

# Great Commission Prayer: Gathering to Pray, Praying for Our Labors

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by David Schrock

*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone?<sup>10</sup> Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! – Matthew 7:7–11 –*

For the last year, members of our church have gathered for prayer on the second Sunday night of each month. This time of prayer focused on more than just praying for physical needs; it focused on being faithful disciples who make disciples. Hence, it was titled Great Commission Prayer and it has involved praying for the various circles of ministry in our church.

These Sunday nights were also intended to be a time of teaching for young children. Now, however, that we have a Tuesday night discipleship program and because we have found Sunday night to be a difficult time to pull the whole church together, we are moving our Great Commission Prayer to the Sunday School hour on the first Sunday of each month.

While it should be obvious why we need to pray together for God to confirm the works of our hands (Psalm 90:17), here are three biblical reasons why you should make Great Commission Prayer a priority in your church attendance.

## 1. Prayer is a prerequisite for any and all spiritual fruit.

To put it in the words of Jesus, no good thing comes to the people of God apart from prayer. In John 15, when Jesus announced himself as the true vine (v. 1), he said that those who fail to abide in him can do nothing of lasting value (v. 5). To be sure, Christians and non-Christians can do lots of things of apparent value, but lasting, spiritual fruit is only borne through the Word of God and prayer. Hence, Jesus continues, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (vv. 7–8).

As a church we want to see fruit that lasts forever, not just fruit that flourishes for a season (cf. Matthew 13). And Scripture teaches us we won’t see his fruit without earnest prayer. We might see growth in numbers or a larger budget, but such markers are not the same as spiritual fruit—the creation and cultivation of Christian disciples who are growing in godliness and making the gospel known. This only comes by prayer, and thus as a church we want to give ourselves to regular times of corporate prayer.

## 2. Disciples of Christ are identified by their commitment to corporate prayer.

If the reason for prayer is to see God glorified through spiritual fruit, then the regular assembly of God's people should be filled with prayer. To put it the other way around, prayer is what disciples do. And not surprisingly, that's exactly what we see in the book of Acts. Consider a few examples of corporate prayer in the life of the early church.

- Before Pentecost the followers of Christ were huddled in the Upper Room "devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:9)
- In deciding who would replace Judas, the budding church prayed together for their next apostle (Acts 1:24–26)
- The newly formed church in Jerusalem "devoted themselves to . . . the prayers" (2:42). The plural indicates specific times of gathered prayer (cf. Acts 3:1).
- When Peter and John were released from the Sanhedrin, the church in Jerusalem prayed for boldness to continue to preach the Word (Acts 4:31).
- When Peter was imprisoned, members of the church gathered to pray for his release (Acts 12:12).
- When Paul and Barnabas were called to preach and plant churches, the church prayed together for them (Acts 13:1–3).
- Likewise, when Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in the churches of Galatia, they commissioned them with fasting and prayer (Acts 14:23).

From this sampling from Acts, we see the church regularly praying together for the work and the workers of the Word. Indeed, this is what the people of God do. We do not simply meet to provide social comfort for one another, we meet to pray, proclaim the gospel, and prayerfully plan to proclaim ways to share Christ with our neighbors and the nations. In this way, our time of prayer becomes a necessary council meeting with our heavenly commander. We intercede for gospel labors and seek his wisdom in the ministries we seek to fulfill on his behalf. In this way, prayer is not just an additive to our church life; it is the lifeblood.

### **3. The church prays for the work of the Lord to keep itself in line with the Lord's purposes.**

Stemming from the model we see in Acts, we learn that a faithful church must pray together for the work of the Lord, lest we lose our center and our saltiness. Amos 3:3 gives us a principle that two cannot walk together unless they be agreed. So too, because we know that Jesus is walking into the world calling his sheep to himself (John 10:16, 26–29), we know that to walk with Jesus we must be engaged in his affairs. This is why we call our time Great Commission Prayer, because we long to be disciples who make disciples.

While we pray for the physical, economic, and emotional needs of our church, we must also pray for God to have his way in our midst, to conform us into the image of his Son, and through us to see disciples made and matured. Indeed, in our time of Great Commission Prayer, we will pray for needs in the church, but we will also pray that God is magnified through various trials such that he draws people to himself. Indeed, this is how Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane—*Thy will, not my will, be done!*—and this is how John prayed in his third letter, *"I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul."*

By keeping the gospel and its proclamation at the center of corporate prayers, we believe it will help us fulfill the individual and corporate mission of being faithful followers of Christ.

### **Getting Practical**

Practically speaking, our times of prayer will move in an outward direction. We will first pray for people and ministries in the church. Then, we will pray for our community and our personal and corporate evangelism. And last, we will pray for the nations, our missionaries, and outward spread of the gospel.

To maximize our time, we will have individuals share a prayer request. We'll assign a person to pray for them. And then after collecting a dozen or so prayer requests, we will go to the Lord in prayer. In this way, if you have disciple-making, missions-minded prayer request, please let me know.

As a body of believers, each called to be witnesses for Jesus, we want your contributions in this time of prayer. If there are various ministries or needs you would like us to include—perhaps a neighbor you are witnessing to, a Bible study you are starting at work, or an upcoming conversation with a lost family member---please email me ([dschrock@obc.org](mailto:dschrock@obc.org)).

We want to be a church family that prays for one another, as we seek to be Christ's ambassadors to the world. Because, as Scripture teaches, we can accomplish nothing, unless the Lord builds his house (Psalm 127), hence we must pray.

So join us this Sunday morning for a time of Great Commission Prayer and let us watch in hope, as we wait upon the Lord to hear our prayers for the advance of his kingdom.

For His Glory and your joy,

Pastor David