

Why Prayer is Essential to Hospitality

I could not be more grateful that my prayer life has gotten both thicker (deep) and thinner (ongoing) as I move through my post Sabbatical world. It has produced some new practices in my assimilation ministry, galvanized some old ones, and given me new passion for others that Gene (our Lead Pastor) leads us in.

Here are 9 ways that thicker and thinner prayer is permeating our church and its assimilation ministry:

1. 5:08 Prayer

Over a year ago, Gene Appel invited everyone at our church to set the alarm on their phones to 5:08pm. This was to remind us to pray that we would reach 1% of the 5.8 million people who live in a 20 mile radius of our hub campus with the message of Jesus. We call this our "Go Beyond Vision" and we have been sharing it in Next Steps with new people God is adding to our church for 5 years. Gene asked us to pray daily at 5:08pm for the fulfillment of this vision for a full year. It was fun to hear phone alarms go off in the middle of the message or in Next Steps during the Saturday service (even when it was my own phone as I hosted Next Steps...which prompted me to lead everyone in 5:08 prayer on the spot!). There is a power to this kind of "thin prayer" when it's daily, and includes everyone for a 365-day streak. I could go on and on about the unprecedeted things God brought about during this concerted daily prayer effort, but let me share just three of them here:

- We were given the largest donation Eastside has ever received: a 4.5 million dollar church property in Bellflower that enabled us to launch our 4th campus.
- The number of guests who gave us their contact info at Guest Central increased by 90% year over year and Next Steps grew by 26% as a result.
- We became the 2nd fastest growing church in the U.S.

2. Car prayer

Like many of you, I pray in the car on the way to church that God will defeat the forces that are opposing guests as they attempt to make it to church and to Next Steps. I also pray that the Hosts and Table Hosts at every campus will be empowered by God to help guests experience their connection to the Body of Christ. This regular practice of "thin prayer" not only makes a difference in things unseen, but it makes a difference inside me as I remember whose battle this is and what my role is (and isn't).

3. Phone prayer

We do a lot of phone follow up when guests make decisions to follow Jesus or are baptized.

When a need is shared in one of these phone conversations, I have learned to ask if I can pray for them right now. They are always surprised and grateful to have me pray for them over the phone. Many of them have never heard a person pray for them before and it has an impact on guests in multiple ways. I try to practice this in person as well when a guest shares a prayer request with me. They are consistently so appreciative that I paused to let them hear me pray for them or their loved one.

4. Pre-game prayer

One way of expressing a thin but powerful prayer is by circling up with the Table Hosts and Assistants just prior to "game time" in Next Steps. I do this with any of them that are present before the guests arrive, spontaneously. When we do this, we can sense our dependence shift internally from ourselves to God. We also observe breakthroughs together that we credit to God and our asking Him for them specifically.

5. Table prayer

At the end of every session, we have Table Hosts pray that the assignments of the week at Next Steps will make a powerful difference in their growth as a Christ follower that week. Though they do not have time to ask for prayer requests, they usually include in this prayer anything that an individual may have shared in discussion that could use prayer support. Sometimes, they even email that guest during the week to see how that issue is progressing.

6. POC prayer

POC stands for Pastor On Call. We always have at least one available during and after services. The cool thing is that they are not just ordained staff, but Next Steppers who have graduated who have the gift of pastoring. I am so proud of these people when they serve in this role. We are in the habit of referring people to POCs from Guest Central and Next Steps when we sense someone needs a level of conversation and "thicker" prayer that can best be experienced in a pastoral moment in a room we have dedicated for this purpose.

David Sotelo is one of our interns and also a young adult. He is not a ministry major or necessarily pursuing vocational ministry. Recently he received a card that a guest sent to our office addressed to "Pastor David", thanking him for taking the time to listen and pray for them. Whether it takes place in our office on weekdays or in the church at weekend services, there is nothing quite like this kind of prayer for helping guests feel connected to God and our church.

7. Big weekend prayer

Before Christmas and Easter services, Gene will have the entire staff meet him in the auditorium to hear him share specific prayer targets surrounding these high-outreach weekends. He then sends us for 20 to 30 minutes to anywhere a guest might appear that weekend: Every seat in the auditorium, Guest Central, the parking lot, restrooms, Kidside, and more. All are covered with "thick prayer" from the perspective of guests who we want to see connect with God and others at our church in these services. It gives us as staff the conviction that our property is

now set apart for a holy purpose and we are ready for it, come what may.

8. Diploma prayer

This is one of my favorite moments of thin prayer and a real privilege. Whenever someone has completed all 4 sessions of Next Steps, they are given a Certificate of Completion (Diploma) for graduating from the training. I am always amazed at how much they value these certificates. On all campuses, they are printed out with guest's names on them so that they are ready for the guest's final session. They have Gene's signature printed on them as well and a wet signature from either myself at the Anaheim campus or a Campus Pastor at our other Campuses. We sign each one individually so that we can pray for each person being added to our church by name as they are being added. This not only gives us name recognition for guests joining our church, but it also gives us the ability to say to each Next Step Grad, "I have prayed for you by name". This just feels right.

9. 21 days of prayer

This is a time to thicken the prayer life of everyone at our church in a way that those new to our church can easily connect with. Inspired by Church of the Highlands in Birmingham AL, we do this one to two times a year to rally people around who they are as followers of Jesus in our community in this generation. This year, it will be attached to Gene's series on the book of Acts entitled "The Deep". The online prayer guide breaks Acts into 21 readings, gives a key thought for prayer each day fueled by a daily video prayer request from an Eastside staff person released through social media. To thicken the prayer even more, we have Wednesday evening Nights of Worship during the 21 Days to help the church members new and old experience prayer in community. Rocket fuel for the climb.

Since returning from my Sabbatical, my prayer life has become an ongoing tapestry of thicker and thinner conversations with God throughout my day. It has also been permeating the lives of our guests in ways they don't even realize. My challenge to you as a Sherpa is to not take any guests on the climb without taking prayer along with you as a key piece of equipment for reaching the summit.

> [Read more from Greg.](#)

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