



# PRAYER MINISTRY TEAMS

**Basic issues around the formation and running  
of prayer teams within the life of a congregation**

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*These Prayer Ministry Guidelines were developed by  
the Walmer Road Baptist Church Prayer Team  
in conjunction with the Prayer Team from  
Danforth Baptist Church in 1989-1990*

## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Premise of the Ministry**

Our God is a God of love, and out of that love flows the salvation, restoration and wholeness that he longs to bring to his creation. One aspect of the redemptive work of God is the healing of individuals from various forms of physical, emotional, spiritual and relational brokenness. The work of healing through prayer and the laying on of hands was an integral part of the ministry of Jesus as he came to declare and demonstrate to in breaking of the Kingdom of God. He equipped many of his followers to carry on this work, as an integral part of the faithful enactment of the gospel. It is a part of our calling as the Body of Christ to continue this Kingdom work.

### **B. Purpose**

Incorporating a prayer ministry time into worship services on a regular basis is one way in which we can be faithful in connecting the **declaration of the Kingdom of God** through teaching, worship and evangelism, with the **demonstration and extension** of the Kingdom through prayer and healing. Together, these components are a part of our faithful enactment of the gospel in the midst of the kingdom of this world. This is the larger purpose for the development of this type of ministry.

The more immediate purpose of the ministry is to intercede with people by invoking the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and ministering wholeness, deliverance, peace, healing, reconciliation and the empowerment of individuals according to their needs.

### **C. Rationale**

We have increasingly been witnessing the work of God in power as we engage churches from the global south. There we are seeing God at work in a manner which our western gospel has affirmed in theory, but seen as impossible in the practice of our local churches. Increasingly our people are experiencing God in new and fresh ways which are very reminiscent of the words of Jesus in which he spoke of the works which would be done by his followers. We now need to build on this corporate wisdom and knowledge. Our call is to be good stewards of the gifts and resources that God has given to the church. In this we are obedient to his Word and experience the joy of being instruments of peace, justice and reconciling love as the Kingdom is extended.

People are being trained to pray with faith in both God's ability and willingness to act. They are increasingly developing a high level of trust and expectation for healing to begin even as they pray. This kind of prayer has been hard to find in the western church through much of the Enlightenment era, with its emphasis on secularly defined rational frameworks. As God uses this

opportunity to pour out his grace, love, peace and compassion, the congregation as a whole may be encouraged and edified by the blessings evidenced in the lives of individuals.

The prayer ministry provides a specific opportunity for people to seek prayer and intercession in an atmosphere of worship. Some who have not been exposed to or found access to this kind of ministry in their house churches or elsewhere may find some of their needs met in this context. Others, in need of ongoing prayer or additional support, may be identified through this ministry and appropriately referred. This will allow them to receive the needed support or assistance.

Prayer ministry is also intended to release more people in the congregation into ministry in a context which provides ongoing learning and support. This helps to spread the load of pastoral care in the community, and provides the congregation with a significant channel through which they may receive intercessory prayer.

Finally, prayer ministry provides an opportunity for encounter with the living God for those who have not yet come to know him. The demonstration of his love and power at work may be a powerful testimony to the unbeliever.

## II. Oversight of the Prayer Teams

1. The elders have oversight in the area of healing prayer ministry in the congregation and also the house churches. They carry the responsibility for its direction, execution and integration into the life of the larger community.
2. The elders are also responsible to facilitate the necessary training events in order to make sure that the teams are continuing to grow and potential members identified, trained and mentored.
3. One elder will be given the primary responsibility to oversee this aspect of the ministry of the church.

## III. Identifying Prayer Team Members

1. People who have been **invited and approved** by the elders to minister prayer during the designated services are to minister as a part of a team with both responsibility and accountability.
2. Team members are identified according to their **sense of call**, demonstration of genuine love and care for others, maturity, humility, giftedness, desire to learn and share what they are learning and a willingness to abide by the guidelines given.
3. **Compassion** is a vital gift for prayer ministry. Without this, prayer ministry can be abusive and severe. Compassion provides the counterpoint to the power that God works

through the prayer team. Prayer can be dangerous because of this power. It can corrupt. Jesus beautifully combines power and compassion. “Authority needs compassion to keep it from becoming destructive. Compassion provides the environment in which authority can function.”<sup>1</sup>

4. There needs to be a concerted effort to identify people with **gifts of discernment**. Discernment is a foundational gift of the Spirit for any type of prayer ministry.

Discernment is the divine ability to see what is actually going on and to know what needs to be done in any given situation. As John Woolman says, we ‘feel and understand the spirits of people.’ This *charism* of the Spirit is critical because accurate diagnosis is necessary for effective ministry. We need, for example, to discern between multiple personalities caused by emotional wounds and those caused by demonic activity.<sup>2</sup>

This gift is best discovered by simple observation over time. The people tend to be quiet and do not draw attention to themselves. But, people in the congregation know them and go to them when they have need for guidance.

5. **Prudence** is a cardinal virtue. It is vital to godly living. C.S. Lewis writes, “Prudence means practical common sense, taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it.”<sup>3</sup> Jesus knew when to speak and when to be silent. Prayer team people need this as well. They are not to be people who “know best” or go around trying to fix people. They need to be people who are able to know when someone is not able to hear the truth.
6. The prayer team members also need to be people of **common sense**. They should be people who practice spiritual disciplines and understand that prayer team ministry is no substitute for this. They are people who are connected into the body of Christ and do not go about ministering on their own. Prayer team members should also be people who have a certain healthy scepticism. They are not quick to attribute causes to things, but are prepared to take the time needed to diagnose.
7. Prayer team members should be people who have demonstrated an **awareness of the resources available in Christ, and lived a life which regularly accesses these resources**. They are growing in their life in Christ. They live out what they believe. This is something that is discernable to those watching.
8. A vital mark of people who are good members of a prayer team is their **practicing of confession and forgiveness**. It is not just coincidence that the Lord’s Prayer asks God to forgive us as we forgive others. Our capacity to forgive, and our willingness to receive forgiveness, is vital for healing and wholeness. It is our own harbouring of wrongs

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Foster, *Prayer*, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Foster, *Prayer*, p. 231.

<sup>3</sup>Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, (Macmillan, 1943), p.60. Quoted in Foster, *Prayer*. p. 232.

against us and an unwillingness to forgive which is one of the greatest blocks to the work of the Spirit of God in our lives and in the lives of those for whom we pray.

#### IV. Expectations of those on Ministry Teams

1. Team members are asked to commit for a year. It is recognized that this is a major commitment of time involving training, preparation and evaluation time in addition to the actual ministry time.

The prayer ministry team needs to be available for prayer ministry services before, during and after the service.

- It is necessary to meet for worship and prayer before the service in which ministry will occur.
  - This time is needed for personal preparation and to listen to what God may be wanting to do during the upcoming ministry time.
  - It is crucial that team members recognize the necessity of this preparation time and see it as integral to ministry.
  - **There will always be a desire to skip.** This is a spiritual battle and if good work is being done, there will be opposition.
2. Actual prayer time in the context of the worship service requires, on average, a commitment of approximately 30 minutes. It is important that the persons praying are both willing and able to take time and to demonstrate patience.
  3. The prayer team gathers after the ministry time for about 10 minutes to both share experiences and to evaluate the ministry time. This is intended to be an opportunity to learn from our experiences, and to encourage and support one another in this ministry.
  4. Team members are not intended to set up or provide ongoing prayer, counselling or other support to persons coming forward for ministry. Any follow-up or additional intervention that may be indicated needs to be dealt with in consultation for appropriate referral.

## **V. Preparation and Training**

1. Prayer team members are required to obtain and read the following three books:
  - MacNutt, Francis, *Healing*, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1974).
  - Pytches, David, *Come, Holy Spirit: Learning How to minister in Power*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985).
  - Payne, Leanne, *Listening Prayer*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).
2. Team members are to be people of prayer who regularly read and meditate on the Word of God, and daily seek to be led by the Spirit. It will be helpful, over a period of time, to read the biblical references on healing as listed in the back of the Pytches book, as well as systematically reading Scripture for personal growth.
3. A short series of two or three training/orientation sessions will be held in advance of the first ministry time.
4. Team members are also expected to participate in development seminars and local conferences as they are made aware of them.

## **VI. Integration of Prayer Ministry into Worship Service**

1. The Worship leader is advised by the Worship co-ordinator of the need to incorporate and introduce the ministry time.
2. A brief description and rationale for the ministry time should be given in designated services.
3. The ministry time should be a time of worship, adoration, devotion, listening and receiving from God. The music group will seek to facilitate this by the used of appropriate music and reflection.
4. Invitation is given to all those open to receive ministry for physical, emotional or spiritual healing, restoration of broken relationships, strengthening to cope with difficult circumstances, empowerment for ministry, or other personal prayer. Visitors, members, Christians and non-Christians alike are included in the invitation.
5. The congregation may be encouraged to enter into a time of prayer, asking God what he may want to do or say at this time, what specific items or areas of brokenness he may want to address, what words, pictures, or impressions he would have us share for someone in the congregation, and to spend time listening to God's response.

6. Any words, pictures, or scripture given to prayer team members for the congregation should be shared and anyone identifying with these should be encouraged to come forward for prayer. Those responding to a word given should acknowledge this so that the person giving the word may be encouraged that it has been confirmed.
7. The congregation may be dismissed with a benediction, although ministry in the prayer wing may continue. When someone being prayed for has children in the nursery, a team member should ask the spouse or a friend to pick up the children so that nursery workers are not inconvenienced.

## VII. Ministry Guidelines

1. All those ministering should gather during the established preparation time, for prayer, confession and to listen for any words of direction that God might have for that session.
2. **Confidentiality is extremely important** when personal information is shared or revealed during the ministry time. Consultation with the overseeing elder or other ministry team members may be deemed necessary at times, but nothing should be discussed which is not essential for dealing with the concern or problem at hand. Under no circumstances is any personal information to be shared with anyone outside of the prayer team.
3. The ministry time is intended to respond to the expressed need of the person coming forward for prayer, and/or according to specific guidance given by the Holy Spirit. Those ministering should avoid analysing or providing lengthy counsel.
4. Those praying should feel the freedom to stop and seek counsel when needed. The overseeing elder will be present during the ministry time to help respond to any problems or difficulties.
5. Prayer should be conducted in a quiet, sensitive and genuine tone of voice. Do not express shock or judgement. The best way to do this is to relax and be yourself and to avoid being pious or dramatic.
6. Be sensitive, attentive and ready to listen very carefully and non-judgementally to the person coming for prayer. The Holy Spirit is at work in their life. Do not assume that role.

7. As the ministry time is being introduced, prayer team members should assemble in the prayer wing in the decided groups of two or three. One person will lead. The others will observe and listen to the Spirit.
8. Whenever possible, at least one person of the same gender as the person being prayed for should be a part of the prayer group.
9. Only one or two should lay hands on the person after asking permission. When possible, hands should be placed near the site of the problem (obviously this is sensitive and gender specific). Place hands on the head or shoulder for emotional healing. If a person shows signs of swaying under the power of the Spirit, it may be advisable to place one hand at the person's back.
10. If someone should fall under the power of the Spirit, remain calm and assist them to the ground if possible, realizing that people rarely, if ever, hurt themselves when falling under these circumstances. Do not try to get them up. Allow God to do his work continuing to lay on hands and simply blessing what God is doing in them and/or pray in tongues. Stay with them until they are ready to get up.
11. If someone becomes very agitated under the power of the Spirit, ask God to reveal any demonic activity. Agitation does not automatically mean the person is demonized, but it may be simply an indication of the powerful work of God. If any demon manifesting does not leave after quiet authoritative command, it should be bound in the name of Jesus. Consult with the overseeing elder on how to proceed.
12. In any situation where a person becomes extremely distraught, agitated or disruptive for any reason they should be guided out of the worship area to a private office. The privacy and dignity of the person should be protected at all times.

## VIII. Ministry Steps

### First: the interview

1. **Greet** the person and ask their name.
2. **Interview** the person to determine what the problem is, or where they are experiencing pain. A) **ask the person**, "What would you like God to do for you?" or "What would you like us to pray for?" B) **ask God** what he wants to do, or what he wants to deal with at this time.



3. **Listen** closely to the person, and to what God may be revealing by his Spirit through words of wisdom, knowledge, prophecy or discernment.

### **Second: the diagnosis**

4. **Diagnose.** There needs to be a preliminary decision as to what the problem or need is.

### **Third: Prayer selection**

5. **Prayer Selection.** Select an appropriate prayer
  - i. clarification of the problem
  - ii. Healing
  - iii. Forgiveness/ extending forgiveness
  - iv. Reconciliation
  - v. Deliverance
  - vi. Empowerment/infilling of the Holy Spirit
  - vii. Release of spiritual gifts

### **Fourth: Power engagement**

6. **Invoke** the presence and power of the Holy Spirit upon the person, encouraging them to relax and welcome him rather than striving or praying themselves. Lay on hands in appropriate places and manner, and simply pray “Holy Spirit, we ask you to come and minister in power to \_\_\_\_\_.”
7. **Relax. Wait. Observe. Listen to God. Ask him what he is doing and/or what he wants you to do.**
8. **Pray**, asking the Holy Spirit to minister to the specific area or need while observing the person for any response to the presence of the Spirit upon them, and continuing to listen for any specific direction. Make all prayers very direct, short and simple, without pleading. **Wait** for God to act between requests. **Speak directly to the God about the condition** if appropriate, (eg. Jesus, in your name we ask you would remove this swelling).
9. If you sense you are dealing with an unclean spirit, again, **address God.** We have developed a dangerous practice of directly addressing spirits. Nowhere in the Bible are we asked to pray against Satan, rather than to God. Binding and loosing as it is taught by Jesus is not about spiritual warfare. Rather, **Christ has already bound the enemy.** When Jesus teaches us how to pray he does talk about this. He taught us to pray to the Father to “Deliver us from the evil one.” **So, if the Holy Spirit shows us that an evil presence is there, we expel it with a word, “In the**

**name of Jesus, be gone.”** We do not do the warfare. God sends his angels to do that.<sup>4</sup>

10. **If** a person expresses need to confess sin, encourage them to do so before God. Then, **proclaim their forgiveness**, as in “\_\_\_\_\_, in the name of Jesus, I declare that your sins are forgiven.” (Cf. John 20:21-23)
11. It may be appropriate on occasion to ask if the person knows of any barriers to them receiving what they have requested, ie. unconfessed sin, lack of forgiveness of another person. Gently lead them to deal with this silently or aloud, being sensitive to convey God’s love and acceptance.
12. **Dialogue** with the person to find out what she/he is experiencing, what thoughts, pictures or memories may be surfacing, or what spiritual awareness they may be given in order to clarify what God is doing in them and how to proceed in prayer.
13. **Bless what God is doing**, especially if the Holy Spirit is noticeably at work, and if you do not know what he is doing. Pray quietly, in tongues if so gifted, seeking to affirm whatever God is doing and continuing to listen for further insight or direction.
14. **Stop praying when** you have gone as far as you feel you can, or until the ministry of the Holy Spirit abates. Ask the person if they are aware of any change, sensed God’s presence, received any direction or assurance.

#### **Fifth: Post prayer direction**

15. **Close** by giving thanks and praise to God for what he has done so far, and by giving the person any additional direction that may be necessary or helpful. If the person has received partial relief, it may be appropriate to suggest that they come up for more prayer at the next ministry time.

### **IX. Follow Up**

1. Never promise or announce to someone that they are healed. If they are, it will become apparent to them soon enough.
2. Never under any circumstances condone or suggest that the person stop taking prescribed medication or any other medical intervention.
3. If a person seems to be healed of a physical ailment, they should be clearly instructed to see a doctor for verification.

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<sup>4</sup> Leanne Payne has an important section on this issue in her book, *Listening Prayer*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994). p. 57-69.

4. More often than not, a person is partially healed (by our criteria) or receives some improvement in their condition, rather than total healing as we understand it. If this is the case, it may be appropriate to suggest that the person come forward for more prayer during the next ministry time.
5. The person should be encouraged to give thanks to God for any healing or improvement in their condition. It may also be appropriate to encourage them to give testimony to friends and family, to their house church, or to the congregation as a whole, depending on the nature of the healing or answer to prayer.
6. If it seems that the person is in immediate need of additional intervention (ie. is suicidal, demonized, needs medical attention), consult with the overseeing elder to determine appropriate action or referral.
7. Do not give out your address or phone number to persons being prayed for, or arrange for additional meetings outside of the ministry time without consulting the overseeing elder.
8. When physical healing or spiritual deliverance has clearly taken place, one member of the ministry team should give a verbal and written account to the overseeing elder. All information given will remain completely confidential unless the person gives express permission for it to be shared.
9. Each team of two or three should, amongst themselves, evaluate and critique their ministry after the ministry time has ended. The purpose is to learn from the experience and one another, and to correct approaches which may be hindering ministry or causing unnecessary discomfort for all concerned. Humility and a willingness to learn from one another is crucial because all of us make mistakes and are in the process of being transformed into Christlikeness.