

Whatever Happened to the Prayer Meeting?

by George Verwer

Samuel Chadwick, one of God's great men of past years, taught that Satan's greatest aim is to destroy our prayer lives. Satan is not afraid of prayerless study, prayerless work, or prayerless religion ... but he will tremble when people pray.

If Chadwick was correct (and hundreds of other great men of God have said similar things), then we have real problems. If there is any part of our church life that seems to be in trouble, it is the prayer meeting. In fact, in an increasing number of churches, for all practical purposes, there is no such meeting.

In ministering in thousands of churches in North America and around the world, I have never ceased to be amazed at the neglect of true, heart-felt, corporate prayer. There are some beautiful exceptions in some countries, but they are few by comparison.

Let us put the prayer meeting back into the life of our churches – the hour has come to pray! This will take: action, discipline and perseverance, combined with large amounts of love, patience and spiritual reality.

Many Christians have stopped going to dead, poorly-organized prayer meetings, while others continue only with a sense of duty or guilt. Should we not be drawn into the presence of the Living God with higher motivation than this? Why are we attracted only by special speakers and programs rather than the Lord Himself? What real authority does the Lord Jesus have in our churches today?

The lack and neglect of prayer meetings are, I believe, two of the great mistakes of our Bible-believing churches, and such deception by Satan represents a far greater enemy than liberalism or the cults. In fact, a clear study of 2 Corinthians 10:4-7 would show us that prayer is the principal means through which we are going to stand against the enemy in whatever way he might attack us.

We seem to be blind to the nature of spiritual warfare and feel that as long as we have a ... good number on Sunday morning, then we are okay. Could it be, as in Revelation 3:1, that we have a name that we are alive but are in fact dead? Could it be true, as one man said, that if the Holy Spirit left us there would be very few changes made? Everything would go on as usual?

Let us bring back the prayer meeting into its rightful place in the life

of the church, and let us put Christ back in His rightful place as Lord of our lives.

Here are some helpful ideas on leading prayer meetings:

- Spend time in personal prayer.
- Read God's Word, especially on the subject of prayer, and then feed on helpful books on the subject. There are [many] books available – use some of the powerful quotes from these in your prayer meetings.
- Mobilize as many as possible to present, at intervals during the prayer meeting, short, specific requests from the mission fields both at home and abroad. Avoid having more than 5 to 10 minutes of requests before turning to prayer. Further requests may be made at intervals throughout the meeting. In this way people can retain names and prayer topics more easily.
- Read out “hot” items from the newspapers (and internet) which will motivate the people to a sense of urgency. 1 Timothy 2:1 gives us clear teaching about the need for this.
- When possible, organize some kind of visual aid that will help the group focus on prayer needs.
- On occasions you may like to arrange visits from special speakers, but communicate that most of the time will be for prayer. If you feel the speaker must bring a longer message, extend the meeting – don't cut down on the time allotted for prayer. Keep in mind that talking to God is more important than listening to man.
- Emphasize different aspects of prayer, especially praise, thanksgiving, worship and intercession. Have someone at the piano, or with a guitar, who can help set the pace in leading praise and worship.
- After presenting some brief requests it is good to break into smaller groups. After 5 or 10 minutes introduce fresh requests. Of course, part of the time can be spent all praying together, with various members of the group leading in prayer. Variety is important.

- Urge people to pray. Help them feel relaxed in things like grammar and theological content. Encourage people to pray who don't often do so (in public) ... but don't embarrass anyone.
- Seek a balance between the Holy Spirit's spontaneous work and each person's helping to make the prayer meeting what it should be. Be patient and reject discouragement; people will not learn reality in prayer overnight.
- Urge people to be worldwide in their vision. Make use of maps. Encourage people to write to missionaries for whom they are praying and to give reports on specific answers to prayer.

Exhort and teach your members from the Word of God about prayer.

Point out some of the things they should avoid if they want to keep the prayer meetings alive:

- x Praying too long at one time.
- x Preaching at people in their prayers.
- x Praying for things pertaining only to their church.
- x Not changing anything from one week to the next.
- x Judging or looking down on people who lack ability in English or theology.
- x Not really believing or expecting any specific answers.

This material will not be new to many people who read it, but it is the cry of my heart that some readers will determine to act, regardless of the cost. The battle will be uphill all the way, for as Hallesby says in his great book on prayer, "Prayer is work." However, the results will be enormous and eternal.

George Verwer is a founding member of Operation Mobilization. This article was previously adapted and reprinted with permission from OM in Northern Lights magazine, Dec. '93.

<http://www.ncem.ca/component/content/article/9-news-main/254-whatever-happened-to-the-prayer-meetin>