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LEADING IN PRAYER

- I. Examples of Leading in Public Prayer in the Bible
 - A. Old Testament
 - 1. 1 Kings 8
 - 2. 1 Chronicles 29
 - 3. Ezra 9 and 10
 - 4. Nehemiah 9
 - B. New Testament
 - 1. Acts 2:42
 - 2. Acts 4:23-31
 - 3. 1 Timothy 2:1-4

- II. Historical Importance
 - A. It used to be a major part of the service.
 - 1. Several different kinds of prayers: invocation, adoration, confession, intercession, illumination, communion, thanksgiving, benediction.
 - 2. History in Protestant churches of having a long pastoral prayer.
 - 3. Worship books and service books vs. dramas and the use of video.
 - 4. H.O. Old
 - B. Liturgies
 - 1. Chappell
 - 2. Today many churches are: welcome, 25 minutes of singing, brief prayer, sermon, closing prayer, closing song, dismissal. This may be what people are used to but is impoverished, especially in the area of prayer.

- III. Kinds of Prayers
 - A. Invocation - call on (*invocare*) the Lord
 - 1. Historically, begins with a short Scripture sentence
 - a. Psalm 124:8 - Our help is in the name of the Lord, maker of heaven and earth (Genevan Liturgy)
 - b. Psalm 105:1-3 - Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praised to him, tell of all his wonderful works! Glory in his holy name.
 - c. Psalm 8:1 - O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth.
 - 2. Short opening prayer.
 - B. Prayer of Adoration
 - 1. At the conclusion of a song or the end of a musical set.

2. Use Scripture. Keep it short. Mood and tone should match the subject and nature of the prayer (don't be a downer). Avoid stage directions as much as possible. Keep the focus vertical (bow your head, raise your hands).

C. Prayer of Confession

1. Matthew Henry urged confession our sin (nature) and sins (specific), confessing our sins and lamenting them, confession sins of omission and commission, then finally turning to Christ for mercy.
2. Use Scripture (Ten Commandments, Beatitudes, fruit of the Spirit, Psalms, Daniel 9). Don't be too long.
3. Don't fall into the habit of cliché lists that are easily ignored (we've made idols out of family, money, career, kids, success). Better to go one step up the ladder of abstraction (we've made idols of your good gifts) or one step lower (we get up in the morning thinking about money instead of thinking about you).
4. Assurance of Pardon (e.g., 1 John 1:8-9).

D. Prayer of Illumination

1. I will usually do this one. I probably make it too long.
2. Quote a verse of Scripture or adopt a prayer from Psalm 119.

E. Prayer of Intercession (Long or Pastoral Prayer)

1. What you include depends on what other prayers will be offered in the service. Always start with some kind of adoration, maybe a confession if it hasn't been offered yet, then spend most of the time in intercession.
2. What do you pray for? There are lots of different models.
 - a. Four areas of intercession used by the early church and revived by the Reformers: pray for the civil authorities (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Tim. 2:2); the Christian ministry (Matt. 9:36-38; 1 Tim. 2:1-2); the salvation of all people (1 Tim. 2:1, 3-4), and the afflicted (2 Cor. 1:3-4, 11; James :13-18).
 - b. Pray from the inside to the outside (your church to your community to the Church to the world).
 - c. David Powlison differentiates between circumstantial praying, wisdom praying, and kingdom praying. A good congregational prayer will have all three (see previous two models).
 - 1) Circumstantial - jobs, sickness, events
 - 2) Wisdom - holiness, discernment, sin
 - 3) Kingdom - advance of the gospel, global, big picture

IV. How to lead in prayer (especially a congregational prayer)

A. Prepare.

1. These are studied prayers. Not form prayers (written prayers), nor extemporaneous prayers. They are "studied prayers" which may or may not be written.

2. Public prayer is often boring because little thought is put into it. There's not preparation, no training, no effort.
 3. Better to read your prayer than wander, repeat yourself, and use a lot of cliches.
 4. But if you write out your prayer, make sure you are writing for the ear, not for the eye. And don't sound like you are giving a discourse.
- B. Use forms with freedom.
- C. Pray Scripture.
- D. Don't footnote. The Lord already knows who said what. Spurgeon: "It is not necessary in prayer to string a selection of texts of Scripture together, and quote David, and Daniel, and Job, and Paul, and Peter, and every other body, under the title of 'thy servant of old.'"
- E. Leave the preaching for the sermon.
1. Don't exhort. Don't explain texts. Don't unpack complex theology.
 2. Spurgeon: "Long prayers either consist of repetitions, or else of unnecessary explanations which God does not require; or else they degenerate into downright preachings, so that there is no difference between the praying and the preaching, except that in the one the minister has his eyes shut, and in the other he keeps them open. It is not necessary in prayer to rehearse the Westminster Assembly's Catechism."
- F. Do not go into all the details of congregational life.
1. You don't have to cover every birth, death, and engagement in the last three months. Certainly don't try to give announcements in the prayer.
 2. Spurgeon: "As I have said before, there is no need to make the public prayer a gazette of the week's events, or a register of the births, deaths, and marriages of your people, but the general moments that have taken place in the congregation should be noted by the minister's careful heart.
 3. In general, when you lead don't feel pressure to remember or note all the needs in the life of the body.
- G. Pray so that others can follow you easily. You are praying to God, but others are listening. You want to edify (1 Cor. 14:17).
1. Don't let your sentences get too long, too flowery, too ornate.
 2. Don't use colloquialisms. "Lord, you're so sweet." These are distracting. Use language informed by Scripture that is comfortable to you.
- H. Keep it relatively brief. Better to be short than long.
1. Three to five minutes is plenty when you are starting out. Seven to ten minutes if you are really experienced and gifted.
 2. Don't try to pray for everything (the sick list, the pastors, the consistory, the missionaries, the youth group, the President, the congress, world evangelization). Better to pick one or two themes.
- I. Remember you are praying with and on behalf of others.
1. Use "we." Think of the "ours" in the Lord's Prayer.

- 2. Don't relate your personal experiences (one dear elder who prayed a heartfelt prayer about all he had learned in his marriage).
 - J. Order your prayer. Make sure there is a flow and direction. Don't get too wordy. Keep a good pace.
 - K. Beware of verbal ticks: popping your p's, smacking your lips, sighing, ums, mindless repetition of the divine name, "we do pray" and "we would pray"
 - L. Show proper reverence, confidence, and emotion.
- V. Sample Prayer

Resources for Leading in Prayer

Hughes Oliphant Old, *Leading in Prayer: A Workbook for Worship*

Bryan Chappell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice*

The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions

Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Chapter 4 on Our Public Prayer)

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