

Where Are the Praying Men?

By Mark Price

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They came every Thursday night. They prayed face down, stretched out before the altar, sometimes for an hour or two. This small group of men called out to God for personal and corporate needs.

This was my first pastorate, and I was convinced of the importance of praying men. Of course, having women engaged in prayer is just as important. In fact, they are often the faithful intercessors in any church. But I was particularly burdened to mobilize the men.

So each week, five or six men gathered and prayed. I was not discouraged at the attendance because I remembered the story of Jeremiah Lanphier. In 1857, in response to his invitation to the first official New York City noonday prayer meeting, only six businessmen showed up. However, those few eventually grew into groups of tens of thousands meeting daily to pray.

In that first pastorate, my prayer was, "Do it again, Lord. Do it again!" Our Thursday night prayer meeting continued for two years with the same five or six men showing up and crying out to God.

After a ministry move to another church, I continued to press the need for praying men. I asked them to join me on Thursday nights to pray—and this just two came. Again, the story of Lanphier and the revival of 1857 helped deflect my potential discouragement.

We changed our prayer time to Sunday mornings before our service. Our participants then ranged from two to six men. But throughout this time I kept wondering, *Where are the praying men?* I have preached and taught numerous Bible studies on prayer. So where are the men who have caught the vision, passion, and burden for prayer?"

E.M. Bounds, in his classic work, *Prayer and Praying Men*, writes, "Old Testament history is filled with accounts of praying saints. The leaders of Israel in those early days were noted for their praying habits. Prayer is the one thing which stands out prominently in their lives."¹

Change in Perspective

The more I wondered, the more I fought discouragement. As I expressed this to the Lord, He showed me things I had forgotten. He reminded me to stay focused on what was happening in the church, instead of just looking at what I thought *wasn't* happening to my satisfaction.

So I began to take inventory of the prayer life of our church. The Lord reminded me of the small group of women who meet frequently on Saturday mornings to pray. The four men who pray on Wednesday mornings. The women who gather at the church to pray for the public schools in our city—and those who partner with each other to pray for marriages. Then there are the women's prayer team, the deacons, and the staff who are available for personal prayer after the service.

In my discouragement I had also discounted the importance of our church prayer coordinator who sends emails daily with a devotional thought that encourages members to pray. She also organizes prayer events such as the National Day of Prayer. The church maintains a prayer group database that sends prayer requests to the membership as requests come into the church office. And to top it off—the church has invested money to establish a prayer room readily accessible from the worship center.

Change in Heart

I realized that although I have not seen large numbers of men committed to prayer, an atmosphere of prayer is present in our church. We've even heard people from outside our church comment, "I hear you are a praying church. I have a request."

So instead of focusing on my seemingly failed expectations, I will commit to leading my church toward developing an even greater atmosphere of prayer in these ways:

- As pastor, I will continue to model and teach the importance and activity of prayer.
- We will always have a prayer coordinator to demonstrate that prayer is our priority.
- We will provide numerous opportunities to engage people in prayer.
- We will take time to give reports of answered prayer.

Yes, I will always remember that group of men praying face down, stretched out before the altar, and certainly, I want more men to join me in prayer today as well. But I am thankful for a church with a few men and a few women who are obedient to Jesus' desire for His Church to be a house of prayer. God responds when His people pray— and it isn't about the numbers.

1E.M. Bounds, *Prayer and Praying Men* in *The Complete Works of E.M. Bounds on Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 497.

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