



Scripture recognises there are different kinds of prayer

Nike Adebajo is a Regional Minister with the Yorkshire Baptist Association. Having helped facilitate ecumenical prayer gatherings in Sheffield, she emphasises the value in learning from other traditions – including from the global south and east

Part of my commitment to prayer started when I was a university student in Nigeria in the mid 1970s. A prayer movement swept through tertiary institutions, which led to an explosion with thousands of people making a commitment to follow Jesus. Nigeria now has one of the largest gatherings of Christians on the planet at the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Holy Ghost Convention (conservative estimates put it at 1 million, though Kwiyani 2020 puts it at 2 million¹). Don't get me wrong, there are many challenges facing Christianity in Nigeria, discipleship being one of them; however, a desire to pray is ingrained in most Nigerian Christians.

After arriving in the UK in the late 1980s and moving to Sheffield in the 1990s, my family joined The King Centre which later joined St Thomas' Philadelphia, a bigger church which God had given more of a platform in the city. I was soon invited to lead on prayer, and from that I've helped to facilitate two ecumenical prayer spaces in the city.

These are emPower - a quarterly gathering for any Christians in the city who want to pray together; and Sheffield Leaders in Prayer, where church leaders across the city meet monthly for mutual encouragement and to pray for the city and the Church's mission.

emPower takes place in different churches with people coming from different streams and ethnicities.

We start every gathering by reminding people we are from different denominations/ streams and encourage people to make space for one another's spirituality. Worship is led by a team drawn from different churches across the city. We identify people, again from different churches, who can inform our prayer topics.

emPower is an amazing example of how coming together in that ecumenical space, journeying together and being willing to lay down our way of doing things and exploring other's, helps us to grow. One instance of this has been a Pentecostal minister who couldn't initially understand how one could be silent and pray; however, through journeying together, including participating in an emPower online lament during Covid lockdown, has come to recognise the power of these other forms of prayer. In the same way, there are many who value a quiet way of praying but who are now able to flex into something more exuberant. It's been such a joy.

As a regional minister, I see this beginning to happen at the local church. Many of our congregations are experiencing an increase in the number of our sisters and brothers from the global south and east and some fellowships are willing to try praying differently to reflect these new styles. I try to help identify differences in prayer styles, for instance, encouraging a congregation (appropriately) to pray in the style of Acts 4.24 when 'they all lifted their voices to the Lord'.

I'd encourage us all to be willing to lean into and learn to pray in different ways - intentionally make space for different prayer styles in our individual and corporate prayer life. One of my favourite scriptures on prayer is Ephesians 6:18: 'And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...' Scripture recognises there are different kinds of prayer. There is a richness to the various Christian prayer approaches – may we be people who are open to that. Who knows, that may be a cure to some people who say they find prayer boring.

¹ Harvey Kwiyani, *Multicultural Kingdom Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church* (London, SCM Press, 2020), p29