



CALL TO PRAYER: Reasons church leaders struggle with prayer

By Chuck Lawless

Aug 2, 2013

EDITOR'S NOTE: This column is part of the call to prayer issued by Frank S. Page, president of the SBC Executive Committee, to pray for revival and spiritual awakening for our churches, our nation and our world during 2013. Baptist Press is carrying columns during the year encouraging Southern Baptists to pray in specific areas and for specific needs in petitioning the Father for spiritual awakening.

NASHVILLE (BP) -- John, a leader in a church I assisted as a consultant, admitted to me what I'd heard before from seminary students and church leaders alike: "Dr. Lawless, I don't always pray like I should. I know better, but prayer isn't easy."

I've heard something similar so many times that I've begun asking for more details. These findings are anecdotal, but here are my general conclusions about why church leaders struggle with prayer.



Chuck Lawless

1. Leaders are "fixers" by nature. Most leaders don't readily admit a need for help. Instead, we are problem solvers who seek solutions, attempt answers and try again if the first answer doesn't work. Indeed, our followers expect leaders to come up with solutions. Our persistence and tenacity to do so -- both good traits in themselves -- sometimes push prayer to a last resort option.
2. We never learned how to pray. Churches make this mistake with most spiritual disciplines: We tell believers what to do but don't teach them how to do it. "Pray. Pray. You must pray," we proclaim. When we tell but don't teach, though, we set believers up for discouragement and failure. If leaders are honest, we'll admit that we, too, have much to learn about how to pray.
3. Prayer has become more about ritual than about relationship. This reason relates directly to the previous one. We know we should pray, even if we don't know how, so we go through the motions of prayer. It is not a relationship with a living Lord that calls us to prayer; it is instead only religious ritual. Ritual seldom leads to a consistent, vibrant prayer life.
4. Prayerlessness can be hidden. No one in our church needs to know about this struggle. We can talk about prayer, teach about prayer, write about prayer and even lead corporately in prayer -- all without anyone knowing that personal prayer is sporadic at best. This kind of hiddenness is an enemy of heartfelt prayer.

5. We don't really believe prayer works. Sure, we teach otherwise about prayer. No church leader I know would teach that prayer is ineffective. Nevertheless, our prayer life often suggests otherwise. Sometimes we don't pray at all. When we do pray, we're too often surprised when God does respond. Surprise is one indicator we're not convinced about the power of prayer.

6. We have never been broken under God's hand. The Apostle Paul, who was a leader extraordinaire, learned the power of strength in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Faced with a thorn in the flesh, he pleaded with God to remove it. God instead sovereignly used the thorn to weaken the apostle, who experienced God's strength at his weakest moments. It is in our weakness that we learn how to pray, but leaders naturally fight against weakness.

7. Leaders read the Word in a one-sided way. Leaders often are teachers who read the Word for information transmission more than life transformation. When we approach the Word that way, we miss the opportunity to be in dialogue with God. Our Bible reading -- even when preparing for teaching or preaching -- should bring us to praise, confession and obedience. It should lead us into prayerful conversation with God.

8. Some leaders have simply lost hope. It happens. Church leaders who prayed more consistently in the past sometimes lose hope under the weight of church conflict, family struggles or health concerns. Unanswered prayer leads to faithlessness, which leads to prayerlessness.

9. We miss the Gospel focus on the prayer life of Jesus. I love the four Gospels, but I admit to reading them for many years without meditating on Jesus' prayer life. A seminary professor challenged me to read the Gospel of Luke with this focus in mind, and my prayer life has never been the same.

In fact, church leader, I give you that same challenge. In your quiet time this week, read these texts from the life of Jesus -- Luke 3:21-22; 4:42; 5:15-16; 6:12-13, 27-28; 9:16, 18, 28-29; 10:1-2, 21; 11:1-13; 18:1-8, 9-14; 19:45-46; 20:45-47; 21:36; 22:17-19, 31-32, 39-46; 23:33-34, 46; 24:30, 50-51. Note how Jesus prayed. Listen to His teachings. Think deeply about the Word. Then, respond to Him in prayer. Take the first step toward being a praying church leader.

--30--

Chuck Lawless is professor of evangelism and missions and dean of graduate studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. This article was first published at thomrainer.com. Get Baptist Press headlines and breaking news on Twitter ([@BaptistPress](https://twitter.com/BaptistPress)), Facebook (Facebook.com/BaptistPress) and in your email (baptistpress.com/SubscribeBP.asp).

© Copyright 2013 Baptist Press

Original copy of this story can be found at <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=40843>