

How to Build a House of Prayer

By Dave Butts

Knowing that God's House is to be a House of Prayer is one thing. Knowing how to build that House is another. The Bible tells us that unless the Lord builds the house, those who labor, labor in vain. That is especially so when we are speaking of a local congregation that becomes so impacted and driven by prayer that it truly could be called a House of Prayer.

God's Word contains no blueprints for building a House of Prayer. Looking about at various congregations that are known for their strong focus on prayer also leaves us without a clear pattern. Each of these churches seems to have grown and developed in prayer according to their own corporate personalities and distinctions. Most of us who work in helping churches grow in prayer have studiously avoided any cookie-cutter methodology. The Divine Builder seems to be custom-building His Houses of Prayer.

Still, there seem to be principles that are true in all prayer-driven churches. Discovering and implementing those principles should help any congregation move toward the goal of seeing prayer become pervasive throughout the Body.

Pray about Prayer

The simplest and most basic of those principles is that we should pray about prayer. Several years ago I was with a group of prayer leaders who met with the staff of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church, certainly a fine example of a House of Prayer. In the midst of the conversation, the question arose of how the congregation had begun and continued this journey of prayer. The answer was swift: "We asked God to pour out a spirit of prayer." Though we tried to talk about methodologies, the staff of Brooklyn Tab were adamant in their answer: "We must pray about prayer." If we truly believe that the Lord is the Builder of his House of Prayer, then it makes sense that we come to him first.

The formation of a prayer team to simply pray about the church becoming a House of Prayer may well be the most important step in transforming a local Body. In Zechariah 12:10 we read of a spirit of prayer being poured out upon a whole city: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication." Use that passage to begin to pray for that spirit of prayer to fall upon your congregation.

Pastors must lead the way

It is difficult, if not impossible to find a passionate, praying church without also finding a congregation that has come to understand the

role of the pastor as the key person in becoming a House of Prayer. Pastors cannot lead people where they themselves have not gone or are at least in the process of moving in that direction. This is especially so in prayer. The praying pastor is a pre-requisite for a church becoming a House of Prayer.

In a very real sense, God will not allow it any other way. If a pastor is not a person of prayer, and is not desirous of the congregation growing in prayer, then a movement of prayer within the church actually begins to look and feel like rebellion. God isn't in the business of blessing rebellion against legitimate leaders, even if they are leaders who don't understand the importance and centrality of prayer for a healthy church. This is why it is so important for prayer leaders to consistently pray for their pastors.

It also speaks to the role of the seminary and Bible College in training church leaders regarding the importance of leading the church in prayer. Those of us who attended Bible College or Seminary are grateful for the tools we received for ministry. One tool that was consistently neglected by the vast part of our educational institutions was that of prayer ministry. It was assumed that pastors would pray, and most of us do. But the role of prayer in church growth, shepherding, and spiritual transformation was absent from our instruction. The Church today is paying a price for that neglect as we focus more on human methodologies and less on the power of God released through prayer.

Leaders must be engaged

It is not only pastors who must lead out in prayer. There must be an ownership of the concept of becoming a House of Prayer by the total leadership of the church. To become a praying church will require structural changes that can only be achieved as a local leadership moves together under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

A very practical way to build this concept into leaders is to slowly but clearly bring more and more prayer into the leadership and business meetings of the church. This will take patience as well as creativity as prayer is made an integral part of how business is done in the Lord's church.

One of the most important steps for leadership is to develop the biblical foundation upon which a House of Prayer must be built. Rather than viewing this as the latest "church fad," it is vital that leaders understand the biblical imperatives of a praying church. Perhaps the best study would be to examine the book of Acts and see how pervasive prayer was in the life of the early Church. A desire to move in apostolic direction should lead us to the apostolic secret of much prayer.

A functioning prayer ministry team

Most praying churches have developed a team of people whose responsibility is to call the church to prayer and keep prayer in the forefront of the church's activities and consciousness. The particular job description of a prayer ministry team will vary from church to church, but will often include:

- planning prayer meetings
- overseeing prayer education and training events
- developing intercessory prayer teams for church leaders
- assisting other church ministries with their prayer focus
- connecting the church to larger prayer events outside the scope of the local church
- organizing Sunday morning prayer teams to cover worship services in prayer

One of the most critical decisions for a church is the formation of a prayer ministry team. A common mistake is to fill that team with those whose major passion and ministry is that of intercession. These dear people are basically being asked to operate outside of their gifting and calling. The prayer ministry team is essentially an organizing, serving and administrative group. Look for those who believe in the power of prayer and have gifts of organization and serving.

This team needs to work closely with the administrative leadership of the church. They should see themselves as the team that carries out the desires of church leadership to make the church a House of Prayer. Rather than an "outsiders" group that is trying to infiltrate the congregation with prayer, it needs to be seen as the ultimate "insiders" group that has received its commission from the church's leadership to bring prayer into every aspect of church life.

Prayer meetings that "pop";

One of the reasons that people don't go to prayer meetings is that they've already gone to one . . . and don't want to go back. Most prayer meetings are poorly attended, poorly planned, and lacking in enthusiasm and effectiveness. This should never be the case. Prayer meetings ought to be the highpoint in the life of believers; a time to be ushered into the throne room of God to worship Him and present our requests before Him.

There are several keys to a good prayer meeting that "pops" with excitement. One very basic shift is to move from a "need" based prayer meeting to a worship-based meeting. A traditional need-based meeting begins with someone asking the dreaded

Question, "Does anyone have any prayer needs?" That typically leads to a long period of discussing needs of people rather than praying.

Daniel Henderson, in his excellent book, *Fresh Encounters*, teaches about moving from need-based to worship-based. Prayers that emerge out of times of worship are typically much more God-centered than man-centered. These times of prayer stay fresh and dynamic because of their focus on God.

Another powerful prayer meeting style can be developed around themes. For instance, a church could announce that on a certain night, they would meet to pray about the missions program of the church. The prayer ministry team meets in advance with the missions team and they plan an evening that engages the sense and pulls people into times of serious prayer for missionaries. Maps on the wall, pictures of missionaries, scriptures that focus on the Great Commission, appropriate lighting, music, and décor can give attendees a powerful prayer experience.

Both the worship-based prayer meeting and thematic prayer meeting are based on one assumption . . . someone is planning the prayer meeting. Somehow we have allowed prayer meetings to degenerate into an unplanned, disorganized event in which not a lot gets accomplished for the kingdom. When I am asked to lead a prayer meeting, I feel a solemn responsibility to prepare myself spiritually and to plan carefully as I lead people into the presence of God. Good planning may be the most spiritual thing you can do as you lead a prayer meeting.

A pervasive prayer strategy

Becoming a House of Prayer is far more than adding a prayer meeting to an already hectic church calendar. It is a church in which prayer has become pervasive in all aspects of church life. Leaders and members of the congregation cannot imagine prayer not being a part of everything they do.

This will not happen automatically. It must be an intentional decision made first by leaders and then carried out systematically in the life of the church. There can be a basic church-wide accountability system in which, for every proposal made or program initiated, the question is asked, "Where is prayer in this?"

One way to organize this is to make sure that there is a prayer leader on every ministry team in the church. This is the person who, in a sense, advocates for prayer within that area of the congregation. For example, if a church has a worship team that oversees what takes place in worship services, there would be a prayer leader in that team who is monitoring the quality and quantity of prayer during the worship services. That person would have the freedom to work with the rest of the worship team to build prayer into the services.

This same system of organization could be used for the Christian Education, Youth, Evangelism, and other ministry teams within a local congregation. In this way, prayer is not dependant upon one group of people, but is diffused throughout the church. The prayer ministry team in such a church will become the resource group for other teams as they build prayer into their respective areas.

Summary

The local congregation that begins to move toward becoming a House of Prayer is changing more than methods and techniques. It is honoring the Lord by turning to him first and by depending upon his power and might released through prayer. There is a spiritual dynamic that is unleashed within the body that cannot happen in any other way than through God's

people bringing everything to the Lord in prayer.

Discussion Questions

Have you ever attended or visited a church that you would consider a House of Prayer? What was it about the church that caught your attention? What was the most exciting prayer meeting you've participated in? What made it exciting? How would you define a House of Prayer? Write out a succinct definition that could give guidance to a church seeking to move in this direction.

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Note: This article is a chapter in *Giving Ourselves to Prayer: An Acts 6:4 Primer for Ministry*. For information on this resource, [click here](#) .