

Restoring a Vision for the Small Prayer Meeting

By Joseph Winger

Glancing around the prayer group, my heart sank. Even though everyone was excited and ready to pray for our church, we still numbered only five. While I reflected over the many large prayer events I had attended, feelings of failure flooded my thoughts. All I knew to do was to smile on the outside and silently pray, "Father, I don't care how many show up. You are here and I am here to do Your will. Your Word teaches that You are 'not restrained to save by many or by few' (1 Samuel 14:6 NASB). Within moments a renewed gift of hope and faith entered my heart.

Although our numbers were few, here is how the meeting ended that night. We experienced an incredible sense of unity and the manifest presence of God was overwhelming. We all left with the confidence that significant answers to prayer would come through our little gathering. Too often we judge success in terms of numbers. But the strength of God's kingdom has never been determined or affected by the size of a human crowd. The Bible is clear—God's power is best demonstrated through human weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

In fact, our Heavenly Father seems to delight in bringing His people to the end of their resources in order to show just how awesome His power is. Remember the story of Gideon? The Lord told Gideon that his army had too many men. God knew Israel would boast of the victory because of their vast number of soldiers (Judges 7:2). So the Lord downsized the army from 32,000 to 300. The result was a miraculous display of God's strength.

When it comes to the size of a prayer meeting, we must never become discouraged with small numbers. On the other hand, we shouldn't take pride in having a small group either. We must guard against an attitude that says, "We are few because we are the elite special force of prayer warriors." Likewise, hiding behind an "us four and no more" mentality may be a rationalization for an uncreative, anemic prayer ministry—an excuse for not discipling others in prayer. I believe God is well pleased when we, as Local Church Prayer Leaders, are careful not to despise our "small beginnings." Yet, we must always seek the Lord for His ways to expand prayer throughout the Church. One CPLN member coined the motto for her church, "Every member is to be a praying member." She intends to settle for nothing less than seeing her church become truly prayer-based!

Regardless of the percentage of church members who become actively involved in the church's prayer ministry, the basic prayer unit—“two of you” will never change. Jesus established the basic prayer unit when He said, “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:19-20 NIV).

Regarding these verses, William Barclay observed that Christ's promise is for two spheres:

The church. Jesus is just as present in the little congregation as He is in a large gathering. He is as much present in the small prayer meeting as he is in the crowded arena. “Jesus Christ is not the slave of numbers,” Barclay states. “He is there wherever faithful hearts meet, however few they may be, for He gives all of Himself to each individual person.”

The home. One of the first interpretations of this verse was that the two or three persons referred to mother, father, and child. There is nothing more powerful than a husband and wife, or a family, agreeing in prayer! Barclay concludes, “There are those who never give of their best except on the so-called great occasions; but for Jesus Christ every occasion where even two or three are gathered in His name is a great occasion” (The Daily Study Bible, Vol. 2, p. 211). In the Old Testament, the destiny of a nation of several million people was determined by the prayers of three men: Moses, Hur, and Aaron. While Moses held up his hands in prayer, Israel would begin to win the battle against the Amalekites; when Moses became weary and let his arms fall, Israel would begin to lose. Fortunately, Aaron and Hur supported Moses in his weariness and held his arms up for him (Exodus 17:8-16). Exodus 17 from the Old Testament and Matthew 18 from the New Testament both illustrate the power of a small prayer gathering. So today, we must not become disheartened when only a few people show up for prayer time. In Deuteronomy 32:30, we read that one man could chase a thousand and two could chase 10,000 under the power of God. Surely the same is true of Christ's Church. That's unbelievable power in a small package!

Joseph Winger is a longtime pastor and prayer leader. He was the director of the CPLN before Jonathan Graf.

For help on leading a prayer meeting, we recommend the books: *Fresh Encounters* by Daniel Henderson and *And the Place Was Shaken*, by John Franklin.