

C is for Chains

Chains? Surely Jesus came to set us free from our chains - why are we talking about chains?

Well, this isn't about tying people in knots in prayer, nor making prayer a form of slavery. It's about connecting people together in prayer. Linking them up, person-to-person, to activate a high level of participation.

Prayer chains can go across a city, across friendship groups, across churches or even nations. Recent advances in technology have made prayer chains even more accessible to a greater number of people.

One October, I received a short text message on my mobile phone from a friend at a conference, telling me of a credible threat to Christians in Alexandria, Egypt.

I was miles from a computer or from a prayer group. The threatened event was to occur on the 'Night of Power' during the Muslim feast of Ramadan - just after Friday prayers - in 90 minutes. Christian homes and businesses in Alexandria had already been daubed in readiness for a massacre.

What could I do? I complied my own message and sent it by text to everyone on my mobile whom I knew would drop everything and pray. And I prayed!

Praise God He answers prayer: the troops were sent in and calm restored. Even the perpetrators were arrested!

Imagine what could be done to make prayer effective if we had ready-made chains of prayer in operation for urgent needs?

Every church could have its prayer chain for emergencies. How? Ask people to commit themselves to be available. The prayer chain is activated by the co-ordinator who receives one phone call, checks out the information from the original source, and then makes up to five phone calls (depending how many are in the chain). Each of those people then make a further five phone calls each.

Within a maximum of 15 minutes, 26 people have been alerted to pray. This is a kind of pyramid prayer chain.

Alternatively, if the folk have mobile phones or computers on broadband, and agree to have lines open all the time - even in the middle of the night - one message sent to multiple recipients in one action becomes possible.

When we enter into a commitment to pray we will find that prayer becomes more meaningful and relevant. And the immediacy of this form of prayer makes us more involved in the needs of people - even those we may never meet.

Through this kind of praying, we help change the world.

C is for Concerts of Prayer

I am often asked what a 'concert of prayer' is: "Is it something to do with music?" The answer is yes, and no. A concert of prayer comprises several elements.

The term stems from the 18th Century when a band of Scottish ministers wrote letters to each other in 1744 about being 'in concert' for prayer. By this the men meant they were in an agreement to pray with one another in unity.

Jonathan Edwards, the American Revivalist preacher, also picked up the term. He said it meant: "An explicit agreement and visible union of God's people in extraordinary prayer."

Today, prayer concert is applied to a type of prayer gathering, which brings God's people together from different denominational and cultural backgrounds.

In one place, they engage in a period of concerted prayer, using different styles, creativity, music and proclamation.

In the United States there has for many years been a ministry called ' Concerts of Prayer International.' One of my close friends leads this movement for the whole of New England.

A concert of prayer in its modern expression is essentially a public event. It can be for a small number like 30, or as big a group as 3,000 or 30,000 people.

It will consist of prayer and praise songs, praying with scripture, and in different group sizes. So, in its original sense, a prayer concert would begin with quiet meditative prayer between us as individuals and God for two minutes.

This would be followed by prayer in twos for each other for four minutes. Then small groups of four would be formed (by joining two groups of two), praying for the church - for up to six minutes.

This would then in turn be followed by two groups of four joining together to pray for ten minutes for the nation. A break for some prayer-singing would then be followed by reversing the process.

Application

Starting with the group of eight, pray for the world and its needs for eight minutes. Break into groups of four and pray for four minutes - each taking a nation or a missionary or both to God in prayer. Next, in twos, pray for each other and your ongoing life of service - for two minutes. Finally, pray on your own, asking God to speak to you and through you.

Each element of the meeting, here, focuses on saying a prayer after reading a relevant Scripture, which is relevant to your prayer topic.

Conclude the event with a period of corporate prayer, picking up a subject that the Holy Spirit has emphasised as being important for that occasion (like a story in the news) and conclude with a few minutes of praise.

There are many variations on this method of corporate prayer. If you are hosting a citywide prayer gathering, you could focus on different institutions - like local government, education or the police - or localities in the city. Preface each with a short introduction, or hand out briefing papers. Have a time to pray for the street where you live.

Break into triplets to pray for non-Christian friends - sharing the name of one person each (one minute each) then praying for each other's friend as well as your own (six to ten minutes)

Be open to introduce creative prayer methods - with the aid of posters, PowerPoint, an overhead projector or objects to help focus everyone's attention. A huge map of the city or the nation on the floor can become a focus too - people can gather around it, stand in it, or even lay hands on it!

Why not have a prayer concert focused on stories in the news? Spread the pages of a newspaper around small groups and pray over the issues raised on the sheet.

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