

Hearers Only, or Doers, Too?

A few months ago I spoke in a church on a Sunday morning, and my message, "Get into the Battle," seemed extremely well received. I talked about the role of prayer in pushing back the forces of darkness and in growing the Kingdom of Christ.

I had close to a dozen positive comments, including one older gentleman who, through tears, said, "We really needed this."

In my closing thoughts I offered a few practical action steps to get into the battle. I knew this church had a corporate prayer meeting on Wednesday nights—at least, it was supposed to be a corporate prayer meeting. But I also knew that usually only two to five people out of a congregation of 400 or so came out to pray. My last action step point was to challenge them to come out to that prayer meeting. I tried not to make them feel guilty, acknowledging that we are all busy. But I asked if they could commit to attend the prayer gathering one Wednesday night a month.

"In a church this size," I said, "if you hit different weeks when each of you came, that would mean 40–50 people would be here every week storming the gates of heaven for God's Kingdom purposes in this church!"

Alas, I have heard that thus far the size of the group has not increased. Now to be fair, I suspect it has a small group ministry where people regularly pray with each other—although it's likely they pray for each other's needs rather than a broader Kingdom expansion agenda normally covered in a corporate prayer meeting. Still, I had hoped for a few more to come out to the prayer gathering each week.

I believe one of the reasons people say they think prayer is important but don't really do it—in church after church—is related to what my colleague Dave Butts thinks is a big sin in the modern church. In reference to James 1:22, he says we may

think that when we hear something preached from God's Word and agree with it, that's enough. We think we are automatically "doers of the Word."

How does that relate to prayer and my message? In most churches, people talk about prayer and sincerely believe it's important. But their actions do not support that belief. They are hearers, but not doers.

How can we combat that in a church? I believe we can do it in these two ways:

First, we need to continue to put forward the need for true followers of Christ to be involved in praying with other believers. If you are a Kingdom believer, then you will want to see the Kingdom grow—and that involves praying together! Leaders need to challenge their people to participate in corporate prayer opportunities.

Second, we need to teach Western believers to value community over individualism. Americans are rugged individualists. This translates into, "I can pray alone at home." In virtually every other culture, believers typically pray together. The Church is designed to be a communal society, not a group of individuals who come together once a week.

Be encouraged pastor, prayer leader, and prayer warrior. Keep praying with others and encouraging others to join you. While I prefer bigger, I am reminded that Jesus says He honors as few as two who agree in prayer!

✘ —Jonathan Graf is the publisher of Prayer Connect magazine. He is also the author or compiler of 7 books including his newest one, Restored Power: Becoming a Praying Church One Tweak at a Time.