

It Absolutely Works

When I wrote this column on a Sunday in August, the church where I am an elder in charge of prayer and outreach baptized three people in the service. That might not be a big number for a lot of churches, but for our smaller church—Christ Community Church in Brazil, IN—it was huge!

It was our second baptism Sunday in less than three months. The previous baptism Sunday was the first one we had observed in more than two years, also with three people baptized. Easter 2022 was the last one before this summer.

Since the beginning of this year, we have grown by more than 40 percent, with new people coming almost every Sunday. Most of those guests have now become a part of our fellowship. We have rejoiced over 11 salvations, transformed lives, and some healings and other miracles. Worship is dynamic, people participate with energy, and we regularly sense the presence of God among us.

What changed to bring about this new vitality and growth? It is absurdly simple. We sought God. We asked for it to happen! And it began to happen, believe it or not, during a season with no senior pastor—until his arrival in mid-January.

God blessed us first with a deeper hunger for Him, for Jesus, and then for the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and church. Our midweek prayer meeting grew to more than a third of our adults coming, including all elders and spouses.

We changed the primary focus of our midweek prayer meeting, adding worship and eliminating much of the prayer for the “make my life better” kinds of needs. If someone does express a need for personal prayer, we have teams of people who will gather around them to pray *at the end* of our midweek gathering. And on Sunday mornings, we have prayer teams at the front who pray for those who come forward with a need. We also

have an active text prayer chain that is needs-oriented.

But we guard our corporate prayer time. It now only focuses on God's Kingdom agenda: His Spirit and power poured out among us and other churches in the community, transformation of our city and region, and the salvation of the lost.

I've worked with churches in the area of prayer for the past 28 years, and I see this one change work over and over again. If a church can shift the focus of its main corporate prayer expression away from life's "little answerables" and begin focusing on God's purposes and power to grow His Kingdom through the Church, Kingdom things start to happen! To use a phrase coined by Daniel Henderson, we need to focus prayer "vertically rather than horizontally"—on Jesus rather than on those in the room.

While it is not wrong to pray for people's needs, Satan loves it if that's all a church does. His domain is not threatened by someone's sore back improving. But when a church focuses its prayers on growing Christ's Kingdom, the enemy is pushed back and Kingdom things start to happen.

Try it! God will move—guaranteed!

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