

covenant family delights in prayer, the more they will delight in praying with God's people.

II

How Do I Make the Most of Congregational Prayer?

'Let us therefore go boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.' - Hebrews 4:16

I. Praying along with the Elders

'Although led by an elder, [congregational prayer] becomes the prayer of the whole assembly as the Lord's people participate by giving earnest attention to the content of the prayer and adding, by an audible or inaudible Amen, their enthusiastic concurrence with its petition' (*Directory*). As the elder prays, the congregation in their minds and hearts is to be taking those same prayer requests to the Lord. In other words, congregational prayer is not a congregational listening to an elder's prayer, but the congregation following the elder before the throne of grace in unified praise and petition.

II. What Happens If My Mind Begins to Wander?

It is easy for one to become mindless rather than mindful in prayer - to listen rather than follow in prayer. When this happens, briefly confess such negligence and weakness to the Almighty Father, seek His sovereign strength, and return back to congregational prayer. By God's grace, focus in prayer will continue to mature.

III. Confessing the 'Amen'

The Heidelberg Catechism instructs the Church that, 'AMEN means: So shall it truly and surely be. For my prayer is much more certainly heard of God, than I feel in my heart that I desire these things of Him.' Such is what the Christian professes at the conclusion of prayer. In congregational prayer, it is good for all present to audibly confess the Amen together as a sign of unity and for the edification of the saints.

III

How Do I Make the Most of Congregational Prayer throughout the Week?

'Pray continually' - 1 Thessalonians 5:17

I. Continued Prayer for Requests Mentioned

One simple way to continue make diligent use of congregational prayer is to make note of some of the prayer requests mentioned throughout the service, particularly during the pastoral prayer, and take those before the Lord throughout the week in private and family worship. Examples of this may be a need in the church or community, or for a particular sister-church, or for believers in a particular nation.

II. Follow-Up and Recount the Lord's Faithfulness

If there are specific prayer requests for brothers and sisters in the Lord, Christians should reach out to them throughout the week. As believers see how the Lord is faithful to answer the prayers of His people, and such answers are shared with the church, it will serve as a great testimony to God's sovereignty and goodness, as well as encourages the congregation to pray boldly and broadly.

Conclusion

'And call upon me in the day of trouble: so I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.' - Psalm 50:15

In all things, the best way to make the most of congregational prayer is to persevere in prayer through the week, both privately and as a family. Christian pilgrims and covenant families, do not grow weary in your prayers; nor become negligent in this means of grace. Our God hears the prayers of His people, and He will accomplish His will.

The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. 'The Directory of Public Worship' and 'The Larger Catechism'. Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2018.

The Heidelberg Catechism. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2018.



Approaching the Throne of Grace: On Making Diligent Use of Congregational Prayer

A Pamphlet to Encourage Believers & Covenant Families in the Ordinary Means of Grace

'Let us therefore go boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'

Introduction

'God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine among us.' - Psalm 67:1

I. The Importance of Prayer

From the Christian's conversion to their final breath, prayer is both a privilege and priority of the Christian life. Prayer is a privilege, for those once enemies have been adopted as sons and granted audience before the sovereign and gracious King. Prayer is also a priority, for we are fully dependent upon God for all things, and must go to Him in prayer.

II. Prayer as an Ordinary Means of Grace

Prayer is one of the 'outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation' (*Westminster Larger Catechism* 154), along with the Word and sacraments. Prayer is made effectual as a means of grace to the congregation as the Father hears and answers our prayers, as the Son mediates our prayers, and as the Spirit empowers us to pray and testifies that we are adopted by God and united to Christ. Prayer is, therefore, not only the duty of individual Christians, but also of the gathered assembly. As covenant families gather for worship, they testify to their faith in the risen Christ as they go boldly before God's throne of grace with their praise and petition.

I

How Do I Prepare Myself for Congregational Prayer?

'I exhort therefore, that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.'

- 1 Timothy 2:1

I. Understanding the Theology of Prayer

As the Larger Catechism teaches, 'Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, in the name of Christ, by the help of His Spirit; with confession

of our sins, and thankful acknowledgement of His mercies' (*WLC* 178). One of the ways to prepare to go before the throne of grace as the assembly of saints is to be regularly mindful of what prayer is. In preparing for the Lord's Day on Saturday evenings and Sabbath mornings, Christians and their families do well to instruct and encourage one another on what it is to go before the Almighty God in congregational prayer.

II. Understanding the Elements of Prayer

Congregational prayers in a worship service 'includes adoration, thanksgiving, confession of sin, and intercession' (*Directory for Public Worship*). One way to prepare for congregational prayer is to be well-acquainted with the various sections of prayer in the service. Christian parents should also seek to instruct covenant children in the order of service so that they may likewise participate in worship and grow in the life of the Church.

A. *Silence and prayer before the beginning of worship.* Before the beginning of the service, the congregation takes time to silently prepare themselves for worship - confessing sin, giving praise for salvation and seeking the Lord's blessing.

B. *Prayer of Adoration.* The minister, upon the call to worship from the Scriptures, leads the congregation in prayer of the 'incomparable greatness, goodness, and majesty of the Lord, in whose presence the congregation is gathered;' 'solemn confession of our unworthiness by nature to approach Him and our inability of ourselves to worship Him;' 'grateful blessing of Him for the unspeakable gift of His Son Jesus, the only Savior of sinners;' 'joyful claiming of the promises to the saints of His covenant of grace;' and 'expectant seeking of His blessing upon the praise, prayer, and proclamation of the Word that day' (*Directory*).

C. *Pastoral Prayer.* During the Pastoral Prayer, the minister leads the congregation before God's

throne of grace for the various praises and petitions of the church: of thanksgiving for the many graces of God granted to the church; of the confession of sins; for the specific needs of the local congregation and community; 'for the advancing of the Gospel and the Kingdom of Christ to all the nations of the world: for the conversion of Jews and Gentiles, and the hastening of the second coming of our Lord; for the flourishing of the church at home and abroad; for the relief from oppression of persecuted believers; and for civil governments, that they would rule with justice in the fear of the Lord' (*Directory*); and for the blessing and sanctifying of the Lord's Day, particularly for the Spirit's blessing upon the ordinary means of grace.

D. *Prayer of Illumination.* Before the preaching of God's Word. The elder leads the congregation to seek the Lord's blessing over the preached Word: that just as the Spirit inspired the Word, He would illumine it in the minds and hearts of the Church; as well as for the salvation of the lost and the strengthening of the saints.

E. *Prayer of Application.* After the conclusion of preaching, the elder leads the congregation to seek the Lord's blessing that God's Word would be rightly applied to the lives of the congregation, both individually and corporately.

III. The Practice of Prayer

The Directory of Public Worship states, 'Prayer is to be offered boldly in the name of Jesus Christ, with the utmost reverence in thought, language, and manner, with the deep humility appropriate to forgiven sinners approaching the presence of the Holy God, and with the joy of children accepted by a loving father.' From such a description we are reminded of this truth: the best way to prepare for congregational prayer on the Lord's Day is to be in prayer yourself and with your family throughout the week. The more the individual Christian and