



## Prayer and Response for Sunday Gatherings

### Setting the Table:

At the heart of any gathering of the church is responding to God. When God reveals himself to us, we have the choice to rightly respond to him; this is worship. In view of God's mercies, we respond to his Son's life, death, resurrection, ascension, pouring out of the Spirit, and his current/future ministry.<sup>1</sup> We respond to his word and teachings (most prominently and authoritatively spoken in Holy Scripture), and we respond to the Spirit's voice and movement in and among his people.<sup>2</sup>

On any given Sunday (or really anytime we gather as the body of Christ), we pursue the revelation and presence of God in several biblical ways: singing, preaching, reading Scripture, communion, praying, serving, and fellowship, as we offer our gifts to each other and to the Lord, for the edification of his church. When, in a Sunday Gathering, we hear from God (through song, sermon, Scripture, communion, prophecy, prayer, service, etc.) it is the **good** and **right** thing for the hearer/receiver to **respond** to his voice.<sup>3</sup> Response is the heart of our gathering.

### Response in the Sunday Gathering:

In an effort to be obedient to God's voice, and to respond to him as we hear him, we desire to communicate a **theology** (or a shared understanding) of response, to implement a **model** of prayer and response for our Sunday Gathering, and to become a church that **practices** this model week in and week out.

### Our Theology of Response

When God speaks, he desires to act.<sup>4</sup> When God speaks to his people in the Old and New Testaments he almost always calls them to act and move in trust and faith.<sup>5</sup> **When God speaks to us today, his desire is for us to act with him and for him, in faith.**<sup>6</sup> This is true worship: when we hear from God and do what he says.<sup>7</sup> True worship is bridging the gap between simply **knowing in your mind/heart what God says**, to **trusting what you've heard from God and living-out what he's said in the world.**

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<sup>1</sup> Rom. 12v1

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 95v5-7; 150v1-6; 1 Chr. 16v29; Jn. 4v23; Heb. 12v28-29

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 32v8-9; 119v105; Lk. 11v28; Jn. 10v27; 14v26; 16v13; Rom. 8v14; Rev. 3v20

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 1; 15v6; Ex. 19; Is. 55v11; Matt. 7v24; Jn. 15v1-11; Heb. 1v1-2v1; 1 Jn. 1v3

<sup>5</sup> Prov. 3v5-6; Ps. 37v5-6; Jer. 17v7-8; Matt. 17v20; Jn. 14v1; Rom. 1v17; 8v28; 10v17; Phil. 4v6-7

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 12v1-2; Heb. 3v15ff; Jas. 1v22-25

<sup>7</sup> Isa. 29v13; Jer. 7v23; Ps. 112v1; 143v10; Jn. 4v23-24; 14v15, 21-23; Phil 2v5-8; 1 Jn. 3v22-24; 5v3

A major and tragic consequence of the fall in Genesis 3 is that separation was introduced into our relationship with God, and thus separation was introduced between our speaking and our acting<sup>8</sup>. And to make things more difficult, our listening to God's voice and then responding in faithful and timely ways is hindered by this same set of consequences.<sup>9</sup>

For example, you may have a deep desire and good intention to love your spouse, your children, and your church family in a self-giving way; to die to self and care for them in ways that you know are good and right. And yet, we so often miss the mark on our good, God-given, and biblical intentions.

So, as we talk about our time of response in our worship gathering, we are talking about a model of church life that we hope will help us **close the gap** between simply hearing God's voice with good intentions, and bringing that revelation to life through our actions. We implore God to help us move from simply having a desire to love God and others, to faithfully acting on that desire.<sup>10</sup>

What can we do to more immediately and concretely say "yes" to God, rather than putting off our "yes" to after lunch or to Monday morning when the encouragement or conviction wanes? **We can act in concrete ways in the moment that we hear his voice.**<sup>11</sup>

We can respond (that is, choose to join in with what God is already saying and doing) and take an embodied action on our end. If you are in Christ you can choose, with your Holy Spirit-empowered will, to make a vulnerable move with your entire being - heart, mind, and body - in response to him. In the very moment we are hearing from the Lord, we can and should say to him:

*"Yes, Jesus, I hear you, and I want what you are saying. And I want what you are saying past this moment of inspiration and revelation; I want what you are saying later when this moment fades away".*

The Scriptures teach that real, living encounters with God ought to be the normal Christian experience.<sup>12</sup> When we practice responding in the very moment we hear God, we are putting feet to the belief that we are united with Christ, that he is alive now, and that he is loving and leading his church in the grace and power of the Holy Spirit; that he speaks and we hear. **This is what we need as a church**, and this is what the world needs from us, since the world is far from him. We must know and believe that God SPEAKS!<sup>13</sup>

We deeply desire this type of culture **for our good** and **God's honor**. We want to give our church a clear path from having an invisible, unseen stirring within us to joining in on what God is doing within us. We hope and desire to become a church that says "yes" to God with more than a silent

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<sup>8</sup> Matt. 26v41; Rom. 7v18; Jas. 4v17

<sup>9</sup> Jos. 5v6; Prov. 1v23-33; Acts 5v29; Eph. 5v6; Jas. 1v14-15; 2 Tim. 3v2

<sup>10</sup> Jas. 1v19

<sup>11</sup> Ex. 19v5; Deut. 5v33; Ps. 119v5; Jn. 5v30; Eph. 5v1; Jas. 4v7; 2 Jn. 1v6; 3 Jn. 1v11

<sup>12</sup> Ex. 33v14; Ps. 27v4; Jer. 29v13; Matt. 18v20; 28v20; Jn. 14v16, 26; 15v5; Acts 3v19-20; 1 Cor. 3v16; 2 Cor. 3v16-18; Eph. 1v17-18; Heb. 4v16; Jas. 4v8

<sup>13</sup> Jn. 10v27; Rom. 10v17; Heb. 4v12

nod, but rather with our whole person. And as this goes on, we pray to patiently and graciously move from a church that says “yes” on Sundays to carrying our “yes” every day before God, in every part of our lives.

**What might God speak?** It could be anything that aligns with the person of Jesus and the words of Scripture. This is *important* - God’s voice sounds like Jesus:

God may simply want to encourage you with your true identity rooted in him.

God may want to heal you physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

He may want to deliver you from the enemy.

God may want you to confess your sins before him or others.

He may give you a simple next step for your journey of faith.

He may want you to seek/receive forgiveness, or he may want you to make peace in a difficult situation.

He may want you to simply praise him with a louder voice than you normally do, or to sit and listen because you speak too much.

He may want you to bring that neighbor some cookies, or to trim that branch that has been a point of contention.

He may want you to practice a discipline of fasting, sabbath, solitude, Bible study, or prayer.

He may want to address that addiction or stuck place.

He may want to pull you out of the shadows and into his light.

He may want to breathe new life and give you new steps into your marriage, singleness, or parenthood.

... Respond, respond, respond. Worship. Follow. Listen and act.

In summary, we **deeply desire** to facilitate gatherings where **movement, action, and response** are normal parts of every Sunday morning. Where we can begin to put feet and movement to the things God is saying to us by shortening the gap between His speaking and our action. We want to be a people who are encouraged, equipped, and lovingly guided into worship and living a life that looks like Jesus’ life, because it is filled with us saying “**yes**” to our Heavenly Father.<sup>14</sup> We want this to be the **expectation** our church family carries into our gatherings.

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<sup>14</sup> Eph. 4v11-16

## **Our Model and Practice for Response as a Church Family**

In an effort to honor the voice of God as he speaks to you, and in an effort to honor your vulnerability and experience in the response, we are providing a very concrete and orderly model for “Prayer and Response” at CDA Bible Church. We have taken examples from Scripture as well as from other churches we trust and have adapted these for our own context and family; we believe it will be a beautiful encouragement and challenge to our family.<sup>15</sup>

We think it’s important to say this: we are intentionally trying to **normalize** the reality of God speaking and us responding; and we are specifically avoiding **sensationalizing** this amazing aspect of God’s presence with us. God’s speaking and his people responding is the normal and biblical Christian life, as we have explored already. We are seeking to normalize this reality in our worship gatherings by heeding Paul’s instructions to provide orderly worship.<sup>16</sup>

To that end, our **orderly model for response during our Sunday gathering looks like this**: after the pastor’s message, we’ll give an invitation to the congregation to respond to whatever God may be speaking to them. When you sense that God is speaking,<sup>17</sup> the invitation is for you to move in response to him; you will move to the side of the Worship Center where we have reserved space for your response to God and for our prayer team to pray over you.

**Note:** The invitation to move your whole body across the room is not because God is more present over there, or because it boosts the egos of the leadership, or because we’re interested in manipulating people’s emotions. Again, we are not seeking to sensationalize God’s voice and our response, but rather normalize hearing from and responding to God for our church family. These are orderly, concrete steps.

### **“Ok, so I moved over to the side, now what?”**

Once you have moved to the side of the Worship Center, we ask that you engage in this simple posture of prayer: pray, standing on your feet with your hands open in front of you, palms up. It is as simple and non-threatening as that. We are asking everyone who is responding to God’s voice to pray this way because this prayer posture is **biblical** and **practical**.

**Biblical**, because this posture is found all throughout the Scriptures.<sup>18</sup> Theologically and thematically speaking, having our two feet fixed on earth is a reminder of our “dirt” origins.

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<sup>15</sup> From Pastor Zach – *We owe a great amount of these thoughts to the beautiful work being done by God at Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon. I personally was able to participate and experience for myself this type of response prayer, and it was so powerful and formative. Many of my thoughts on this have been shaped by their teaching but have been filtered through my own reflections on Scripture and our unique church context here at CDA Bible.*

<sup>16</sup> I Cor. 14v26-40

<sup>17</sup> Recall, God speaks in a variety of ways to us (the church, creation, our conscience/his internal whisper, art/music, sermons/teaching, fellowship/prophecy, etc.) but he most concretely speaks through the Scripture, and thus all other modes of his speaking must be weighed against what he has revealed there. God’s voice anywhere else will sound like the voice of Jesus in the Bible.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Tim. 2v8; Ps. 28v2; 63v4; 134v2; 143v6; Lam. 3v41; Job 11v13; 1 Kings 8v22, 54; Lk. 18v10-14; 24v50

Our days are numbered, and we live in a fallen world. Likewise, two hands open and turned upwards toward heaven says “I have nothing, but God gives everything. He provides and lavishes his love even in this moment”. It is the posture of receiving from the Heavenly Father, who loves to give good gifts to his children.

**Practical**, because it is a posture that engages your whole body in responding to God, because it’s broadly accessible to most people, and because it allows our prayer team to pray for you without interrupting or interfering with the experience you are having with God (more on that below). For those who need to sit while they pray, there will be a few chairs there; either sitting or standing, our desire is for you to hold your hands out to receive what God has for you in that moment.

### **“What should I expect while I respond in prayer?”**

As you stand in response, you’ve moved with your entire body to stand in God’s presence; you may be continuing to listen to what he’s saying to you; you may be confessing sin; you may be overcome with feelings of joy; you may be saying “yes” to something God is telling you; you may even be wrestling with God.<sup>19</sup>

As you are responding to God’s voice at the side of the Worship Center, our **trained** prayer team members may come and actively pray **blessing prayers** over you while you continue praying.

***Blessing prayer:** partnering with others who are responding to an experiential encounter with God through the Holy Spirit.*<sup>20</sup>

In blessing prayer, the trained prayer team member will come along side you, place a hand on your shoulder, and speak a blessing prayer out loud over you, as they join in and bless what God is *already* saying/stirring in you. This kind of prayer recognizes that what is happening begins and ends with God, and that we (the prayer team) are *participating* with his movement.<sup>21</sup> Through blessing prayer, we are asking God to continue what He is doing in you and to strengthen you in whatever it is he is speaking to you in that moment.

So, in an effort to be concrete and to have clear expectations, our simple Blessing Prayer is this:

***“Lord, thank you for seeing your daughter/son. I bless what you are doing in my sister/brother, and I ask you for more, in Jesus’ name. Will you increase your work in them?”***

We recognize that when you move to the side of the Worship Center you are sensing God’s presence and/or hearing God’s voice and responding to him in accordance with our invitation.

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<sup>19</sup> Gen. 28v10-16

<sup>20</sup> This definition was borrowed from Tyler Staton at Bridgetown Church.

<sup>21</sup> Eugene Peterson calls this type of participatory prayer “praying in the middle voice”. For more information on this, read his helpful chapter in “The Contemplative Pastor”.

Simply by your movement to the side of the Worship Center we know that God is at work in you! Our goal is to encourage you in this moment, to stand with you as you stand before God.

There is no more sure and powerful way for us to join in on the work of God than to pray a simple blessing over you in that moment.

### **“When does the response time end?”**

The response time after the pastor’s message may last around 20 minutes, but how long you stand in prayer off to the side is entirely between you and the Lord. You can stand in prayer for just a few minutes, or even for the entire response time. There is no right or wrong answer here.

### **“What else should I know?”**

**About laying hands on your shoulder:** When you respond off to the side in the way we’ve invited you to, at some point, a member of our prayer team will likely come over and place their hand on your shoulder. We lay a hand on the person we are praying for because that is a posture of blessing.<sup>22</sup> Our prayer team is trained to only and specifically touch in this way. It is a **positive, safe, familial** touch and a way to build trust.

**About Communion and Singing:** There are other elements of our response time as well, such as taking communion and continuing in singing our worship. All of these elements may happen interchangeably during the response time: some folks may be taking communion, while others linger in song, or while others yet respond in prayer off to the side. All of this is welcome. There is no prescribed order in which to engage in response.

It may be that in the course of singing your worship after the message that God speaks to you through the song; even then, you can move to the side, lift your hands, and respond to what God is speaking to you.

It may be that while you are taking communion you are overcome by God’s presence in a way that moves you to respond; again, you may move freely to the side, lift your hands, and respond to God’s movement in your heart.

**About sharing prayer requests:** When responding off to the side, you do not (and perhaps even should not) share with the prayer team what specifically you are hearing from God or what exactly you are responding to from him. We trust God and his work, and ultimately want to respect your privacy. Also, we don’t want to cheapen a moment either! Sometimes trying to explain what is happening inside of us while God is moving is really difficult, so the expectation is that you **don’t have to tell**, and we **won’t ask**. But, if you are led to share and choose to share, we are honored, all ears, and will bless you in that.

If you find that you are desiring greater interaction with our prayer team during the response time, perhaps wanting to share or confess something or have someone to spend time praying with you

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<sup>22</sup> Deut. 34v9; Mk. 10v16; Lk. 4v40; Acts 6v6; 8v17; 13v2-3; 28v8; Heb. 6v1-2; Rev1v17ff

or for you in greater detail, there is an elder prayer time after the gathering in the Prayer Room that we've created specifically for that purpose.

### **In Conclusion**

Our desire as a church is to be a people who are constantly seeking to hear from our Heavenly Father **and** desirous to do what he says. We likewise want to be a people who take our roles as God's family of priests seriously in that we **bles**s those who are in God's presence and encourage them to move forth in faith and action. Such responses are the heart of our gathering; they are the reason we have been saved and given new life in Jesus – so that we can come into God's presence with open hearts and hands, to humbly listen to him and respond to his voice!