

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING: Intercession aside, do Baptists have a prayer?

February 2, 2007

Posted: 2/02/07

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING: Intercession aside, do Baptists have a prayer?

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

Baptists understand numbers. That's how churches measure success in baptisms, Bible study attendance, budget giving and building campaigns.

But for all their talk about the importance of prayer, Baptists seem less certain how to measure the effectiveness of prayer ministries.

A member of Iglesia Bautista Segunda in Corpus Christi bows for prayer.

**See Related
Articles:**

- PRAY
WITHOUT
CEASING:
Intercession
aside, do
Baptists have
a prayer?

- [Prayerwalkers
appeal to God
to take back
community](#)
- [UMHB
students put
feet to their
prayers in the
streets of
Tokyo](#)

Counting the number of people signed up for an intercessory prayer ministry or listing answers to prayers may provide some means of charting progress, but those are secondary measurements, said Ted Elmore, former director of prayer and spiritual development with the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board staff.

“How many people (in a congregation) are delighting in God? By praying, we learn communion with God. We may not get answers to our questions, but we become a people who are contented with God. The measure of effective prayer is whether people are walking in communion with God and growing in their contentment with God,” said Elmore, a member of [121](#)

[Community Church](#) in Grapevine who works with churches as a life design coach and consultant.

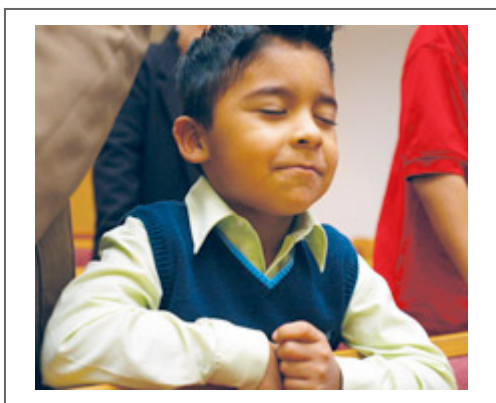
Church members' deeper walk with God becomes demonstrated in their attitudes and actions. Praying people are eager to serve, willing to forgive and growing in grace, he insisted.

Deirdre LaNoue, a Baptist historian and former professor of spiritual formation at [Mount St. Joseph's College](#) in Cincinnati, agreed.

"Jesus told us that the greatest commandments in all the law are to love God with all that we are and to love others as much as we love ourselves. If those participating (in prayer) are being drawn into a deeper love for God and if people are being truly loved and served, I think these are clues that the prayer ministry is effective, although I grant that this can be hard to measure," LaNoue said.

Small groups provide a context in which the prayer life of members best can be gauged, Elmore stressed.

"Effectiveness is best measured in small groups where people agree to be held accountable in covenant with one another. That's where you get a sense of the spiritual growth of one another," he said.



A child at Iglesia Bautista Segunda in Corpus Christi prays. Betty Talbert, director of spiritual formation at Baylor University's Truett Seminary, insists adults can learn about prayer from children. "Until the age of 10, most children meditate—think prayerfully about God—regularly. ... They stop believing mostly because of the cynicism of adults around them," Talbert said.

Betty Talbert, director of spiritual formation at Baylor University's [Truett Theological Seminary](#), likewise emphasized the importance of small groups. Small groups focused on prayer have a long history in Baptist churches, she noted.

"Traditional effective intercession was associated with Sunday school, Woman's Missionary Union and Wednesday night prayer services," she said. "These groups in Baptist life were small enough to know the details of the lives of (church members) or missionaries for whom they were praying and to be encouraged by reports that their prayers were being answered. So, the small group is just a resurrection of what we, as Baptists, traditionally have done."

When small groups within a larger fellowship focus on prayer, pride becomes a potential pitfall to be avoided—along with the perception that

the small group is “holier-than-thou,” LaNoue noted.

“The danger of pious pride is a deadly one,” she said. “I think the best antidote for it is making sure the leadership constantly teaches and trains on the idea that prayer is a means of service. I don’t think we teach enough on the virtues. Certainly, humility and generosity are key. I think we should be watchful of our attitudes and anything else that can cause division in the body. Leadership must be proactive.”

Church leaders can help the church as a whole develop a closer connection to prayer-based small groups, Talbert added. For instance, a pastor may lead a worship service celebrating the decisions of members who have committed to spiritual growth through involvement in small groups. As a part of the service, he could invite the whole congregation to pray for those members.

“This approach has the goal of letting everyone in the church be a part of what is happening with the groups,” she said.

Church leaders also can promote harmony by working to enlist new people for prayer-based small groups.

“Be certain that all members feel welcome to join groups at any time,” she said. “If everyone is always welcome, no feeling of superiority develops inside or outside the group.”

Baptists can grow spiritually by focusing on different types of prayer, she added.

“Try new prayers. Let some folks do contemplative prayers. Let others do prayers of adoration using Psalms as their text,” Talbert suggested. “Ask folks to use journals and write their prayers or write answers to prayers.”

Baptists typically have focused almost exclusively on intercessory prayer,

LaNoue observed.

“Some disciplines that might bring more balance to our prayer life are the more contemplative aspects of gazing upon God in love and adoration, listening and reflecting on what we hear from our conversation with him, even just learning to rest in the presence of God through prayer, without needing to accomplish anything,” she said.

God transforms lives when people open themselves to him, Elmore noted. Devotional Bible reading, combined with periods of quiet meditation, provide a context in which the Holy Spirit shapes lives, he added.

“There is a lot to be said for solitude—for shutting out the noise of the world and just listening. God uses his word to teach us to hear his voice,” Elmore said.

“In solitude and meditation, the Holy Spirit works, shaping us. ... It is through prayer and meditation—not activity, but being in the presence of God—that we find satisfaction.”

Fasting, journaling, simplicity, service, solitude and confession represent some of the spiritual disciplines Christians historically have found helpful aids to spiritual growth, but LaNoue noted not every Christian responds equally well to every discipline.

“We are not meant to be cookie-cutter Christians. I think our unique temperaments tend to dictate the ways we are most comfortable relating to God,” she said.

“But this doesn’t mean we shouldn’t stretch ourselves and try to keep the relationship fresh and creative by utilizing a variety of disciplines. This might require trying things that are outside my usual comfort zone. Some of the spiritual disciplines that I have studied over the years have deeply enriched my prayer life.”

Spiritual disciplines are just tools to be used or not used, depending on how effective they prove for a particular individual, she noted.

“Whenever we start comparing ourselves or using the disciplines as a measure of how spiritual someone is, the disciplines become legalistic and destructive,” she warned.

“The disciplines are not an end in themselves; they are a means to an end. They place us in the path of God’s grace and transformative power, if we practice them with the desire for him and nothing else.”

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Baptist churches, in Texas, the BGCT, the nation and around the world.