

Prayer Affects the Heart

In that moment, we were praying over the new families that had recently started attending—and the new influx of children. In fact, the previous Sunday we had been blessed with the largest number of kids we've had in Sunday church for many years.

Chuck shared that he was in the foyer after the service, with kids running around everywhere. He was nearly knocked over.

Uh-oh, I thought, where is he going with this?

Then, through a choked-up voice and watery eyes, Chuck grinned and said, "It was wonderful!"

Prayer Changes Us

During the past year, while we searched for a new senior pastor, a regular topic of prayer in our midweek service was for young families to come to our church and for our children's ministry to grow.

In January, God brought us a dynamic, young (early 30s) pastor couple with five kids. Several families who previously came only occasionally are now regulars. And we have added several new families. Overall attendance in our small church is up 30 percent—and our children's ministry increase is close to 100 percent!

Prayer can and does change situations, but it also changes *us*!

Several years ago, I ministered in a church in central Florida that was loaded with "snowbird" retired folks. The weekend I was there, I learned of a problem. The church had hired a new youth pastor who was a magnet for kids. Close to 100 junior high and high school kids were now coming to the church—most without their parents. These unchurched kids had no understanding of what was appropriate in and around church.

Many of them rode their skateboards on the patio outside the church.

People started getting upset and wanted the youth pastor to do something about it. "Ban the skateboards," they pleaded.

But that might keep these kids from coming. What to do?

We helped the seniors understand that these kids did not know any better, and that they needed prayer. A plan was initiated to get each senior to pray for specific kids.

As they did, over time something happened. God changed their hearts for the kids. They started loving these kids and showing excitement that they were coming!

When we pray, the Holy Spirit engages our hearts with His purposes and changes our hearts to align with those purposes!

As I have been praying for growth and more families and kids, something has happened to my heart, too. A few days ago, my wife mentioned that Courtney, our kids' ministry co-director, asked if we would lead the first graders at VBS this summer.

"Do you want to do that?" my wife asked, thinking I would say, "No!"

"Sure," I said.

What happened to Jon? Prayer and the Holy Spirit—that's what! Bring on those urchins.

– Jonathan Graf is the publisher of *Prayer Connect* and the president of Church Prayer Leaders Network.