

A GUIDE FOR PUBLIC PRAYER

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

In the same way that the early church was characterized by private and public prayer, we too want to obey this biblical principle and pattern. These guidelines are offered to those planning or participating in worship services in order that they may prioritize prayer when the church gathers each week.

- 1. Remember the biblical acrostic: ACTS—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.** As we survey the praying of the church, are we taking time to express praise and adoration, confession of sin, thanksgiving for blessings, and requests for needs? This can be accomplished partly by focusing on each of these in specific prayers throughout a service.
- 2. When asking a member of the congregation to pray, try to notify them ahead of time** so they have time to gather themselves, pay attention to what needs are being shared, what truths are being taught, etc. This will enable them to pray in a more thoughtful way. They can be asked before the service, or we can say, “In a moment Bro. _____ is going to lead us in prayer, but before he does let’s take a few moments to review some current needs.” This will help them be more ready to pray in an informed way.
- 3. Model appropriate corporate prayer by praying using the plural pronouns *we, us, and ourselves.*** These words reinforce the idea that it is the church praying together, even if one person is leading the prayer. Prayer in worship isn’t a monologue, but a prayer of the entire church, for the church.
- 4. Don’t hesitate to take time to pause and gather your thoughts before you begin praying.** This can be a powerful way of praying thoughtfully, and it also teaches those listening about the value of worshipping in an unhurried way.
- 5. Encourage those who pray to let their prayers reflect the season and circumstances of church life.** If a missions trip is approaching, remind people to keep that in focus in corporate prayer. If the church has been learning about unity in the sermons, remind those who pray to ask the Lord to make unity characterize the church. In this way the truth of Scripture is being reinforced throughout the service. This is especially helpful to do in the closing prayer as the members prepare to depart.
- 6. In general, the key is to be intentional.** Be deliberate in taking time to pray, and helping others not to see prayer as just filler, or a transitional time for people to get into place for the next song or service element.

About the writer: W. Jackson Watts has served as pastor of Grace FWB Church in Arnold, Missouri (near St. Louis), since 2011. He is a member of the Free Will Baptist Commission for Theological Integrity.