



CREATING A CULTURE OF PRAYER

a conversation between
Lynn Green and
Pete Greig



Pete Greig has been teaching on prayer for more than 25 years. He founded the 24-7 prayer movement, which has spread into more than half the nations on earth.

He has written award-winning books about prayer, including *How To Pray, God on Mute*, and *How to Hear God*. And he also founded the Lectio 365 app, which many Baptists use today.

General Secretary Lynn Green recently met Pete at Waverley Abbey, where she asked him a range of questions about prayer

Reflections on the 24-7 Prayer movement

Lynn Green

One of the things you're most known for is the 24/7 Prayer Movement. This was something birthed in God's heart, but you obviously helped considerably to get it off the ground.

I wonder if you might tell us about the 24/7 Prayer Movement, its impact – and your own involvement?

Pete Greig

It's a great question, because on the one hand, 24/7 Prayer was a sovereign move of God. But sometimes I think we play down our role in partnering with God in things, maybe with good motives.

Augustine says, 'Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not.'

And I like that balance.

We made sure the prayer room was very creative and interactive, which I think has been very important, especially for children in prayer.

We taught on prayer. It's amazing to me how prayer doesn't come up that much when it's on almost every page of the Bible.

The other thing we've done practically throughout the years is work very hard at gathering and telling stories. Because if you want to motivate people to pray, just tell them it works. And give an example, and they want to do it.

You may be thinking this is all very well for you, you're a prayer movement.

But I guarantee every single minister reading this, if you go to your congregation and ask "Who here has seen a real, genuine, no

exaggeration, miraculous answer to prayer?" You'll have many, many hands go up.

And if you then just start to ask people their stories, your faith will be rocketing by the end.

The apostle Paul says: '*Faith comes by hearing*'. (Romans 10:17)

I think it's very important to tell the stories of answered prayer, to inspire people and remind people this is the great power we have, as followers of Jesus.

Unanswered prayer

Lynn

How can you create a culture of sharing stories of prayer, when it needs to be more nuanced than just 'God's doing the miraculous' every week?

God doesn't always answer prayer. Sometimes we wait a very long time, and it feels like there's no answer. Sometimes it doesn't pan out like we'd hoped.

So how do you set that kind of culture that is both expectant and faith filled, but is also realistic about answered prayer and unanswered prayer?

Pete

This is very personal for me. In our first year of non-stop prayer, we thought we'd found the big red switch. We thought: "If everyone would just pray the way we were, it would make revival happen!" We were probably a bit insufferable.

And then my wife Sammy had an epileptic fit. It had never happened before. Our second child was seven weeks old. We found out she had a brain tumour - a very large brain



tumour. And we had over a month of not knowing if it was operable. We were incredibly lucky - blessed - that it was operable. That's another conversation for another time.

She had something the size of an orange taken out of her skull and has had epilepsy ever since. I can't tell you how many times I've sat next to my wife, watching her slipping into these very dangerous kind of seizures - one normally involves an ambulance - and crying out to God to make it stop... and it not working.

Yet at the same time I'm seeing and hearing about miracles: my inbox is full of stories of answered prayer.

I realised in myself - and I suspect every church leader can relate to this - the tension to go one of two ways. I could have become a bit cynical, because I was hurting like hell, and just say, "Oh, it's all nonsense."

Or, and this was the greater temptation, to become fake - not be honest with the church, lest it ruin their faith - thinking "I've got to do God's PR for him". Not tell them my chaos and my questions.

My second book was called *God on Mute* about unanswered prayer. And I had a very famous Christian sit me down and say, "You cannot release that book. You're meant to be the guy who says this stuff works."

Lynn

What does it mean by 'work,' though? That's the whole point.

Pete

100 per cent. But actually *God on Mute* has brought more people back to faith in Jesus or



stopped them losing their faith, than anything I know. Here's where I would land this: I think the Bible is more honest about unanswered prayer than the church is.

Lynn

Yes. There's all the whole lament in the Psalms - they cry out to God and say, "What on earth are you doing?"

Pete

Between a third and half of the Psalms are lament - but almost all of them are flitting between.

What we're not supposed to do is get together in on a Sunday morning and be miserable. We're meant to get together and handle the paradox that this room is full of people whose hearts are breaking - and others who are celebrating what God has done.

Developing a culture of prayer in our churches

Lynn

I'm thinking of all the pastors out there trying to hold together the people on fire for God, and those who are heartbroken.

How do you hold that together in the life of the church? And how do you develop a culture of prayer?

Pete

Well, the first thing is that to be a leader, is to handle paradox. Continually. Unless you're wanting to lead a cult, you're going to have chaos - different views, different people in different places. And you're seeking to shepherd that. So it's a good question.

Let me be really practical. The first thing is - and you'd expect me to say this - a prayer room. They create a space that facilitates sharing and prayer in a way that our Sunday gatherings and small groups can't.

It's so moving as a pastor seeing people's heartbreak written on the walls - things that wouldn't be appropriate for someone to take the microphone and share on a Sunday. These are places of lament.

But you'll also see testimonies of God answering prayer, and so physically, it all comes together in a space like that, which in a way your question intimates is very hard to administer on a Sunday.

I think a lot of this, actually a lot of prayer in general, but certainly the paradox piece, is what we model as leaders. It's why we have to do our own soul work, because it's not easy to lead out of complexity.

If we model that transparency as leaders, where we are honest about our questions, but also honest about the miracles and things God has done, we can create a culture where people know it's okay to be vulnerable and to be hurting - and to testify to the great things.

Preventing burnout - how does a leader receive?

Lynn

It's hard being a church leader these days. How do you not get into burnout? Because obviously prayer is part of that.

But if you are reading this and you are in this place, what hope do you offer for a way forward?

Pete

Being a church leader is incredibly tough. I'm a local church pastor. As well as the 24/7 thing, we always talk about the pain and the privilege with our team here. There is great privilege, we all know that, but there are incredible pressures. All of us have to play the long game.

Your friendships are incredibly important. I hope we've kicked out this nonsense that you can't have friendships with people in your own congregation. It is nonsense. It's unbiblical. It's unhealthy. I know it's been taught in the past: we've got to get rid of it.

Prioritise your close friends, the friends who have been friends for 10 years or more, the people who are unimpressed.

You realise eventually that prayer just as a transaction - intercession, spiritual warfare, petition, which tend to be the types of prayer in our kinds of traditions - are problematic, partly because they don't always work.

Partly because we're dealing with such vast things, and partly because what it does to your relationship with God, if you're always asking - "please, please, please, please."

A friend of mine is a vicar. His son Connor was 17 at the time and doing A levels. He said, "Every day when Connor came home from school, he came to find me in my study.

"There's a couch in the study. And Connor just crashed out on the couch and stared at the ceiling and didn't want to talk. He didn't want to borrow the car keys, didn't want to tell me about his day. He just wanted to be in the same room as me."

And my friend - James - said, "I can't tell you how much that meant."

He said, "Later at dinner, Connor would definitely ask for the car keys, and then would probably talk about his day."

And James challenged me. He said, "How much time do you just spend lying on the couch staring at the ceiling with your heavenly Father? Or is it always: 'I need the car keys?'"

Learning how to just be still and know the presence of God every day has become essential to me. Reminding myself of the love and affection of God. And praying with that part of my brain.

If we only pray with that part of our brain that's about the frontal cortex, which is language, and it's measurable, we are missing out on something that Jesus considered essential. When He prayed all night, he can't have been using words incessantly.

So praying with the limbic region, which is about creativity, imagination, colour, empathy, learning how to pray non-verbally, is really important. I am convinced it's an essential part of a healthy spirituality and long-term sustainability in ministry.



Developing prayer meetings – some practical tips

Lynn

Pete, many churches have a prayer meeting. I wondered what tips you might suggest to help people?

Pete

Great question. I'm passionate about prayer meetings.

Here are some of the keys. Do whatever you can to stop it being boring!

Firstly, try and fuse worship with prayer. More and more worship songs are actually intercessory. If you look at the lyrics, many of our prayers can be worship. Have that flow – it's helpful.

Secondly, break up the prayer meeting with different models. Now this will work if you've got 10 people in your prayer meeting, or 10,000.

Sometimes get everyone praying all at once all together. Most people look terrified!

I tell them Jesus often prayed in a loud voice. In Acts chapter four when Peter and John came back to the church, it says they spontaneously all prayed all at once, and the room in which they were meeting shook.

And every single part of the world that is seeing revival prays in this way. So maybe we have to get over ourselves culturally, and realise there is something biblical in this?

Just start with 15 seconds or 30 seconds. We're not South Korean level yet where it's going to go on all night. And we've built that up - it's a culture in our church.

Next thing is to break the prayer meeting down into threes, ie nine people, three threes. And that means everyone prays rather than having to listen to one person.

They might struggle with that, because some people think, oh, gosh, I don't know how to pray out loud. I'll often say, right, we're praying into, say, a church plant. A, B, and C.

As, could you please pray for Johnny who's leading it?

Bs, can you please pray because we still need to find a venue.

And Cs, could you pray for people to come to Christ?

It's rather nice to lead, you step back and you find everyone praying! It's beautiful. It's a much better use of time.



Pete Greig is the founder of 24-7 Prayer, a prayer meeting that's continued for more than two decades, with communities all over the world committing to periods of continuous prayer.

24-7 Prayer provides learning and teaching on prayer with free resources, courses, apps and ideas. Find out more on 24-7prayer.com



Lynn Green is the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Last December she called Baptists to embrace a season of prayerful waiting and stillness.

Creating a Culture of Prayer Conversation

Please use this QR code to find the videos of Lynn and Pete's conversation

- or visit baptist.org.uk/cultureofprayer

