

Let Them Pray

By Sandy Mayle

Behind me stretched the long wooden altar of our camp meeting tabernacle. Before me sat a cadre of seasoned prayer warriors, primed for the morning prayer session, anticipating my opening remarks and itching to break for the altar and get down to business with God.

Really, they hardly needed a prayer leader, just a Bible verse to encourage them, some timely prayer requests, and an altar to kneel at, and soon their voices would rise in a uniquely beautiful chorus—each praying, many aloud, and all at once.

When my friend Jeff, the pre-appointed prayer leader, took a new job and moved out of state, he insisted I take his place. I was a writer, I protested, not a leader . . . but I prayed about it and agreed.

We met almost daily, those saints and I, and by the time the camp ended I'd shared with them (by way of opening remarks) a powerful prayer essay, passed along some helpful notes from a prayer conference, read an impactful prayer by Watchman Nee, talked about each believer being a house of prayer, dubbed prayer warriors the "knees" of the church, and encouraged the practice of *Lectio Divina*.

But as the days passed, attendance dropped off. Even my own mother apologetically stayed back at our cottage. Was I throwing cold water on their initial eagerness to pray, instead of stoking it to even hotter flames? Where did I go wrong?

As I considered it later, I think these sincere, straightforward prayer warriors found some – or many – of my offerings unnecessary time-stealers at a relatively brief

morning prayer session.

They didn't want to talk about prayer; they wanted to pray. Like horses straining at the bit, they wanted to get to the altar. For they had desperations. Doubts and attacks of the enemy. Haunting fears. Family situations. Lost and rebellious loved ones. Severe health concerns. Relational disasters. Churches back home cooling and dying – even now on the brink.

God was eager to hear those prayers. And I stood in the way with my illustrations and *Lectio Divina* and images of themselves as knees. Oh, those were all wonderful—in the right time and place. But as pre-prayer remarks, they put *prayer* front and center, not God Himself. Prayer—its methods, its value, its various aspects. Instead of God – His anticipating ear, His passion to help, His heart for the lost.

I wasn't at a prayer workshop or a church leadership conference; I was at a prayer meeting. I should have recognized and honored their hunger—stoked it, even. Not by promoting prayer, but by promoting God. Because when His people are hungry for Him, searching for answers, desperate for His touch-prayer follows as reflex.

How much better had I:

- Touched on their desperation (“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” Ps. 62:8): *What exactly are you desperate for just now? Who has God pressed heavy on your heart?*
- Lifted up God (“I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?” Jer. 32:27): *Bring your need to God; He can do anything!*
- Proclaimed His promises (“Through [His own glory and goodness] he has given us his very great and precious promises” 2 Pt. 1:4): *Here's a promise God gave me for you today; take this to the altar and pray it to Him...*
- Invited them into His throne room (“Let us then approach

God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" Heb 4:14-16): *Come; empathy, mercy and grace for your need are waiting here.*

All they needed was a fresh glimpse of God. A plain but powerful scriptural truth. And a simple, unhyped invitation to meet Him at His throne. For when it's time for prayer, God is winsome enough, the plain Scriptures are powerful enough, and the reality of prayer is supernatural enough to all stand on their own, without our embellishments.

"Your God is listening closely . . . He cares deeply . . . He's waiting to respond as only He can . . ." Those simple truths bear a glorious weight of wonder. They're staggering, really. So much so that many times . . .

That's all we need to say.

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