## Lesson 3: The Four Keys of Effective Prayer

**In the prayer seminar** I asked, ‘can we all agree to base our prayers on four basic truths in the light of this passage and other related Scriptures?"

**Key #1:** "Let's **claim the Presence of Christ** in our midst, expecting Him to actually be present by His Spirit as He promised. (Matthew 18:20)

**Key #2:** "Second, let's **trust Him to take charge of us** because He is the Head of the Church. (Romans 12:1-2 & John 16:13)

**Key #3:** "Third, are we all **completely willing** for Him to **change each one of us** as He sees fit? (Jude 24)

**Key #4:** "Fourth, can we **agree to trust Him** to **bring us all into harmony** with His Father and thus into heaven's harmony with one another?" (John 13:34-35 & John 17:20-23)

I paused and then added, "Now, I would like for each of you to carefully consider whether you can heartily agree to unite in prayer on the basis of these four commitments. I want you to feel perfectly free to say so if you are not ready to accept this basis for our united prayer at this time."

I waited while they thought this through. They all agreed. So we began to pray. We had barely begun when Sam's prayer dissolved in tears. For some time he sobbed like his heart would break. Finally, I asked, "Can we help you?"

"I've been away from the Lord for a long time," he confessed, "and I want to come back to Him. Last night, Dr. Lutzer told how Israel had backslidden and become like a marred clay vessel and God had to break His people that He might mold them into a new vessel. I know God was speaking to me, calling me back to Himself."

We encouraged Sam, then resumed praying with a sense of awe and wonder that the Lord had so remarkably answered our prayer for His presence and active leadership. By the time we finished praying, all of our hearts were softened and we were drawn closer to the Lord.

Gene Constantine, a deacon from Corpus Christi, remarked as he was leaving, "I've never been in a prayer meeting like that before." What made the difference? Christ came into our midst and took charge because we "opened the door" (Rev. 3:20) and let Him come into our meeting to glorify Himself in meeting our needs.

## Three Powerful Realities

Let's notice here three powerful realities:

* Christ was present and actively working
* Christ was applying the Word of God as it had been preached
* Christ was present and applying His Word in answer to our prayers

This prayer meeting turned out to be a refreshingly unusual experience for most of the group. Should prayer groups (where Christ is actively at work) be rare? Or should we normally meet in expectant faith claiming that He will be present, actively in charge, changing each one of us and bringing us all into harmony with His Father and thus into heaven's harmony with one another?

Dr. C. John Miller, founding pastor of New Life Presbyterian Church in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, had a prayer meeting where Christ was usually actively in charge. So many came for this exciting prayer meeting that they had to move from the basement to the sanctuary to hold the crowd. Christian's lives were being changed. In fact, they came wanting to be changed and they were not disappointed. It was not unusual for prayers for the lost to be answered and for the new believers to begin attending prayer meeting.

The prayer meeting lasted about an hour and a half. Part of the time everyone was together and part of the time they divided into small groups. Much of the counseling needed by burdened members was taken care of in the small groups.

This dynamic prayer meeting was a key factor in the growth of New Life Presbyterian from a small home Bible study to a congregation of 600 members. The church also sponsored two daughter churches.

## A Prayer Meeting—Killed and Revived!

Pastor Miller's prayer meetings were not always alive through the active leadership of Christ. Some years earlier he had pastored a church where the prayer meeting died. He came to the shocking conclusion that he killed it!

How did he kill it? By thinking his preaching and his hard work were all that was required for success. He did not regard prayer and the active work of the Holy Spirit as absolutely necessary.

## Humility: A Prayer Essential

Then he went through a struggle with an overwhelming sense of defeat in 1970. He came out of this struggle deeply humbled and keenly aware of his need to constantly rely on the active work of the Spirit through constant prayer about everything. He especially prayed for the prayer meeting, for those who would be leading, as well as for those he expected to attend. **Then his prayer meeting came alive with the presence and active leadership of Christ.**[1](https://www.praywithchrist.org/leaders-the-four-keys-of-effective-prayer#endnote)

Pastor Miller led his flock to become the living church gathered in prayer around Christ. (Christ dwells not only in individuals, but also in the midst of His people!) (Eph. 2:18-22). Thus a group of believers become a living temple, a house of prayer (Isa. 56:7; Mt. 21:13; Mk. 11:17; Lk. 19:46). **BUT—to make Christ at home in our midst we must humble ourselves**

For thus says the high and lofty One

that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy;

I dwell in the high and holy place,

with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit,

to revive the spirit of the humble,

and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."
**(Isaiah 57:15)**

When we become truly humble we realize that we are limited creatures who are absolutely dependent on God for life, breath, and all things. Furthermore, we know that we are sinful creatures compared with our sinless Savior. Thus we are absolutely dependent on God's free grace for salvation and any favors we might receive from His hand. Humility brings a recognition of total dependence on God that leads to prayer as the only way to live and get things of eternal value done.

Christ is our example. He humbled Himself when He became a genuine man and lived in constant dependence on His Father and He took the sinner's place on the cross. He did nothing on His own initiative apart from His Father (John 5:19, 30; 8:28-29; 12:48-50). Prayer was the way He lived and got things of eternal value done. On at least one occasion He spent all night in prayer (Lk. 6:12). Fifteen times in the gospels we find Jesus in prayer. He arose long before daylight and went out to a solitary place to pray (Mk. 1:35). He won the biggest battle of His life in Gethsemane in prayer (Lk. 22:40-45).

**Humility leads to prayer as a constant necessity because the humble know that apart from Christ we can do nothing of eternal value** (John 15:5). Peter and all the apostles learned this the hard way when they failed to stand up for Jesus when He was on trial. This was a deeply humbling experience. After they were restored we find them giving prayer and ministry of the Word top priority in their lives (Acts 6:4). Prayer is mentioned 38 times in Acts and is found at every important turn of events.

## You face a choice

We all face a choice. We must make Christ at home in our midst by humbly gathering around Him in prayer or go our own way in our own strength and accomplish nothing of eternal value!

### IN THE NEXT FOUR SESSIONS, WE WILL EXAMINE MORE CLOSELY:

* Claiming the obvious presence of Christ
* Trusting Him to take charge
* Being willing for Him to change us as He sees fit
* Trusting Him to bring us all into harmony with His Father, and thus, with one another

### RESEARCH FOR INSTRUCTOR:

1. To be sure that you fully understand and can explain the "Four Keys," re-write each one in your own words.
2. Can you explain what these terms from the Four Keys means:
	* Claiming the Presence of Christ
	* Trusting Him to take charge of us
	* Being willing to let Christ change us as He sees fit
	* To be in heaven's harmony with one another
3. In your concordance, look up the following words:
	* Humble/humility
	* Note the verses where these words are found and look them up. Use the cross-references in your Bible to study the subject further.

### POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

* How will recognizing Christ's presence in our midst make a difference in our prayer life?
* How does Christ change us when we pray?
* Right now, are you in a state of humility or pride?
* What are the ingredients of a prayer meeting where Christ is allowed to take charge?
* How do we go about letting our prayer meetings be the active work of the Holy Spirit?
* What are the heart attitudes of those who enjoy a Spirit led prayer meeting?
* How does the life of Christ illustrate what our posture should be toward the Father in prayer?
* What are some evidences that Christ is in charge of our prayer meetings? That self is in charge?
* Can you repeat the Four Keys of effective prayer?

## Endnotes

1 Taken from Outgrowing The Ingrown Church, by C. John Miller (Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan Publishing House, 1986, pages 94-97), copyright ã 1986, by C. John. Miller. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.