

EXCERPT



The Power of Group Prayer How Intercession Transforms Us and the World

November 22, 2022 | \$18, 224 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0306-0

Praying together has the power to transform you and the world around you. Drawing from decades of ministry experience, this practical guide for group prayer from Carolyn Carney offers stories and practices for corporate prayer, reflection questions, and supplemental resources to help pastors and ministry leaders build powerful intercession groups.

Growing More Intimate with God

The purpose of prayer is not about getting what we pray for. Shocking, yes? If prayer is just about getting answers, then we are more like consumers than children. Okay, we might be children—but spoiled children, the kind who only listen when they get what they want.

Prayer is about getting *who* we pray to. If we don't have intimacy with God when we pray, we may end up feeling the kind of frightening, desperate anxiety Dorothy and her whole crew felt as they approached the Wizard of Oz. When there is something we desire but don't have the power to apprehend, we come to a good Father who doesn't give us a stone when we ask for bread. So if we are going to be transformed in our prayer and be agents of transformation in the world, we need to consider how attached we are to God in the first place and what blocks that connection with God.

BUILDING ATTACHMENT TO GOD

The recent work in neuroscience by people like Jim Wilder, Curt Thompson, and Karl Lehman has connected our character identity and transformation to what happens along neural pathways in the right side of the brain. Wilder and Michel Hendricks write in *The Other Half of Church* that the bulk of our discipleship in the church is derived from preaching and teaching, and maybe some spiritual disciplines thrown in. This will work for some, some of the time, but not for all. Hendricks shares that he was dumbfounded when he recognized character growth in himself during the first eight years of his life with God but little thereafter. He *knew* a lot more things as he aged, but his character was not more like Jesus. I was single until age fifty-one, but then God brought David into my life. In a matter of just a few months, here was someone who loved me not for what I could do for him but just for who I am. Having served *lots* of people for nearly thirty years of ministry, it was rare to experience this kind of love. This was new for me. I grew attached to David in a way that I was not attached to others. Words were not necessary to understand this love, neither were thoughts; I didn't need to read a book to know this love, I felt attached through time spent together. It was the same when I'd walk into a crowded room and see him across the way. That deep, undeniable attachment helped me find him in a crowd.

This is the kind of attachment many of us feel in the first years after coming to Christ. We know deeply in our souls how much we are loved, forgiven, chosen, and cherished by God. It is like there is a constant glow on our faces. I remember Sharon, who had come to faith early in her freshman year, just could not help herself from telling others about Jesus and all that he had done for her. She undeniably experienced God's love for her and felt attached to God. As in marriage, unless we actively nurture our attachment to God, we become stale and distant; we know the motions of being connected, but we lack desire. This can explain why we excitedly sign up for a new conference or buy the latest bestselling Christian book, thinking this will be our silver bullet to intimacy with God.

And within weeks—or days, perhaps—if we haven't made significant inroads back to a meaningful attachment, we are right back where we were. But regular efforts to connect with God, to recognize his presence in our lives, draw us close.

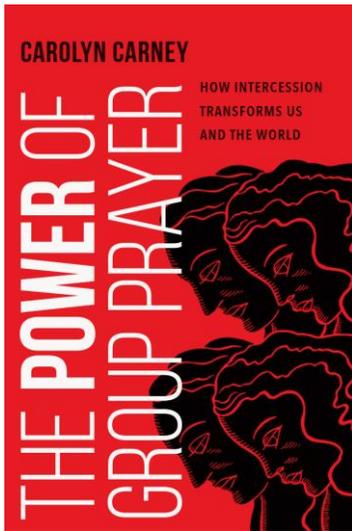


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*"The wise and practical teaching offered here will unlock God's good gifts and ignite renewal and transformation in the church. Don't let this book sit on the shelf. Put *The Power of Group Prayer* into practice and watch the revival begin!"*

—Connie Anderson, national director of intercessory prayer, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA

Jesus paid attention to his attachment to God. Many times in the Gospels we see Jesus pulling away to a solitary place to be alone with the Father. After his baptism and before he begins his public ministry, Jesus goes away into the wilderness for forty days to fast and pray (Luke 4:1-2). After an entire night of healing and casting out many demons in Capernaum, Jesus, in Mark 1:35, sets out early in the morning before light, to pray. Matthew 14:1-13 describes the beheading of Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist. When the message gets relayed to Jesus, he "withdraws to a deserted place by himself." Based on the references to Jesus withdrawing to solitary places and praying, we can assume that this withdrawal is a time of intimate connection with his Father also. And of course, we have the poignant description of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In John's Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17) we see the fruit of his prayer, of his attachment to God. Naturally, in the time of our testing, our true character is revealed. John 13:3, "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God," shows us that despite Jesus entering into what will be the most difficult point of his life on earth, he is solidly assured of who he is. He feels indelibly attached to his Father. And because he is sure of his identity, because he knows and has experienced the Father's loving touch, because he knows that he belongs to God, he can face the heartbreak of betrayal, the torment of torture and taunts, and ultimately, his last breath.

Before we engage in intense intercessory prayer, we must renew our attachment to God. When we access our attachment with God, we are filled with his unconditional love. We don't do this with words, or reading Scripture, or even listening to a worship song. None of those will hurt, but primarily we want an indelible image. God is invisible, so this can be a little tricky. But just like David and I can sit on a couch together, look into each other's eyes and without saying a word, know that we belong to each other and are deeply loved just for who we are, we can do the same in our sanctified imagination with God.

In my sanctified imagination I walk through an autumnal field with the warming sun on my back and a gentle breeze in the air. As I walk across the field, I see this lone oak tree, with its mature limbs spreading out like arms inviting me in. I walk toward the tree and the closer I get, I notice there a figure sitting underneath the tree. And as I approach, I have an inkling . . . yes! It's Jesus waiting for me. A broad smile lights his face as I come into view. The last few steps I break into a run, drop my shoulder, and playfully plow into his shoulder. I fall onto the ground beside him and we laugh and poke each other a bit, and then as I catch my breath, our eyes meet. He holds my gaze and looks at me like no one else has ever done. I am loved, known, held, and cherished. I breathe in these truths for a few seconds and my heart is full. I have undeniably, inextricably, renewed my attachment to God. And from this place of deep attachment, I am ready to pray.

—Taken from chapter one, "Before We Pray"



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Carolyn Carney is the national director of spiritual formation for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. She has a master of arts in spiritual formation and leadership from Spring Arbor University and serves as a spiritual director and retreat leader. She has led prayer groups and intercessory prayer training for more than thirty-five years.

Revival Comes Through Concerted Prayer

Why do you believe group prayer is so important?

Carolyn Carney: Interceding in groups has changed my view of the world, my understanding of God's actions in the world, and simply, just how I pray. I have been to way too many poorly led prayer meetings, and I firmly believe that we are desperately in need of God's kingdom to come in greater fullness. This does not happen because we make a plan. It can only happen when we learn how to pray together.

What is at the core of really good group prayer gatherings?

Carolyn: Good prayer meetings must be well led. So much planning and preparation and resources are given to the worship service in a church, but so little, if anything, is applied to the prayer meeting. If we want real change in the world, it will come from a great prayer meeting, not from a good worship service. Leadership is at the core of really good group prayer gatherings.

What role does prayer play in sparking a revival?

Carolyn: Many Christians talk about the possibility of revival. But revival doesn't come because we make big plans. Revival comes through concerted prayer.

What motivated you to write a book about prayer?

Carolyn: I had been teaching people to pray for decades and most of the books I found on prayer were about personal prayer, not about groups praying together. There was a gaping hole in the market, so I wrote this book to fill that gap. That, and I love to write and tell stories!

Share a few things you hope readers will take away from your book.

Carolyn: There are five main things I hope readers will gain from this book.

1. The quality of our attachment to God affects our prayer.
2. You don't have to think of yourself as a prayer warrior to read this book.
3. There are specific steps to employ to lead an effective prayer meeting.
4. Intercession is like building a highway.
5. The world really can change. And it changes through prayer.



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