



On our knees?

Over the summer of 1998, "On our knees?" sought to gain some new insights into the prayer habits of Christians. Whilst principally a UK survey, we included a global benchmark group of churches. Our main aim was to encourage prayer - individuals completing the survey could request a free booklet on prayer, leaders of churches sending in over 20 responses received a personalised summary report, and many senior church leaders received a complimentary copy of the findings to aid them in their leadership. With over 5500 surveys returned, a wealth of valuable data has been gathered for future analysis and research. This report also contains some data gathered from a further 1800 surveys on prayer carried out after seminars on prayer by former Evangelical Alliance Prayer Secretary, Brian Mills. References to this survey are clearly marked.

Executive Summary - The Key Conclusions

The responses to this survey are likely to be from Christians who are more likely to pray than others. However, this gives some valuable insights into prayer habits of those who do pray, encouraging those who pray less.

- ❶ There are many Christians committed to prayer, and praying regularly across all denominations and countries.
- ❷ Those in positions of leadership (either full-time or in lay leadership positions) are praying more than average, thus giving a positive role model to our churches.
- ❸ The vast majority of respondents would like to spend more time in prayer. There is a clear challenge to the church in every place to provide encouragement to pray, without generating feelings of guilt.
- ❹ People are praying both alone and with other Christians, and seeing this as important. There is an opportunity for more Christian couples to pray together.

The Approach

3000 church leaders from a range of denominations were invited to take part in the project. 2500 were UK churches, with 500 churches from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US. We received 5644 completed surveys from 344 churches (11%), with an average of 16 surveys per church. Data supplied on congregation sizes suggests that 16 surveys per church represents around 13% of church members.

Comparing these figures with other research suggests these 13% are almost certainly skewed to those church members who pray more. This is also supported by examining the churches where a higher proportion of the congregation responded. A number of these churches completed the survey together in church, gaining responses from people who might not otherwise have returned survey forms. There is also a possible bias in the churches opting into the project. Surveys can be tied back to the individual church in order to be able to offer personalised summary reports. Leaders willing to take part may have felt more comfortable about the prayer life of their churches than the leaders who declined.

This skew in favour of those who pray more was anticipated. In some respects this is encouraging, since we are able to glean learning on the prayer habits of

those who do pray. To make some assessment of the prayer habits of the broader church, questions on better researched areas such as length of time a Christian, frequency of attending church and bible reading habits were included.

Given the nature of the questions : using a range of boxes to tick to categorise the respondents' prayer habits and beliefs, we would readily admit that such a survey can only give a snapshot of our prayer habits and beliefs. Our combined experiences of prayer are too diverse and deep to be easily accommodated by such a survey.

SIX POSITIVE POINTERS

- ◆ 48% see private prayer as vital to their Christian life and faith.
- ◆ 64% of respondents claim to pray alone each day vs 34% claiming to read the bible daily.
- ◆ 86% believe they have experienced prayer bring answered.
- ◆ 35% of respondents claim to spend an hour or more each week in private prayer.
- ◆ 75% of respondents would like to spend more time in prayer.
- ◆ 39% pray regularly with other people.

The Returned Surveys

5644 surveys were returned from 300 churches. 69% were from women, 31% from men. 5099 were from the UK, with a global benchmark pool of 545 surveys. By denomination, 64% returned questionnaires were from Anglicans, 14% from Baptists, 10% from Methodists, 4% from Pentecostals and 8% from other denominations.

The 45 to 64 age range and the over 65's accounted for 34% and 32% of responses, with a further 19% coming from those aged 25 to 44.

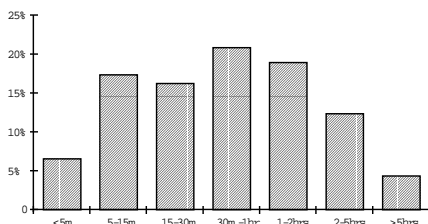
By church position 8% of responses were from those who were pastors or in full time ministry, 26% from those in lay leadership roles, with the remaining 66% from other church members.

Our Personal Prayer Time.

Personal Prayer is important. 47% of respondents rated personal prayer as vital to their Christian life and faith, with a further 30% rating it important. The remaining 23% rated it either unimportant or fairly important. What is included in this prayer time will vary widely according to personal preference and prayer style.

Just over a quarter (28%) of respondents used a "daily office" (Morning/Evening Prayer, Celebrating Common Prayer etc) at least once a week. (including church services) Not surprisingly these are more likely to be Anglican and full-time ministers. However, over 10% of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians use a daily office at least once a week.

The amount of time spent in private prayer varies considerably. (See graph below.)



One third of respondents spend an hour or more in private prayer each week. On average, respondents claim to spend about 7 minutes a day in private prayer. When the sample is re-adjusted to reflect

the whole churchgoing population, the daily prayer time reduces to about 4 minutes. This seems relatively high, although it is influenced by a small number of people spending an hour or more in prayer each day, and by some respondents possibly overstating the time they spend praying.

There is relatively little variation in the pattern by denomination, except that the Anglicans and Methodists have a slightly lower proportion of people who pray for more than an hour each week.

The overwhelming majority believed that God hears their prayers (93%), and that they have experienced answered prayer (86%). Given the skew to those who pray more, this is perhaps not surprising. What may be more surprising is the degree to which respondents experience two-way communication in prayer. Nearly two thirds (63%) spend time listening to God as well as talking to Him, and a similar number (59%) have experienced God communicating with them as they pray.

There is a clear link between the amount of time spent in prayer and the experience of two-way communication in prayer. Dividing the sample into those who pray for more than an hour, and those who spend less than an hour in private prayer each week gives a distinct difference. There is also a clear link between time spent in prayer and the likelihood of reading the bible frequently.

	< 1hr	> 1hr
% spend time listening to God	54%	80%
% experienced God communicating with them whilst they pray.	49%	77%
% read bible every day or most days	44%	82%

What People Pray For

The survey asked how frequently people prayed about 11 different areas. The area most frequently prayed for was family and friends, with time spent thanking God close behind.

The first column of the table below shows the percentage of respondents who claimed to pray frequently about each area. The survey also asked people which two of these areas they prayed

most about. The percentages of respondents quoting each area as one of the two they prayed most about are given in the final column.

Area	Freq	Most
Family/friends	89%	63%
Things to thank God for	80%	28%
health/healing of particular people	67%	27%
praising and worshipping God	65%	14%
confessing things to God	58%	11%
the work of your church	44%	10%
your church leaders	41%	3%
others to come to faith (by name)	33%	8%
world/regional issues	29%	6%
others to come to faith (generally)	26%	4%
your material needs	16%	3%

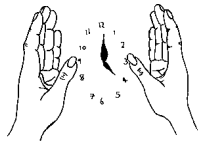
The areas most frequently prayed for, are, on the whole, the areas where people spent the greatest amount of time praying. However, what we pray for most, seems to depend on how long we pray for - the longer we pray, the more likely we are to spend most of our time praising God, praying for the work of our church and for people to come to faith. (In the table below statistically significant differences are shown in bold.)

Area	< 1hr	> 1hr
Family/friends	66%	58%
Things to thank God for	29%	26%
health/healing of particular people	30%	22%
praising and worshipping God	10%	20%
confessing things to God	12%	10%
the work of your church	7%	15%
your church leaders	2%	4%
others to come to faith (by name)	5%	11%
world/regional issues	5%	6%
others to come to faith (generally)	3%	6%
your material needs	4%	3%

Obstacles to Prayer

The survey asked respondents to rate the degree to which five possible obstacles to prayer caused them difficulty. Wandering thoughts was found to be the biggest obstacle, with over 80% of respondents finding this at least "sometimes a problem". Two thirds of respondents found noise or other distractions to be a problem, and just over half (54%) found finding time a barrier. The two areas which were found

to be less problematic were knowing what to pray for (23%) and knowing what to say (32%)



The EA Prayer Survey asked respondents an unprompted question about what they found to

be the biggest barrier to prayer. The top 5 mentioned are :

- ❶ Keeping Concentration (40%)
- ❷ Wandering thoughts (19%)
- ❸ Distractions (9%)
- ❹ Finding Time (6%)
- ❺ Tiredness (6%)

There are clear similarities between the two lists of obstacles, but the degree to which people find them a barrier is different. This is probably a difference in question design.

The EA Survey also asked what was the greatest encouragement to prayer when praying alone. The most common answers are :

- ❶ Answered Prayer (20%)
- ❷ Being in God's presence (9%)
- ❸ Spending time in the Bible (9%)
- ❹ Hearing from God (5%)
- ❺ Quiet / Peace (5%)
- ❻ Knowing God is listening (5%)

Praying Together

84% of respondents agreed that "It is important that Christians should pray together as well as alone. However, only 39% of "On our Knees?" respondents said that they prayed with one or more people outside of church services at least once a week. A further 19% pray with others at least once a month.

There are a variety of opportunities for praying together outside of church services. The survey explored three of these.

44% claimed to pray regularly with a small number of other people. Examples given in the questionnaire were "prayer partners", "prayer triplets", two couples praying together, etc.

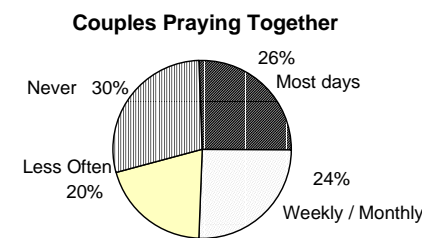
28% of respondents claimed to go regularly to a church prayer group, although when repercentaged to take account of those churches not offering a

prayer group, the figure rises to 32%. A further 21% claim to go occasionally.

Respondents who pray privately for more than an hour a week are not more likely to pray with other people. However, there is a link with attendance at church prayer groups. The proportion of people regularly attending these groups is linked with the amount of time spent in private prayer (see table below) :

Weekly Private Prayer	% regularly attending Church prayer gp
< 5 mins	9%
5m - 15m	15%
15m - 30m	23%
30m - 1 hr	29%
1hr - 2 hrs	37%
2hrs - 5 hrs	44%
over 5hrs	48%

The third area of praying together explored by the survey was the degree to which husbands and wives pray together. There is an old adage which says that "couples which pray together, stay together!" Roughly half of the respondents were married to a Christian partner and living with them. One quarter of couples pray together either each day or most days, a further quarter claim to pray together less often, but at least monthly. 20% claim to pray together, but less frequently, and the remaining third never pray together. Extrapolating these results to the whole church suggests that possibly as many as three quarters of Christian couples who do not pray together regularly.



Those couples where at least one partner is in full time ministry are nearly twice as likely to pray together daily or most days as those who are congregational members. Those lay people who identified themselves as having positions of leadership responsibility were less likely than pastors to pray together with their spouse, but more likely than other congregation members.

	% pray daily with partner
Pastors	39%
Lay Leaders	28%
Congregation	22%
All	26%

There is a clear link between the amount of private prayer time, and the likelihood that partners will pray together. More than one in two married Christians who pray for over five hours a week will spend time praying together with their partner each day. However, for those who pray for under fifteen minutes per week, only one in fifteen couples will pray together daily.

The EA Survey asked what encouraged people when they prayed together with others. A similar proportion of people mentioned answered prayer, but fellowship / mutual support topped the list, with the power of praying together through common concerns the third most frequently mentioned topic. In other words, praying together with other people does give different encouragement to that experienced when praying alone.

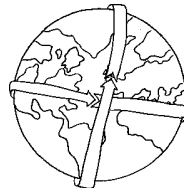
- ❶ Fellowship (25%)
- ❷ Answered Prayer (22%)
- ❸ Praying together - 2 or 3 are gathered, similar prayers (17%)
- ❹ Having specific needs to pray for (12%)

Leaders Prayer Habits

It is encouraging to see that those who are in full time ministry or pastors who responded to the survey are generally modelling very positive habits of prayer, both alone and with others, and Bible reading.



Those who were not in full time ministry, but identified themselves as having some leadership responsibility are also more likely to read the Bible regularly and pray to a greater degree. The table overleaf shows the habits of full time ministers and pastors (P), lay leaders (L) and other members of the congregation (C)



	P	L	C
% read bible daily or most days	84%	67%	51%
% pray for over an hour each week	53%	42%	31%
% regularly praying with small number of others.	64%	54%	37%

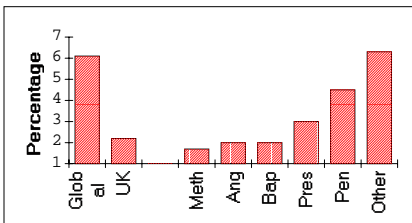
What leaders pray most about is different to other church members. They are less likely to pray most about their family, and giving thanks, and more likely to pray most about the work of the church. Leaders are more likely to spend most time praising God than others.

	P	L	C,
family and friends	51%	63%	65%
work of the church	27%	16%	6%
thanking God	20%	27%	29%
praising God	18%	18%	11%

Prayer for Leaders

One of the aims of the Teal Trust who sponsored the "On Our Knees?" project is encouraging prayer for leaders. We see a need for leaders to be men and women of prayer, but also to be supported in prayer.

Whilst 35% of congregational members claimed to pray regularly for their leaders, only 3% list this as one of the two areas they pray for most. This varies considerably by country and by denomination.



Prayer around the World

The survey also included a sample of 545 responses from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA. The vast majority of the answers are very similar - the barriers to prayer, what people pray for, our experience of answered prayer, the time spent in prayer are all similar between countries, although the countries chosen have similar cultural patterns. There are a couple of interesting differences :

- Christians in the global sample were more likely to read the bible every day or most days 70% vs 56%,
- 57% of Christian couples in the global sample pray together at least once a week compared with 37% in the UK sample.

Encouraging Prayer

Three quarters of respondents would like to spend more time in prayer. There is a real opportunity to increase the prayer power of the broader church, if we can find ways of helping each other in prayer.

Teaching is not necessarily the answer. The survey asked whether people would like more practical teaching on prayer. Only 52% agreed with the statement, and fewer people strongly agreed than with any other statement!! We can speculate that this may be a reflection on the teaching that people have already received, that may have generated feelings of guilt or inadequacy.

A Prayer Plan can help a church look at its prayer life in its broadest sense, and encourage prayer throughout the church.

Such a plan is typically a short document, possibly only with a few bullet points, that outlines how a church plans to develop its prayer life, and ensure that prayer needs are adequately covered. It is best formed by a church council or leadership team, arising from a review of the prayer life of the church. Like any strategy, it will need to have people identified who will be responsible for ensuring that required action happens. Here is an example of a prayer strategy:

BCC Prayer Plan

To increase our prayer time - by holding a weekly prayer group, by urging our home groups to include some time in prayer at each meeting, and by encouraging people to have a daily personal quiet time with God.
To pray for our leaders, our mission and ministry by giving prayer needs in each Sunday's newsletter and by holding quarterly half day prayer meetings.
To respond quickly to urgent prayer requests from church members via a prayer team co-ordinator, available 24 hrs a day.
To prayer walk a different part of our neighbourhood each month so that we cover the entire area each year.
To offer books on prayer and books of prayers in our church library.

Finally, perhaps we should all remember to turn to the Lord ourselves in prayer and ask for his help for each one of us in our own personal prayer lives. The best teaching on prayer comes not from the greatest preacher, but from God himself, as we meet with Him in prayer :

*Lord, teach us to pray
(Luke 11:1)*

"On Our Knees?" was sponsored by The Teal Trust. We aim to encourage Christian leadership by offering training materials and developing prayer support for leaders. We work with leaders of all denominations, and can be contacted at :
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This summary report was written by John Preston, Director of the Teal Trust. Particular thanks go to Jenny and Andrew Ward, and to Jane Bowler for keying in a quarter of a million pieces of data (!) and to Jane Bowler for her illustrations.

