

Prayer

Prayer: Conversation with God

Have you ever tried to hook up a satellite dish? If you want to send and receive messages from thousands of miles away you must aim the dish with painstaking accuracy. Otherwise, sending and receiving messages makes as much sense as using smoke signals to explain The Four Spiritual Laws to an ostrich.

What's cool is God isn't thousands of miles away—He doesn't need a complex communication system to speak to us or hear us. His ears are right here, way open and not clogged with wax build-up. We know a God who wants to hear us; our deep need is to hear Him. That's why you're so important. You'll help others hear Him. Start by hearing from God first before making plans or programs for prayer. Pray about prayer—that's where to start. Ask God how He wants to use you to help others pray and mature as intercessors. There are a few other concepts that help as well.

God's relationship with His people is one of romance; He's the groom, we're the bride. When people want to experience romance, they pay close attention to creating an atmosphere that enhances intimacy. When we gather together to pray, how can we foster this kind of atmosphere? What would this look like? What would it take? Do you need violin music? Should you hire a lounge lizard who sings, "Feelings...nothing more than...feelings...." Do you need flowers? You could try these. You can do a lot of different things no matter how crazy they sound. Feel free to experiment. A few things to keep in mind about cultivating atmosphere are people, preferences, places and practice.

People

We long for authentic communication. They need to be themselves and express themselves honestly with God. Encourage them to talk with God in their every day speech and mannerisms. God understands regular English—we don't have to talk "spiritual" Praying together using our everyday language is what we call conversational prayer; no previous experience is required. You don't have to be a rocket scientist, brain surgeon or a monk to participate in conversational prayer. Emphasize authentic expression with God and one another.

Preferences

We have different styles and tastes when it comes to fashion, music, food or sports. You'll need to know who the people in your group are and be sensitive to their likes and preferences. Some people prefer silence, some want music. Some people are sensate; that is, they want a concrete approach with clear directions and a list of requests numbered from 1 to 10. Other people are intuitive and prefer less structure, more spontaneity and imagination when they pray. You need to be aware of your style and others so that everyone feels included during conversational prayer.

Places

The place you meet for prayer influences the atmosphere for your group. It helps to have a regular meeting place that everyone can find easily, but don't lock prayer to one location. For example, which would be more helpful: sitting in a church basement to pray for your campus or standing in the student union where you'll experience the sights and sounds of college life?

There's a practice known as geographical praying. It involves going to the specific location and praying for that event, outreach or person. If, for example, evangelism is taking place at the gymnasium go to the gym the day before and sit in the bleachers while your group prays for the event or people involved. Do you know a professor who's hostile to Christianity? Go to his office and pray for him. There are hundreds of places that create an atmosphere that fosters intimacy, vitality, fun and adventure. You'll find them. Remember, when people gather together and pray no prayer gathering is a failure. When you're authentic, aware of personal styles and atmosphere you'll see students connect with God and each other.

Practice

As you prepare an environment that enhances prayer you'll help new and younger Christians learn how to pray in your group. Help them feel relaxed. They don't have to say anything if they don't want to. People tend to pray after they've watched others pray. Reassure students that silence is not a problem and they don't have to fill empty space with words if the group is quiet. When students speak, encourage them to be brief so that everyone has a chance to pray.

Since people usually have personal prayer requests to share you need to consider how to handle those requests. Often a group spends 20 to 30 minutes talking about requests then squeezes in five minutes of actual prayer before ending. Sometimes that's not a problem, but if your time is limited there's other ways to handle requests. Try having students take a few minutes to write their need on a card then give their card to someone else in the group. After the cards are distributed, each request gets prayed for by at least one person in the group. You might appoint someone to keep track of answers to prayer so you'll remember and celebrate what God has done.

It's been said, "The chief aim of man is to know God and enjoy him forever."

Cultivating your environment for prayer gives every student the chance to make this aim real.

