



## Can Prayer Exist in Business?

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This is the question, and title, at the heart of the inaugural 2017 BELIEVES session held on Jan. 10<sup>th</sup> featuring Veronica Squires, Chief Development Officer at Good Samaritan Health Center; Chris Patton, owner of Mike Patton Automotive; and John Diamond, operator of two Chick-fil-A restaurants in Atlanta.



Before answering the question – “Can prayer exist in business?” – each leader first shared a bit about what prayer is for them.

“Prayer is just an on-going conversation with the Lord,” said Squires, the Chief Development Officer at Good Samaritan Health Center, which is a “one-stop shop” for low income families with a patient-centered healthcare model.

Chris Patton, who is a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation leader from his family in the automobile business, concurred with Squires that prayer is an on-going conversation with God.

“15 years ago, I began to see the business as a talent that has been placed in my hands for eternal return. This car dealership is a ministry,” Patton said. “Then 5 ½ years ago I began writing a blog about all this, starting more as a hobby but then as I wrote it began striking a nerve.”

Patton said he has 5-6 prayer journals that he’s gotten about 15-20 pages deep into, but then stopped.

“What I find amidst all of this is all day I am asking God for help, and seeking wisdom. In fact, my people at the dealership may not even know this, but recently I bought a big fluffy pillow from Big Lots that I have in the restroom in my office. I use it to go into a quiet place at different points in the day, kneel down and pray.”

John Diamond, who has worked at Chick-fil-A since 1987, also said prayer is communication with God.

“But if God’s omnipresent then it’s direct communication with God.”

With a foundation established around how each leader viewed prayer, they then began to answer the question – “Can prayer exist in business?”

“It’s rather easy for me because there’s a platform that the Cathy’s established at Chick-fil-A,” Diamond said. “Chick-fil-A’s purpose is to ‘glorify God, by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us; and to have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A.’”

Patton’s circumstances were different.

“In the car business, prayer is not commonly found,” he said. “Fifteen years ago, I got into leadership and started a Monday morning devotional. As I grew spiritually over time, I started pushing this further. What it’s become is the sharing of the Gospel through stories. It started very subtle. I didn’t have the platform the Cathy’s had, but I desired it.”

Patton went on to tell the audience that he has a chaplain who comes in two times each week and makes contact with every one of his 110 employees every week. He also said that every meeting is opened in prayer, either by him or others.

It doesn’t happen overnight,” he stated. “Sadly, if it’s not reinforced, I feel it will disappear in six months.”

He also added, “If we’ve ever ‘arrived’ and think we’ve got this figured out, it’s when we’re about to get ‘whooped.’”

Squires told everyone that at Good Samaritan Health Center, Dr. Bill and Lynne Warren, the founders, started the Center with a prayer room, but it was more for patients initially, and daily devotions have been in place at Good Samaritan since the beginning. Most recently, for over a year the staff has also been doing monthly prayer updates.

“Since prayer is a long game, it’s easy to forget,” she said. “I haven’t always worked in environments that are Christian, so there have been barriers. What I have learned, however, is to take the step to always offer prayer, because most people will receive it.”



CTK Parishioner Maureen Becker who works at AT&T, perhaps one of the most diverse organizations around, was intrigued to ask how each of the leaders embraces other faiths in their workplaces.

“Whether at CFA or as Boy Scout leader, praying to God is often OK,” Diamond said.

Patton gave a specific example to illustrate.

“One example is with a gentleman we hired from Verizon. When he came on board, we told him ‘This is what we believe, but you don’t have to. Here’s what you’ll see and hear. It won’t impact your advancement,’” stated Patton.

Within 2 years, the gentleman moved up in leadership.

“Ultimately, what we had and have is a culture that loves people.”

Patton indicated that he has not yet had someone from another faith ask if they could lead a prayer meeting in his business.

If this did happen he said he would pray like Nehemiah.

“I’ve thought about this a lot, and don’t know what I’d do.”

Squires, who was a religion major in college, emphasized that for her she would take the time to understand what others believe.

“It’s a relationship, so it helps to have thoughtful dialogue,” she said. “I have a 3-year-old, so it’s interesting explaining God in that situation. Often it goes to gratefulness first to explain before prayer.”

Walter Kozik, another CTK parishioner, then told everyone he believes “faith is a process.”

“I agree,” Patton said. “Others need what we have, and if I can share something I want to be available to.”

Diamond jumped back in the dialogue to emphasize something he always does and feels is important – ask permission.

The conversation in the session then shifted to a different question – “What was, or is, the most common misconception about prayer being able to exist in business, or in your organization, that you’d want people to know about so they can avoid worrying about it unnecessarily?”

Diamond chimed in right away stating that the most common misconception is that prayer can’t exist, and that it’s got to be separated.

Patton said, “I was raised to not mix business, prayer, and SEC football. I understand that mindset, but I disagree at this point. People think legally you can’t pray but that’s wrong. We have significant rights. It very much can exist and should. We’ve seen in our country that prayer has stopped and it’s going to take greater than us to change.”

Doug Eidson, principal at Avison Young, followed up with Patton on his remarks commenting, “It doesn’t seem like you’ve had much pushback.”

Patton, who said that they put a New Testament in the glove compartment of every new car sold – referring to it as an “owner’s manuals for life” – responded that they did have one guy hired who left after his first meeting.

CTK Parishioner Maureen Becker then spoke up with a different question, asking Diamond what the conversation looks like at Chick-fil-A.

“It’s not a conversation actually,” he said. “We’re generations away from that. The Cathy’s have done a great job of laying a foundation.”

Though the question was about Chick-fil-A, Patton jumped in to respond as well.

“As an outsider, it’s a huge amount of effort that goes into what Chick-fil-A does. They’re so intentional and specific about their mission.”

The attendees at the session, we’re still curious about what the appropriate dialogue is in a workplace – some of them sharing their own thoughts on the topic.



Bryan Lewis, who formerly worked at US Bank, said he would just say a prayer before meals to establish the space for prayer and faith to be included.

CTK Parishioner Elaine Szeto stated that after the weekend, a great conversation starter is to say, "I went to Mass."

Getting at the core of all that was said, Patton commented, "If you have a heart and love other people, I think the intent comes across, as opposed to if you are trying to convert someone to a way of thinking. Central in all this is to live by love, and share by sprinkling with salt. Hopefully, if you've built enough relationship people will turn to you in crisis."

For Squires, she just tries to keep it real.

"It's about sharing when things aren't going great for me, and just being normal – not always 'Christian,'" she said. "I am a fellow normal person going through the mess of life with mud on my boots."

As he listened to what was being said, CTK Parishioner John Ribka said, "I think I hear what you're saying is that your life is a prayer."

Diamond rounded out the remarks on this topic drawing from his experience as a consultant who advises other Chick-fil-A operators as well.

"As a consultant it's asking the right question. What is most important to you? What do you believe? Hopefully that opens the doors."

Before closing out the very rich, and engaging session, each of the leaders had the opportunity to share what they're "go to prayer" was.

"I have had a tough decade, not just a tough year, so often I just pray 'Lord, have mercy,'" said Squires. "There are a lot of areas of brokenness that I can't fix, and I am a fixer so, again, I pray 'Lord, have mercy.'"

Squires also shared that she keeps a prayer journal. Though there are a lot of prayers that are unanswered, what she finds most important is that when she looks back at it all she feels she is being transformed in the image of God.

"Maybe it's an opportunity for me to grow up and handle things on my own. Or it might be communicating when the answer is "'no' or 'not yet,'" she said. "What's constant is I pray under the thought that God's a loving Father."

Diamond said his 'go-to prayer' is – "Lord, bless these hands to glorify you, and bless our actions."

The bigger broader brush stroke for Diamond, however, is more around thanksgiving and confession, as in the Lord's prayer in Matthew.

Patton summed it up with his prayer, acknowledging that like Squires, he is a fixer – but not good at it – and that most often in prayer, he won't speak at all.

"Give me wisdom. Speak to my heart – what do I need to do, not do. Direct me."