

The Promises of a Praying Church

By Dave Butts

A young single mom named Tammy started coming to our church at the end of the summer of 1996. She was very new to the “things of God,” but wanted to help out somewhere in the church. She became a helper in Sunday school, “herding children” while the teacher concentrated on teaching the Word. It was perfect for her and for the teacher. Tammy knew the children and could help with them, while at the same time she could also learn more of the Bible.

At a training seminar for teachers and helpers one Saturday morning, Tammy showed up with a patch on her eye, obviously in terrible pain. She explained that she had been decorating her home for Halloween on the previous Thursday evening, and in a moment of revelation, realized that the decorations were primarily focused on the occult—things God condemned in the Bible. She suddenly understood that God was not pleased with that, and so she determined to take the objects down quickly. One decoration was attached to a wooden shutter by a tack with a string—and she gave it a strong yank. The tack immediately dislodged and landed in her eye.

It takes no imagination to know that Tammy screamed in pain. The damage was done. All the peripheral vision from that eye was gone, and her forward sight, marred by a scratch across the cornea, was terribly impaired.

The doctor said she lost all of her side vision, and he couldn't be sure what could be recovered with her forward sight. Her vision was blurry and extremely sensitive to any kind of light.

It was a strange turn of events. This happened because Tammy believed she was obeying the Lord's command not to be involved with the occult.

An Agreeing Moment*Brent (an elder), his wife Barb, another elder named Ralph, and my wife and I listened to her story. We were all people of prayer, and more specifically, Brent, Ralph and Barb were lead-teachers of our prayer ministry. We realized that God's reputation was at stake in this matter. When someone in the group spoke up and said, "God wants to heal Tammy's eye," the five of us sensed an increase of the presence of God. His compassion began to well up inside of us.*

"Tammy," Barb said, "may we pray for God to heal you?"

"Oh, please!" Tammy replied.

Our numbers had increased by now with more people walking in for the seminar. So 14 of us gathered around our friend, placed our hands upon her, and began to beseech the Lord that this attack on Tammy's new faith would not have its full effect. We prayed for God to heal and restore her eye.

The manifest presence of the Lord was very tangible and palpable, while each of us in turn asked the Lord for mercy on this new believer.

"What's happening while we are praying, Tammy?" I asked.

"Fiery heat is flowing into my body and going into my eye!" she said. "The pain is subsiding!"

"Do you want us to keep praying?" someone asked.

"Oh, please!" she said.

And so we prayed for 20 minutes—until the pain completely vanished.

Suddenly the intense presence of the Lord lifted, and we knew we were done.

Tammy kept the patch on her eye, but all the pain and sensitivity to light disappeared. We had just experienced powerful agreement in prayer with each other.

Of course, as anyone would, Tammy went to the doctor to determine how to adapt to the damaged eye.

The doctor removed the patch. His jaw dropped.

“Doctor,” she said, “what’s wrong?”

“Wrong?” he said. “Why there’s nothing wrong.” In astonishment, he repeated, “There is absolutely nothing wrong!”

He checked her vision and found she had 20/20 vision straight ahead, with 100 percent peripheral vision on the sides.

“What did you do between Thursday and now?” he said.

“Well, on Saturday morning, 14 people asked the Lord Jesus to heal my eye,” she replied.

The doctor declared that he didn’t know about Jesus, but that he knew for sure there was no longer anything wrong with her eye.

We invited Tammy to testify to the rest of the church about what the Lord had done. We were all as astonished as the doctor. The Lord healed her eye through the prayer ministry of two or three who agreed that this must be done.

If two of you agree . . . it shall be done. So says the Lord.

–David Chotka, “If Two of You . . .” Prayer Connect, Issue 3

A church that prays is a place/people that attracts the

Presence of God. God has always wanted His people to be with Him and to communicate with Him. In the same way that He designed the Temple as a meeting place with Himself, so has He designed the Church. God shows up in special ways where His people have chosen to spend time with Him in prayer. God rejoices over a praying church!

The Father is pleased because as a praying people, His people are walking in obedience to His Word. The Son is delighted to be enthroned as Head of the Church in practical everyday ways, instead of simply by acknowledgement. The Spirit is free to do all that the Father directs Him because their people are continually before the Throne, asking for the power of the Spirit.

Because the Lord's people are busy in prayer, all of Heaven is busy with with divine activity. Things begin to change on this planet that would not have changed had the Church not prayed. Prayer really does move the hand of God. But in addition to all the wonderful things that are released because of the praying saints, we will also see a changed Church as it becomes known for prayer.

The Marks

A praying church:

- will passionately love God
- will demonstrate love for one another in practical ways
- will have an evangelistic heart
- will care for its leaders
- will be growing in the Word
- will demonstrate the power of God
- will be concerned for its community and nation
- will nurture stronger families

Oswald Chambers said, "We have to pray with our eyes on God, not on the difficulties." A praying Church keeps its eyes on God, not on other things. It is in spending time with the Lord

in prayer, especially as a congregation, that love for the Lord is deepened and enriched. It is easy to flippantly say, "I love God." It is quite another thing to demonstrate that love in close communication. Giving ourselves to the Lord in prayer is a practical manifestation of our love for Him.

You've noticed that rarely is the offer to pray for someone turned down. Even among non-believers, prayer is seen as an act of genuine love and care. When Scripture tells us to pray for one another, that becomes the practical way by which we regularly demonstrate love. If you know your church family is praying regularly for you, you know you are being loved. Augustine wrote, "Prayer is to intercede for the well-being of others before God."

John Calvin wrote, "Our prayer must not be self-centered. It must arise not only because we feel our own need as a burden we must lay upon God, but also because we are so bound up in love for our fellow men that we feel their need as acutely as our own. To make intercession for men is the most powerful and practical way in which we can express our love for them" (christian-prayer-quotes.christian-attorney.net).

When Christians are trained and motivated to pray for the lost, whether near them or far away, their hearts will be changed by the Lord. You cannot pray for those who do not know Jesus very long before everything within you becomes captured by the love of God for them. Training church members in evangelistic praying will transform your church culture. As my friend Alvin VanderGriend says, "Before we talk to men about God, we should talk to God about men."

When Christians are encouraged and trained to pray for their church leaders, criticism is replaced by intercession. Pastors and other leaders often cite constant criticism as one of the key factors in leaving a church or even the ministry. We are called by God to pray for those who are over us in the Lord. Prayer for leaders changes the atmosphere of a congregation.

As someone once said, "If the church wants a better pastor, it only needs to pray for the one it has."

One of my prayer leader friends, Terry Teykl, wrote a book on praying for pastors entitled, Preyed on or Prayed for. All too many pastors feel preyed upon. The simplest way to change this is to understand that God calls us to intercession, not accusation. In Revelation, Satan is called the accuser of the brethren. In Romans and Hebrews, Jesus is called our Intercessor. Who do we follow . . . the accuser or the Intercessor? Praying churches are praying for their leaders.

Praying Scripture

The most effective way to pray is to base your prayers on the Word of God. A praying church will be one where the Word is greatly honored. The Lord's people are spending more and more time in the Word, not just reading to obtain knowledge, but praying its principles back to God. Scriptural prayers lead to a more biblically literate congregation.

E.M Bounds once said, "The Word of God is the food by which prayer is nourished and made strong."

As the Word of God is prayed, the power of God will be demonstrated in fresh new ways. Most non-Christians (and sadly, Christians too) do not think of the Church in terms of power. We seem to be more about words than power. Paul said, in 1 Corinthians 2:4, that his message was not just a matter of words, but of power. Missionary pioneer J. Hudson Taylor felt the same way, "The prayer power has never been tried to its full capacity. If we want to see mighty wonders of divine power and grace wrought in the place of weakness, failure and disappointment, let us answer God's standing challenge, 'Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not!'" (awakeandgo.com).

Samuel Chadwick wrote, "There is no power like that of prevailing prayer, of Abraham pleading for Sodom, Jacob

wrestling in the stillness of the night, Moses standing in the breach, Hannah intoxicated with sorrow, David heartbroken with remorse and grief, Jesus in sweat of blood. Add to this list from the records of the church your personal observation and experience, and always there is the cost of passion unto blood. Such prayer prevails. It turns ordinary mortals into men of power. It brings power. It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God" (awakeandgo.com).

As a congregation grows to become more mature in praying, its prayers will increasingly move from praying for church-related issues, to more outwardly related ones. Because prayer connects us to the heart of God, we will find ourselves praying for our neighborhoods, communities, and even our nation. Gaining God's perspective will overcome our tendency to pull back and just be concerned about me and mine.

"All great soul-winners have been men of much and mighty prayer," said Salvation Army leader Samuel Logan Brengle. "And all great revivals have been preceded and carried out by persevering, prevailing knee-work in the closet."

Prayer on a congregational level will always affect the families in a church. Family prayer training will show members how husbands and wives and families can pray together. As families come before the Lord together, they will be strengthened not just in their faith, but in their relationships with one another. The praying family is a stronger family in every way. If families are praying together, it is an easy step for the church family to begin to pray together.

A House of Prayer is a church that has been and is continuing to be transformed by the work of the Spirit of God as its members spend time in the Presence of the Lord. As Leonard Ravenhill said, "The true church lives and moves and has its being in prayer."

In his typical prophetic style, R.A. Torrey challenges us, “We are too busy to pray, and so we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little; many services but few conversions; much machinery but few results.”

We can be different! God has clearly called us to be a House of Prayer for all nations. In spite of the pressures in the modern day Church, there is time for prayer that can change the world. Andrew Murray said it this way, “Time spent in prayer will yield more than that given to work. Prayer alone gives work its worth and its success. Prayer opens the way for God Himself to do His work in us and through us. Let our chief work as God’s messengers be intercession; in it we secure the presence and power of God to go with us” (Christian-prayer-quotes.christian-attorney.net).

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