church "earnestly praying to God for him." Barnabas and Saul were sent off on their missionary journeys by the church in Antioch with fasting and prayer (Acts 13). Those instances are just a sampling of the prayer life of these early Christians. Prayer was the lifestyle of the New Testament church. A praying church today is following in their footsteps.

CHAPTER 2

THE WHY OF PRAYER

“History belongs to the intercessors, who believe the future into being.” — Walter Wink

If we are going to have a sustained movement of prayer, we must have a biblical understanding about the “why” of prayer. Without this understanding, we will default to one of two errors: viewing prayer as simply a way of getting things from God, or seeing it as simply a religious exercise that we are supposed to do. We will never give ourselves to prayer until we see its proper place in the plan of God.

From the beginning, prayer has always been about God, first and foremost. All true prayer originates in the heart of the Father. When the Father wants something done, it is immediately known to the Spirit: “In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:11). Through the Spirit, God’s will is made known to the believer. Then, through the name and authority of the Son, we pray back to the Father what he wanted to do in the first place. Mankind has a role—a vital role—but it’s all about God! John Wesley said it this way, “All God’s works are done in believing prayer.”

Again and again, Scripture demonstrates that God has put prayer at a critical junction in how he has chosen to work on planet earth. Prayer is God’s way of accomplishing his will in our world.

As we pray his will, we move into that awesome place of privilege where we join with the work of God. It is how we grow spiritually, not just in doing things for God, but also in learning to work with him in complete dependence. Prayer is so important to our spiritual development that it is not an exaggeration to say God will not move until we ask him. Not because he cannot, but he chooses not to so that we might grow in our understanding of his ways and his will.

One of the most significant passages illustrating this is found in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. The Israelites had continued to reject the word of God given through the prophets, and it was time for the consequences of sin to be felt. Even at that late point, God wanted mercy to triumph over judgment. However, for God's mercy to be poured out, prayer was required. Someone needed to ask him for mercy. God was demonstrating how he had connected his work on earth to the prayers of his people.

“I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none” (Ezekiel 22:30). If you see a passage of scripture in which the Creator of all things is looking for someone, it is important to pay attention. It certainly signifies something very close to the heart of God.

This rich verse helps us understand the dealings of God with mankind, not just in this situation but throughout time. Unrepentant sin has consequences. In this case, it was the destruction of Jerusalem. But the verse reveals the compassionate heart of the Father, showing that he is even now looking for ways to avoid destroying his people. God has, however, tied his workings to the prayers of his people. So we find the all-powerful Creator looking for an intercessor, someone who would stand in the gap and cry out on behalf of the land so that God might pour out his saving power. None are found, and the city is destroyed.

Our Prayers Make a Difference

This biblical story demonstrates powerfully that our prayers do make a difference. Even God was waiting on someone to pray before he acted. That flies in the face of much of the current belief (unbelief) in prayer that says, “Prayer is important, but after all, God is going to do whatever he wants to do.” That was certainly not the case in Ezekiel 22.

There is another excellent illustration of this principle, this time from a positive perspective. In Exodus 32, while Moses is on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, the people of Israel turn from true worship and begin to worship a golden calf. God tells Moses he intends to destroy the people. But Moses steps into the gap of intercession and pleads for mercy for his people. God listens, relents, and the nation is saved. Psalm 106:23 refers to that occasion: “So he said he would destroy them, had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them.” God found someone to stand in the gap (breach), and his mercy triumphed over judgment.

The emphasis on the power and purpose of prayer is clear. God has chosen prayer as his way of accomplishing his will on earth. Jesus taught us to pray this very thing: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Prayer moves from our preconceived notion that it is a way to get things from God, to the more biblical perspective of prayer as God’s tool for bringing about his purposes. We are privileged to be a part of his work on earth through prayer!

With scriptural teaching serving as an anchor, a congregation should move into prayer ministry with the confidence that they are at the center of God’s will for the church. The biblical emphasis on prayer should ensure the support of leadership for this ministry. When the ministry of prayer is seen as foundational to the life of the church, it will move from being a side issue to front and center for every aspect of church life.

“When the devil sees a man or woman who really believes in prayer, who knows how to pray, and who really does pray, and, above all, when he sees a whole church on its face before God in prayer, he trembles as much as he ever did, for he knows that his day in that church or community is at an end.” — R.A. Torrey

It is important at the outset to clarify that the purpose is not just to have a functioning prayer ministry team. The grand, overarching purpose is to have a praying church! It is then that God’s power is poured out upon his people and his purposes are accomplished in our lives. Through prayer, God is honored as his people learn to depend upon him in every way.

A Lifestyle of Prayer

With this as our mindset, we realize that prayer ministry is not about events or programs but lifestyles. Though there will be many programmatic elements as prayer is developed and highlighted in the life of the church, it is essential to point beyond the programs to the One addressed in prayer. Individuals will be taught to walk in continual awareness of the presence of the Lord. As this lifestyle is developed individually, prayer becomes a characteristic of the gathered life of the congregation. All that happens in the church can then be undergirded and fueled by powerful prayer.

New Testament Christians were praying Christians. The church was born at a prayer meeting on the day of Pentecost, and the disciples continued to pray as they went on their way proclaiming the good news of Jesus around the world. That really shouldn’t surprise us. The leaders of the church, the apostles, had gone to Jesus earlier and asked him to teach them to pray. He did.

THE WHY OF PRAYER

Then he instructed them to teach others what he had taught them. From Jesus to the apostles, to the first-century Christians, and down through the years to us, believers have taught and practiced prayer.

CHAPTER 3

THE BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF A PRAYING CHURCH

“The true church lives and moves and has its being in prayer.” — Leonard Ravenhill

As we focus on prayer in the book of Acts, we find that it was a core value of the early church. I doubt they used the term “core value” as we often do today, but the Scriptures indicate that prayer had a place in the key priorities of the church. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). There we find the core values or priorities of the church:

1. Apostles’ doctrine
2. Fellowship
3. Breaking of bread
4. Prayer

Is prayer one of the core values of your church? Certainly we all give lip service to its value, but does prayer really find its way into the nuts and bolts of how you “do church”? In all too many congregations, prayer has become only a way of opening and closing meetings or a means of expressing concern for the sick and hurting. In the book of Acts, believers didn’t simply say that they were devoted to prayer; they demonstrated it by their actions.