

How to Run a Prayer Room

Pray to God, but row for the shore!
-Russian Proverb

This section of the book aims to walk you, practically, through the planning stages of 24-7, into your prayer room and out the other side! Right now someone somewhere is praying 24-7, and by following the suggestions in this section, your group can become a vital link in this international chain for just a few days or many months.

Let the following words be an encouragement as you begin allowing God to give shape to your 24-7 vision: “Our 24-7 week exceeded all expectations. More than 200 people used the prayer room, and more than 20 churches got involved. 24-7 has been one of the most productive (yes, prayer is productive!) weeks I have ever known. People were saved. The lukewarm were ignited. Unity made huge steps forward. Through 24-7, a radical vision was imparted way beyond anything our puny little talks could have accomplished. The week has also multiplied itself into three other locations” (Ian).

Planning Your Prayer Room

We left the prayer room at 4:35a.m., madly and passionately in love with Jesus.
-Sarah

It's important to build up to a season of prayer with careful preparation. There are a number of questions you may be asking at the planning stage:

1. Why do we need a prayer room?
2. How long should we continue?
3. When should we do 24-7?
4. Where should we locate our prayer room?
5. What should our prayer room look like?
6. What should we put in our prayer room?

1. Why Do We Need a Prayer Room?

We think it is really important to locate your prayer in a fixed location for loads of reasons:

- The Holy Spirit can fill a place as well as a person (Acts 2:2)
- The sense of God's presence after many hours of prayer makes prayer easier and the time pass much more quickly. Many people have reported that in the prayer room one hour feels like ten minutes, whereas at home ten minutes of prayer often feels more like an hour!
- Our culture is looking for holy places-locations of sanctuary and spirituality that rarely equate in the postmodern imagination with a two-hour singing session in a purpose-built venue on a fixed day of the week. “There is, in fact,” says Jenny Robertson, “a tremendous hunger now in the West to rediscover holy places. Places where tragic accidents happen are quickly turned into shrines, with flowers, candles, toys, photographs of the child struck down in a car accident, of the victim of a violent crime.”
- *Creativity*: Creative and unusual environments can be highly conducive to prayer. The prayer room enables people to pray nonverbally by posting artwork, poetry, and graffiti on the wall. The environment can be designed artistically to stimulate and direct prayer.

- *Accountability*: The room provides accountability—a place where people have to turn up—and this ensures a constant flow, as one prayer shift hands to baton on the next. Visiting the room is like a mini-pilgrimage.
- *Community*: A shared location provides a strong sense of being part of a community carrying each other's burdens, as well as celebrating breakthroughs together. You are more than an invisible link in a telephone prayer chain.

Author Cheryl Sacks described her first experience of stepping into a 24-7 prayer room like this: “I found myself in surroundings filled with raw passion for God. He was there! This was so unlike any prayer room I had spent time in before. Plastered on the floor, walls, and ceiling were the uncensored hearts' cries of children, youth, and adults as they had come face to face with their creator. In this sacred space I encountered an open heaven. Suddenly I was consumed with desire to fall on my face and begin interceding for the emerging generation.”

Many people have been impacted in similar ways over the last six years. A prayer room does not make prayer automatically easy for everyone who steps through the door, but it's amazing how many people in similar rooms around the world share Cheryl's sense that they are waling on holy ground, entering “sacred space,” kneeling under an “open heaven.”

- *Outreach*: Evangelistically the prayer room is excellent. Non-Christians have often sat in such places to pray, and some have said that they can feel God's presence. As we noted earlier, people who don't want to be preached at may still like to be prayed for.

“A Prayer Room helps a church look beyond itself, motivating it to unleash prayer power for the unsaved, the community, the nation, the church's missionaries, and the world” (J. Vander Griend).

A student named Claire describes an encounter at a night club that illustrates the way in which prayer rooms can sometimes be attractive places for people who wouldn't normally go to church. Claire and her friend were dancing in a venue that happened to be situated right next to a 24-7 prayer room. As the evening progressed, Claire gathered the courage to tell her friend that even though it was late on a Friday night, there would be people prayer right next door. “When she heard about the prayer room, my friend, who isn't a Christian, said, 'My head's messed up right now, and I think I need to do some praying.' I didn't realize she meant 'right now' literally until she left the club, went to the prayer room in her high-heels and spent two-and-a-half hours talking quietly to God!”

2. How Long Should We Continue?

Some groups prefer to approach 24-7 cautiously with a twenty-four-hour vigil or a weekend of prayer, but most can quite easily manage a week or more right from the start. In deciding how long to go, consider the following:

The Size of the Group

As a rough guideline, you only need 30 people to commit to pray for an hour a day to fill a week with nonstop prayer. This assumes that a few will pray in pairs, while the majority prefer the room to themselves.

The Strength of the Community

In our experience, the biggest factor in making 24-7 work for a sustained period is *not* the size of the group but the strength of the community. Some really big churches have struggled to do a single week of 24-7—probably because their people aren't accustomed to attending anything other than Sunday services. Meanwhile a close-knit group of just 20 students found it so easy to pray for a week that they

kept going for a month.

The Maturity of the Group

A Taiwanese believer announced plans to get his cell group to do 24-7 for an entire month. Knowing that some churches 10 times bigger than this Taiwanese cell have struggled to cover a month of 24-7 prayer, I expressed concern that perhaps this dear brother was being a little overambitious. “Maybe,” I said, “it would be more realistic to aim for a week initially.” However, in suggesting this I had totally failed to take into account the maturity of the Taiwanese cell group: most of its members had been beaten severely by their parents just for being baptized. Some had needed hospital treatment as a result. Having counted the cost of commitment in this way, an hour or two of prayer each day for a month was not going to be a big deal for them.

The international aspect of 24-7 often proves humbling for those of us in the West. We have discovered that if you're a Brazilian believer, the funniest part of this book will probably be the section encouraging people to consider fasting from chocolate for a week. These people, many of whom have fasted from all food for a whole month, tend to make fun of our low pain thresholds!

Sometimes, however, people struggle to motivate a church to do 24-7—not because the group is lukewarm but rather because the person with the vision for it is failing to communicate and plan effectively.

The Pace of Prayer

24-7 prayer is meant to be a challenge, so don't be too cautious when you decide how long to pray. If you're too cautious, only committing to, say, a week when you could easily go for a month, the room will often be over-subscribed or there will always be several people in the prayer room at any given moment, which isn't ideal because most people prefer to pray alone.

We've also noticed that a certain momentum often builds as prayer weeks progress. Groups that aim too low at the planning stage miss this exciting discovery of mounting momentum and even breakthrough by stopping too soon.

If in doubt, however, it's better to go for a week and end up doing two rather than announce plans to pray for a month and then quit after a week! And if your week doesn't work out, don't panic. Just stop. You've probably still prayed more than ever before, and we're not trying to break any records.

3. When Should We Do 24-7?

Choose the week carefully, considering the following factors:

- Are your key people going to be in town?
- Could your prayer room build up to an evangelistic focus or form part of a missions push?
- Where does the prayer season fit into the bigger picture of your church life? You might want to pray for one week fairly soon and then for a longer period later in the year.
- Can you build regular seasons of 24-7 into your ongoing community life?

4. Where Should We Locate Our Prayer Room?

We love the fact that prayer rooms are found in so many surprising locations. It's great to be getting prayer out into the heart of communities. A church high in the Rockies deliberately situated its prayer room in a vacant shop adjacent to the rowdiest bar in town. “We wanted to be where the people are,” explained the pastor simply. When selecting a location for your prayer room you may like to consider the following:

- *Accessibility of venue.* Choose a place that doesn't require complex directions to reach, bearing in mind those who will be traveling in at night.
- *Visibility of venue.* Do you want to be seen by people who don't know Jesus?
- *Size of venue.* Ideally the room should be big enough for people to pace in and big enough to take groups without being so cavernous that there's little scope for atmosphere and intimacy. A medium-size room divided into themed areas works well. The ideal, however, is to have the flexibility of a larger room next to one or more smaller ones.
- *Security of venue.* How safe is the building? Think especially about late at night. Try to have a telephone available for emergencies (but switch the ringer off!).
- *Facilities of venue.* Obviously you need restrooms and ideally a small kitchen for making drinks, washing paint brushes, and so forth.
- *Noise/disturbance potential of venue.* With people coming and going all the time and music being played at all hours, look for a venue that is “neighbor friendly.” If it has to be in a private house, can you use a detached one or a basement?

5. What Should Our Prayer Room Look Like?

There are no rules for how a prayer room should look - only principles that help create an environment conducive to prayer. Our world is going crazy right now with interior design programs on television and New Age feng shui experts making a living from moving things around in houses of people with too much money. It's high time we used our imaginations to create spaces that glorify God and help people meet him.

If this isn't your forte, commission some artsy types to design the room to have an impact when people step inside. (For more ideas on creativity see part 3.) You will need a small budget for art supplies, drinks, and so forth. If you mobilize a team of people to design the room, start off by sharing with them any ideas you have about themes you want the room to explore. For example if the theme were to be “holiness,” consider creating a large altar and having an area by the door where people can take off their shoes as a symbolic response to holy ground.

Make use of the Four Walls

Use each wall of your prayer room to direct people's prayers in a new direction. For example you could have the following:

- A “welcome” wall near the door, providing a visual introduction to the prayer room, its themes and aims. On this wall you should also have all the practical stuff like the all-important sign-up sheet (where people write their names to reserve one-hour shifts-see later). You should also post a clear sign saying who's “on call” for that particular twenty-four-hour period (see Step 2).
- A “wailing” wall, where people can post personal prayer requests - a bit like the way the Jews do to this day, wedging their heart-cries on scraps of paper between the great bricks of the old temple in Jerusalem. You could also encourage everyone to post spider graphs on this wall listing all their non-Christian friends, family, and work or school colleagues. This wall often becomes one of the most moving parts of any prayer room, depicting visually the deepest prayers of the community, laid out before God.
- A “worship” wall full of verses, images, scents, and colors - anything to provoke wonder and praise. Prayer is not just a matter of asking God for things. It's about waiting on him, list in “wonder, love, and praise.”
- A “world” wall with an outward focus, perhaps featuring a world map, newspaper

clippings, the details of specific nation, missionaries known to you, community issues in your local schools and among the poor. Some groups have even collaborated with their local police and social services for prayer requests.

Make Use of the Center of the Room

The space between those four walls should not be left bare! Think creativity about what to put in the room itself. You could dream up different sections with distinct “prayer stations” that lead people in ten-minute steps on a one-hour journey around the room. Prayer stations make it easy for anyone to fill 60 minutes with prayer. Some groups drape tents inside their prayer rooms, creating lovely little spaces where people can hide away with a Bible by themselves. Others divide up the space with sheets.

Create Ambient Lighting

Since the first stained glass window was installed, people have understood the possibilities of ethereal color and lighting to enhanced sacred space. In your prayer room the lighting should be warm and subdued. If you use candles, please make very sure that they are safe - nowhere near anything flammable - and that there is a fire extinguisher on hand. Lave lamps are great.

6. What Should We Put in Our Prayer Room?

Stock the prayer room with anything that will stimulate the five senses, helping people - especially children - to pray with all of their being. Often we close our eyes to pray, shutting out God's extraordinary sensory world. Perhaps he wants to teach us to pray with our eyes open. Here, using the five senses as a menu, are just a few suggestions of things you could put in your prayer room, but please don't be intimidated by this list. You don't have to do all of them!

Sound

- Offer a CD player and a broad choice of CDs (don't forget to provide music for the kids too). 24-7 produces a range of prayer CDs in different styles specifically for prayer rooms.
- Stock musical instruments. You may want to provide bongo drums, a rain stick, or a guitar for people to use.
- You or another leader could record a thirty-second audio (or video) introduction, welcoming people to the prayer room, explaining why you are praying in this way and helping people to focus.

Sight

- Arrange in a table books with beautiful covers or with interior photos of nature or perhaps other cultures.
- Leave out a few Bibles (obvious, but easy to forget!), perhaps in different versions.
- A book of prayers can help people say things in different ways than they normally would.
- A “share” book (such as an empty exercise book) offers people an opportunity to write down their thoughts, answered prayers, and stories. (Put this somewhere very obvious.)
- *Operation World*, a prayer guide to every nation on earth by Jason Mandryk, helps people think globally beyond their own worlds.
- You could make a one-hour video guide leading people through their prayer shift in real-time, with regular pointers and Bible verses interspersed by helpful music. This might particularly focus in on local issues and world news items.
- Alternatively, provide helpful DVDs such as the *Transformations Series*.
- Slide projections are great - perhaps of stunning scenes from creation (no family holiday snaps!).

- Is there someone who could make a video of your area or even loop an old bit of film to project on the wall?
- A world map or globe also helps people think beyond their own concerns.
- Posters can amplify your theme. If your church has received any significant words from God or Bible passages you could make them into a poster as well.
- It's worth printing out some relevant parts of the 24-7 website, such as topical prayer pointers, meditations, and pages from Operation World (www.24-7prayer.com/ow).
- A local newspaper reminds people to pray for community needs.
- Post prayer letters from people or projects in the church.
- Post a selection of 60-minute prayer guides in the room. These should be focused around certain issues and take people on a spiritual journey, broken down into five-minute chunks.

Touch

- Provide lots of white paper (large sheets) and pens, paints, brushes, and other art supplies.
- Beanbags and comfy chairs give people seating options.
- Symbolic objects or pictures can direct people's prayers.
- A paper shredder can shred sins written down on paper at the foot of a cross!
- A "sin bin" gives people the opportunity to wad up their written-out sins and dispose of them for good!
- A Labyrinth/Prayer Journey kit

Taste

- Provide drinks - especially tea and coffee (but don't forget the kids!).
- Salt, bread, cool water-the Bible is full of flavors laden with significance.

Scent

- Air freshener keeps the room from getting musty.
- Incense sticks remind people that their prayers are "fragrant offerings" rising to heaven.
- Fresh coffee always lifts spirits!

Checklist for the Planning Stage

- Read this chapter of *The 24-7 Prayer Manual*.
- Decide on a date to begin and the duration of your prayer room.
- Book a venue.
- Commission a décor team.
- Begin to inform local churches.