

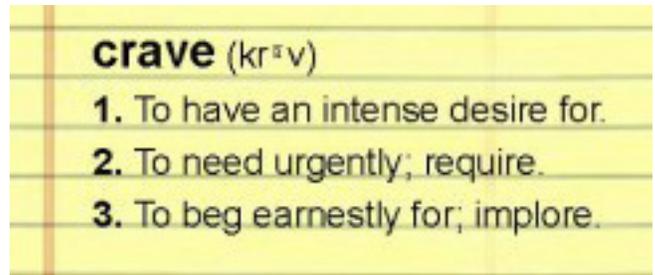
Listening Prayer

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BY PAM COWART

I love my church because we truly CRAVE together. CRAVE is a word that shows up on our church calendar weekly. It is a word that stops our church in its tracks three full weeks every year. We love to CRAVE, and we CRAVE one thing – to be in God’s presence and hear His voice – TOGETHER.

CRAVE is an experience of listening prayer. It is an experience in which we together marinate in the presence of God, resulting in tender hearts ready for action, open to change, and hungry for more. The dictionary definitions truly fit our CRAVE experiences. We “have an intense desire for” them; we “urgently need” them, “require” them; we “beg earnestly for” them; yes, we even “implore” our God to speak. John 10:27 says, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” We expect God to speak and surely He does. As a result, our lives are changed individually and corporately. We respond to what He says with action, change of heart, paradigm shifts, course correction – all resulting in greater unity in our body and advancement of the kingdom of God.



This CRAVE experience began as an experiment in corporate prayer in 2005, eight years into planting Christ Community Church. When the Holy Spirit of our Living God is the key ingredient in an experiment – life change happens. The best experiments have rarely come solely from us – the educated, degreed, salaried parts of our body. Our job has been to say, “Yes, you may experiment,” and encourage an environment of grace where there is freedom to fail – and succeed! CRAVE has been a wholly, holy successful experiment. Pieces of the puzzle have come from many different gifted people who made suggestions, brought their own flavor, and enriched the experience. CRAVE continues to flow and change with the Holy Spirit’s wind.

So what does CRAVE look like? It’s simple, as God’s best treasures usually are.

How We Prepare for CRAVE

Space: An open area is needed for people gathering to have a little “elbow room” around them, if possible.

Music: We always have some form of quiet music playing for the practical purpose of covering the little noises that might distract us. (For those of us in the Western world, silence itself can be distracting.) Music also creates an atmosphere that enhances meditation.

Scripture: Scripture is shared at the beginning, middle and end of the experience to guide the time of meditation and listening prayer.

How We CRAVE

We gather. We come together, whether few or many, at a scheduled time and place. We receive brief guidance from an appointed facilitator. The facilitator introduces the focus of the listening prayer time – the scripture for meditation and any questions for reflection. (We typically have this in a printed form to reiterate the focus and allow for note-taking.)

We scatter. After the facilitator presents the focus, he or she tells participants they are free to sit, stand, move, walk, kneel, lie on the floor, or go to another room – wherever and however they can best meditate, listen and respond with as little distraction as possible.

We meditate and listen. Using the focus scripture, we quiet our hearts and minds to individually meditate on God’s Word. We may be given a topic on which to focus our prayers, for example a need in the church or a sermon topic. But our CRAVE experiences are always anchored in the Word of God. The Lord leads us, as we listen, to deeper places in His Word, uncovering the treasure He has hidden for us to find.

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We gather again. The facilitator calls us back together at an appointed time to share what we have heard from the Lord. God honors our commitment to listen with His commitment to speak. Often the treasure one person shares in this gathering time is the exact word of challenge or encouragement needed by another person in the room. We have heard life-changing testimonies again and again as a result of this “treasure sharing”.

We hear God in as many ways as there are people. Typically, the treasure comes in the form of inspired insights into God’s Word with challenges and convictions to act on those insights. We also experience words of knowledge, prophecy in varied forms, poetry, artwork, even visions. The treasure is as varied as it is rich.

CRAVE Calls to Action

We never know all that goes on when people stop to listen to God. We hear some of it when we gather back together, but often people need some time to interpret what they have heard. In the still, small voice of God, we always experience a call to respond – a call to action. Sometimes it is a simple tweak in thinking, and sometimes it is a command to change our whole life!

The Cash family of Christ Community Church is a prime example. They have answered God’s call to take their three young children and live aboard Mercy Ships. Dianna Cash says; “Having CRAVE and Prayer Weeks as a regular part of my life put me in a place of 1) knowing what my Father’s voice sounds like so that when He was giving us directions about moving into Mercy Ships, we recognized His voice; and 2) providing very specific times to give God the time and space to speak – more concentrated and uninterrupted chunks of time.

“Those times were no doubt a crucial part of God leading us to Mercy Ships. My first question for a few weeks in CRAVE was, ‘God, are we really supposed to do Mercy Ships?’ then I would just sit and listen to His response ... and then ask more questions ... and listen. In that time He confirmed His plan again and again through His Word, through songs that were playing and through the ‘voice’ I’ve learned to be His.”

More Calls to Action Born out of the CRAVE Experience

- Accepting the call to full-time ministry and/or missions
- Adopting children
- Sacrificial giving to missions and ministries
- Leading to start ministries
- Marriages restored
- Bodies restored
- Stopping a building plan that had been in full swing
- Beginning to build again when God gave the green light

Through our CRAVE times, we have received countless nuggets of pure gold that have encouraged, challenged, convicted and called our body to keep following, keep listening and keep digging.

Variations on the Theme

Women’s CRAVE: Women gather once a week to CRAVE together while their children play, resulting in a place of rest, refreshment and rich community.

Staff CRAVE: The staff stops all activity once a week to CRAVE together and focus on the scripture related to Sunday’s message (the congregation is invited as well), resulting in deeper insight and heart preparation to receive the message on Sunday.

CRAVE Out Loud: This weekly event has the added benefit of a trained prayer team ready to pray for specific needs, resulting in the healing of bodies, minds, spirits and relationships.

Baby CRAVE: Any time a baby is dedicated, a small group gathers to CRAVE for that child and family, resulting in an anointed blessing of words from the Lord for the family.

Prayer Week: Three times a year we stop all other activity to CRAVE each night for a week, resulting in direction from the Head for the whole body.

Family CRAVE: Families have been inspired to CRAVE at home. As a result, children know how to listen, as well as speak, in prayer.

Pam Cowart and her husband, Dr. Keith Cowart, planted Christ Community Church in 1998. They have two teenage sons and love serving the Lord together. Pam is a 1991 graduate of the Masters of Divinity Program at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.