



Prayer Guide for Presbyterian Elders

In researching and reviewing factors which are common denominators in growing churches many “basics” are uncovered. One of these is a congregation in which the ministry of prayer is shared ministry. Research also shows that elders who are active faithful and compassionate in their regular visitation of the members and adherents, help build growing churches. In The Presbyterian Church in Canada we believe that elders are to be role models in the areas of spiritual discipline. Certainly prayer is no exception. There are clear indications that renewal and growth takes place in congregations where the elders are actively praying with the people of the church.

“What, me pray?” “Out loud?” are questions often asked by many elders when faced with this concept. Yet the doctrine, tradition, and practice of the church have always included this component in the role of the elder. There are many people in our denomination who have the gift of prayer, that is to say, the ability to offer expressions of confession, adoration, thanksgiving and intercession to the Lord. Prayer is not to be limited to the elders, but it is certainly a good place to start.

The following Prayer Guide for Presbyterian Elders is a collection of comments and suggestions from elders who have learned, and are learning, about prayer in their regular visitation. The Committee On Church Growth is indebted to the Session of Grace Church in Orleans, Ontario, for their efforts and cooperation in the preparation of this booklet. Please remember this information is presented to assist YOU, in your discovery of prayer, and to assist YOU in developing your own style of prayer with your districts. This IS not the last word or Elders Praying, only a tool to assist YOU in your efforts in this matter.

When the session of Grace Church was asked by the Church Growth Committee to supply information for a guide to be used by elders across the church, on the topic of praying with our districts, it was decided that the clerk of session would compile the input received from each elder. On reviewing the information submitted, we came to the realization that there are as many methods of prayer as there are elders in our session. This is not a bad sign however, since all elders, individually, need to develop their own styles of ministry in God’s church, and with the people to which they minister.

What is presented here is a compilation of comments, as given by each elder, to show the differences that can occur. We sincerely hope that this information will be used not as a step-by-step procedure to be followed but will allow you the reader, to realize that prayer is a personal communication between God, the people in your district, and you.

It is up to you to decide when and how to pray and we, as a session, hope and pray that this guide will be instrumental in fostering a more caring attitude between all elders and their districts.

Clerk of Session Grace Presbyterian Church

Background Comments

As members of session, and elders in God's church we are called upon to be spiritual leaders in the body of Christ. As such, we are also to foster, and to encourage growth in that body. For this reason we must. As Christ did, as Apostles did, pray for our people. And we are to encourage our people to pray for us and for church.

It is through prayer that we come to know God. Christ says in Matthew 7:7 "Ask and it will be given unto you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." By asking (praying) we will receive and by receiving we will grow in wisdom and knowledge, and by growing we will truly know God.

We often find prayer difficult because we do not always understand what prayer is, and what it does. To help understand prayer I have gathered together some of what the Scriptures say regarding prayer and have included the Scripture references to enable further study.

1. Prayer is, quite simply, speaking with God. When you talk to Him, He listens, and then, because you have asked, He is able to give you His peace and to guard your hearts and minds. *Philippians 4:6-7*
2. Prayer pleases God and allows Him to soften the hearts of people so that they may be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth. Paul, in his instructions to Timothy on worship, urges him first of all to pray for everyone. *1 Timothy 2:1-8*
3. It is God's will that we pray. Be joyful always pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances. For this is God's will for you Christ Jesus. *1 Timothy 5:16-18*
4. Prayer increases our faith. It builds us up. If we do not pray, we cannot see or experience the great things God can do in our lives. As we pray and begin to see God answering our prayers, we can then begin to have faith and to believe. As Jesus said in Mark's gospel, "Have faith in God" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, go, throw yourself into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." *Mark 11:22-24*
5. Prayer makes us strong to resist the evil one, and helps make others strong as we pray for them. Paul says to put on the full armour of God to strengthen and protect us, and to pray for all the saints (the church). *Ephesians 6:10-20*
6. Prayer encourages us in our times of distress and hardship. When Paul was suffering to the point of death in Asia the prayers of the Corinthians strengthened and encouraged him, and God delivered him from his peril. The prayers of others for us are extremely important in our growing relationship with God. *2 Corinthians 1:8-11*
7. Prayer shows our willingness to submit ourselves to God, and to trust in Him. When we do this, God hears and answers. *1 Corinthians 5:20*
8. Prayer is vital to the fellowship of believers. In Acts, the believers devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. As a result they were filled with awe, and God worked in them with many wonders and miracles. God was present among them. *Acts 2:42*

9. God works through prayer. James says ‘Is any one of you troubled? He should pray. He also says that when you pray. In faith, your prayer will be answered that the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. James 5: 15, 16 *Jeremiah 29:12*
10. God is near us when we pray. Although we may feel awkward and alone when we attempt to pray, God promises to be near us and with us as we turn to Him. *Deuteronomy 4:7*

“Prayers are something that most of us were brought up with from childhood, such as at mealtime, at bedtime prayer, prayer time in Sunday School, and prayer time in church. Like many youngsters, growing up I always took time for my prayers. Like those same youngsters however I never really took time to stop and think about what prayer really is.”

“Prayer, very basically put, is communication with God. As we grow up and move on into the secular world, in which we must earn our living, we know how important communication is in our everyday life. From our first waking moment each day, we communicate with family, friends, and peers. Every time we take a moment to pray we are communicating with God.”

Personal Concerns

“Praying with a family at a visitation or at a session meeting, or anywhere, when praying aloud is very difficult for most anyone. Have you ever had to do any public speaking? Your stomach is in knots your palms become sweaty, your throat becomes very dry and quite often your knees become weak! There is a little ‘ham born In all of us however and once it is finished we find that we have rather enjoyed it and think that maybe we could do that again sometime (and do it better). I don t mean to relate prayer to show business, but the first few times you are called upon to pray out loud the feeling is very much the same. Just remember who you are talking to, and that in itself helps.”

“God does not expect eloquence. Communication with Him should be the same as communication with any close, intimate friend. You are talking with God. RELAX, AND ENJOY THE PRIVILEGE...”

Some of the concerns that can be expressed by the elder visiting someone, and praying with them or leading them in prayer are:

1. “I am not worthy I am not good enough to talk to God.” Don’t worry about it, No one is. But He listens to us anyway. He promises to hear us without considering our unworthiness.
2. “I won’t know what to say,” or, “I will sound foolish.” You are talking with God. God knows you and loves you. It is His wish that we take things to Him. He has promised to be with us. A silent prayer to ask His help before beginning may assure us that He is there.

God has the power and authority and will give it to us when we step out in faith. You must get your prayer life in order and ask God s help in knowing what to do.

“I will always remember what the minister said to our minister when he delivered the charge at the induction service: “Pray for your people.” That instruction hasn’t changed since Christ preached it on the mountainside in His sermon on the mount. If we have been called into service for the Lord as elders in His church, we must heed the instruction.”

To Pray or Not to Pray

“When visiting, the people may not feel comfortable, or expect, or want prayer. You never know until you try. Often they want very much to pray, but do not want you to feel uncomfortable. (The first time is the hardest as in all things.” “After you have talked to people, and have learned of their concerns (private and church) it IS good to take them to God. It shows them that you have listened, and are concerned and that you believe in Him. Remember, to be able to come to our great Father in heaven is a privilege. He has the power to do much in this world if we allow Him and ask Him to work in our lives.”

“During a visit, if the person or persons wish or ask for prayer, one must (or should) respond to any obvious request or need. If there is any doubt in the elder’s mind however, preface any request with the proviso that they may prefer to see, or have a visit from the minister. It is wise to give them the option.”

“At first, I do not have a set procedure to follow during an elder’s visit. If it is a couple or individual that I have not visited before, I will ask if they have had any experience with elder visits, and if they have a particular format that they wish to follow i.e. prayers or Bible readings. Depending upon the answer, I will know which course to follow.”

“Sometimes I feel that unless one knows before hand exactly what spiritual frame of mind the member is in, spontaneous prayer may cause a ‘turn off’ rather than being a help. I have found many members of our congregation to be sensitive to many things.”

It is a good idea to ask for permission. “Would you mind if I had a prayer with you?” or “Would you like me to say a prayer for you now?” I have been surprised again and again by the eagerness of the response! People are simply waiting to be asked.

“It should be understood that most people who are asked to be elders have not had special training in counselling or in helpful prayers. An elder should therefore be very careful in what s/he says or prays for, in that s/he can easily get into deep water and not know how to get out, or do more damage than good. In any such cases, the teaching elder (minister) should be the one advised to step in.”

Format for Prayers

“Prayer must have been difficult for the Apostles. Just as it is for us because they sought from Christ how they should pray. In Matthew 6:9–13 He gave them (and us) the format by which God would have us pray. It may at first be more comfortable for you to pray the words Christ used, but as you become familiar with the format, and guided by the Holy Spirit, you will begin to pray as He leads you.”

“The important thing to remember is that God is not concerned with whether or not you choose the “right” words, or how eloquently you pray, but rather that you are coming to Him, to be in His presence, and to seek His blessing upon those for whom you pray. God cares more about what is in your heart, rather than what is in your mouth when you pray.”

“Be short. Don’t ramble. This is your brother or sister you are praying with. Be yourself not some pious person you are not, for God created you the way you are.”

A prayer can be brief or very long, but when praying with your district it is better to err on the side of brevity than length. It is my feeling that a prayer should include each of the following:

1. ADORATION—Telling God that we praise and adore Him for who He is.
2. CONFESSION—Never a day goes by that we do not commit a sin or many sins. Confess these to God and ask His forgiveness.
3. THANKSGIVING—Where would we be from day to day without our Lord looking out for us and watching over us? I know I would not want to attempt the things I must do daily alone. With the Lord at my side. I will get it done. Thank Him for His watching and care over us.
4. INTERCESSION—We all have needs. Everyone around us has needs. Pray for them and ask God to intercede, and to do what He knows to be best for each situation.
5. PETITION—“A selfish prayer” you may say. Not at all. If you want something or are in need. Ask God for it. He is the judge as to whether or not you should have whatever it may be. “Ask and you shall receive, knock and the door shall be opened, seek and you will find.”

“When praying with your district, I believe you should:

1. PRAY PERSONALLY. Use a specific item of concern that has been raised by the people and an item of thanksgiving for something that has happened in their lives.
2. PRAY FOR GOD’S WILL IN EVERY SITUATION. We become quickly involved in the “I wants” because we are human, and it is good to be able to assess each situation to see if it’s God’s will for our lives.
3. ALLOW TIME FOR PRAYER BY YOUR PEOPLE if the Spirit moves, but do not force anyone to pray. It could “turn them off” elder visits.
4. THANK GOD FOR ANSWERED PRAYERS both answered and unanswered realizing that God has control and will answer prayers in His own way and time, and that He listens to us.
5. BE SENSITIVE to the people you are with. Don’t talk down to them in your prayer. Don’t preach at them in your prayer. Don’t embarrass them in your prayer. Don’t bore them with overly long prayers.”

“Remember that privacy is important. Ask if there are any concerns which you can pray for. Encourage those who feel the desire to pray with you. You are an example, but they are just as capable. Be short, don’t ramble! This is your brother or sister you are praying with. We are all parts of one Body that has many parts, all of which are necessary. Be yourself, remember God created you the way you are. Do not forget that God looks approvingly on fun. Having a good sense of humour often goes far in promoting the Christian way.”

Prayer Samples

The following prayer samples are included for information only. They are not to be used as a litany, but are here for you to see how easy it is to compose your own prayer to our Almighty Father. These samples were not written by people who have been extensively trained, but by elders who care about their people, and take their service to God seriously.

BEFORE THE VISIT (for the Elder): Read Philippians 4:6,7 “Dear Lord, please fill me with Your Holy Spirit and guide me. I am nervous. Help me to love and understand this family. Help me to enjoy this visit. Help us become friends. Help me to minister to them in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

FIRST TIME VISIT: “Lord, we thank you for the opportunity to get to know each other better and to discuss the work of Your church. We ask Your blessing on this house and ask that You will keep all members of this family safe in Your loving care. In Jesus name. Amen.”

FIRST TIME VISIT: “Dear Lord, we have come together tonight in Your presence a members of Your church to get to know on another better. Please help us to open our minds and our hearts that we might hear Your will, and see Your purpose for us clearly. Let us be comfortable and secure enough in each other’s presence to discuss our problems and concerns. Amen.”

THANKSGIVING: “Thank you, God, for the man blessings You have given to us. Thank You for listening to our prayers and acting on our behalf in the different situations that we fin’ ourselves facing every day. Thank You for what You have done for us. Amen.”

INTERCESSION: “Our God and Heavenly Father we ask that you would help us with the situation (at work, at home). We ask for You guidance and help as we seek Your will to allow us to deal effectively with the situation Amen.”

SEEKING GOD’S WILL: “Dear Lord, we ask the You would show us Your will for our lives. We acknowledge to You, Lord, that we cannot live without Your guidance and we ask You to lead us where You want us to go. Amen.”

PRAYER OF EXPECTATION: A prayer sample for a childless couple, who have been wishing or trying to conceive, find that she is pregnant. Thank God for the blessing bestowed on them, praying that all will go well with her and developing child.

WHEN FACED WITH ILLNESS: If a member is confronted with a spouse who has a serious heart attack or other illness, pray that s/he will receive good care and treatment, and recover well. And that s/he will be able to cope with the extra burdens placed upon her/him to be able to support and encourage the sick or convalescing one without making that person feel they are a burden.

PRAYER WITH/FOR THE DYING: “Thank you God for the many blessings You have given us. Thank You for the gift of Your Son Jesus Lord we ask forgiveness for our sins of commission and omission, and we thank You for the knowledge that our sins are forgiven through Jesus. Lord, we ask for Your blessings, and Your guidance. We ask that Your will be for a complete healing, or for release, that You will be here with us, and will guide us through this difficult time. Lord we commit our lives into Your hands and thank You for Your care. Amen.”

PRAYER WITH THE REMAINING FAMILY: “Thank You, God, for the life of _____. Thank you for the many blessings that we have received from You through (him/her). We ask for your comfort and peace on those who are left behind, and we thank You for the assurance that _____ is free from all pain and suffering and is resting in the peace of your presence. Amen.”

HOSPITAL PATIENT: “Father, we pray for _____ We thank You for Your presence with us and ask for Your blessing on our lives. Place your healing touch upon _____. We pray that during this time of illness s/he would receive good care and treatment and recover soon. We ask that the pain would be lessened and that You would comfort and encourage the family. Amen.”

Scriptures

“In addition to prayer, the elder can read an appropriate passage, and follow with a short prayer. I have found many verses in Psalm 27, 77, 91 & 121; Proverbs 3; 1 Peter 4; Matthew 18 & 19; Luke 7 & 18; Ephesians 4; James 4; and John 15 to be appropriate—but of course depending on the mood of the member.”

A very appropriate and comforting thought and words are found in Psalm 34: “When men cry for help, the Lord hears them and sets them free from their troubles. The Lord is close to those whose courage is broken and He saves those whose spirit is crushed.”

General Readings

Psalm 23: The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for Thou art with Thy rod Thy staff, and me they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me In the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell In the house of the Lord forever.

John 3:16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him Should not perish but have everlasting life.

In Times of Need

Psalm 73:26b. God is my strength; He is all I ever need.

Romans 8:2b. We know that In everything God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.

When One Is Afraid

Psalm 46:1. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help In trouble.

Psalm 121:7–8. The Lord will protect you from all anger: He will keep you safe. He will protect you as you come and go now and for ever.

Isaiah 43:1b. Do not be afraid—I will save you. I have called you by name—you are mine.

Luke 2:10–11. Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

When One Is Discouraged

Psalm 61:1–2. Hear my cry, O God; attend unto my prayer. From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock which is higher than I.

Isaiah 26:3. You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you.

Isaiah 40:31. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.

John 8:12. I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

When One Is Facing Sickness

Psalm 6:2. Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak. O Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed.

Psalm 23:4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Psalm 41:10a. Be merciful to me, Lord, and restore my health.

3 John 2. I pray that everything may go well with you and that you may be in good health—as I know you are well in spirit.

Romans 15:13. May God, the source of hope, fill you with all joy and peace by means of your faith in him, so that your hope will continue to grow by the power of the Holy Spirit.

When One Feels Rejected

Psalm 27:10. My father and mother may abandon me but the Lord will take care of me!

John 16:33. These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Colossians 1:11–12a. May you be strong with all the strength which comes from his glorious power, so that you may be able to endure everything with patience.

Hebrews 12:3. Think of what he went through, how he put up with so much hatred from sinners! So do not let yourselves become discouraged and give up.

When Facing Grief

John 11:25–26. I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

Romans 8:28. We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:38–39. I am certain that nothing can separate us from his love: neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers, neither the present nor the future, neither the world above nor the world below—there is nothing in all creation that will ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4: 13–14. We want you to know the truth about those who have died so that you will not be sad, as are those who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will take back with Jesus those who have died believing in him.

Thanksgiving and Support

Peter 1 3–4. Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Because of his great mercy he gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope, and so we look forward to possessing the rich blessings that God keeps for his people. He keeps them for you in heaven, where they cannot decay or spoil or fade away.

Corinthians 13:13. The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

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