

How Can Prayer Affect our Culture?

How is your prayer life? If you're like most Christians, there is room for improvement. I can't think of a more appropriate way to emphasize that than by relating a story I heard about an event in a small town some years ago that historically had been "dry." That is, no alcohol was allowed to be sold or consumed publicly in the town. But then a local businessman decided to build a tavern. A group of Christians from a local church were concerned and planned an all-night prayer meeting to ask God to prevent the bar from opening. It just so happened that shortly after that prayer meeting lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground. The owner of the bar sued the church claiming that the prayers of the congregation were responsible for the destruction of the bar. The church hired a lawyer to argue in court that they were not responsible. The presiding judge, after his initial review of the case, stated that *"no matter how this case comes out, one thing is clear. The tavern owner believes in prayer and the Christians do not."*¹

That's pretty much how I see the prayer life of so-called Christians in churches today, faithless. It has been said that if you want to see how popular a church is, take a look at the size of the sanctuary and find out how many different programs and social activities that the church offers its members. If you want to see how popular the pastor is, find out what the attendance is at services on Sunday morning. But if you're interested in seeing how popular God is in that church, see how many people attend the prayer meetings, and how many prayer meetings take

¹ 1 J.K. Johnston, *Why Christians Sin*, Discovery House, 1992, p. 129.

place every week.²

Our Culture Campaign monthly prayer meetings have room for a lot more people. I can also tell you from experience that prayer meetings at most churches have room for a lot more people. If we were to walk into a prayer meeting at any given church in the Chicago metropolitan area you would find two things prevalent in almost each one of them. The first thing is that you will find the attendance at the prayer meeting will be less than 3% of the total membership of the church. If there are 400 members in the church, there will not be more than a dozen people at the prayer meeting. And of those dozen people, 8 will be senior citizens, one will be the pastor, and who knows what the other 3 will be. Rarely will you find anyone under the age of 40.

The big question we have to ask, then, is why are prayer meetings so poorly attended? Why do Christians put so little emphasis on prayer? Even though they may talk about it, the actions of many Christians belie their words.

One answer, of course, lies in the work of Satan. It has been said that **he trembles** when he sees even the weakest saint on their knees. He trembles because he knows the power of the Almighty God in Heaven is about to come against him. So he will plant in your mind all kinds of reasons for not attending prayer meetings. Such as:

☞ “I’ve tried praying and nothing happens.”

☞ “I can pray just as effectively alone.”

☞ “I’m just not very good at prayer.”

² Adapted from *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* by Jim Cymbala.

But do you know what Satan does to most effectively prevent prayer? He makes most people terrified of praying in front of other people. He makes us self-conscious that we'll make fools of ourselves because of our inability to look cool while praying. He makes us feel foolish and self-conscious to pray aloud. Consequently people don't do the one thing that would guarantee the change they're looking for. Satan will most assuredly lose the war one day, but because of the way Christians conduct their lives in the United States, he's winning most of the battles. And the primary reason for this is that believers do not pray as they should.

But there are other ways Satan attacks prayer. One is through the **culture**. Our culture is a major reason for ailing prayer lives and prayer meetings. We call ourselves the **Culture Campaign** and we are striving to bring decency and morality back into the American culture. We all know that our country was founded on Christian principles and it breaks our hearts to see how rapidly those principles are fading from, or being legislated out of, our culture.

So how does the culture affect prayer life in America and what can we do about it?

Prayer in the United States is impacted by our culture in several ways.

1) The first way involves **Individualism**. Americans pride themselves in being individualistic. We admire the "self-made man," the person who "pulled himself up by his own bootstraps." Self-sufficiency and individualism, however, tend to rule out God in our lives. After all, if a person has to depend on God, then they are hardly "self-made." We encourage children and adults to practice an "*I can do it myself*" philosophy. So if we can do it all ourselves, then why do we need to depend on God and engage in prayer? However, I submit that this concept of

individualism has been distorted. Our founding fathers, who were breaking free from the domination of England were certainly individualists, but they felt very keenly their need for prayer and dependence on God. George Washington even insisted that his troops pray regularly.

Prayer is your proof that you're a Christian who is dependent on the Lord. Christians who do not pray are saying in essence, *"Lord, Don't call me, I'll call You. I can make it on my own."* It's that awful pride that says, *"Really, God, I can make it without You, but don't go too far away in case I need You in an emergency."*

2) Our culture also impacts prayer through **Pluralism**. Contemporary thought has come to value pluralism and tolerance of other religions and philosophies. If a society is going to value all religions alike, then it makes it necessary to downplay the beliefs of any one group. Hence, even though Christianity and faith in God played a major role in the foundation of our American culture, it is now being downplayed in order to accommodate, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say tolerate, all the other groups coming into our country.

3) Our culture also impacts prayer through **Lifestyle**. So much of our culture is subtly intertwined with our lifestyles that we do not always even realize how strongly affected we are by the culture. For instance, how much TV do we watch? And what programs are we watching? On the one hand do we complain about too much sex, violence, and profanity on television and on the other sit down and watch that exact same programming for two to three hours each night? If you do this, you are in effect telling the sponsors of those programs you like what they're providing, and they'll do nothing to change anything. If, however, you turn off your television and then e-mail, write, or call the sponsor and tell them you're turning off the programs they

sponsor because the content is offensive to your family, that is when you'll see change.

Even during decent programs we often are bombarded with commercials that should be X-rated themselves. The exact same action is required for such commercials. And the next time you're watching an hour-long program, conduct your own mini evaluation by counting the number of individual commercials that occur during each break. Also keep a running total for the minutes allowed for programming and the minutes allowed for commercials. What a powerful message regarding the importance of materialism in our culture! Do we feel inferior if our furniture or car isn't as snazzy or as expensive as our neighbor's? Do we feel we or our children have to wear the clothes or styles that are currently trendy?

What kind of movies or concerts do we attend? What are our priorities? If you want to get a reality check on what your priorities really are, as opposed to what you think they are, go through your checkbook and see where your money goes. Make a list of your activities and see where you are really spending your time.

If a prayer meeting is at the same time as a football game, which event takes priority? As a pastor, I clearly notice a drop in attendance at services when certain athletic events are on television.

If you desire to spend your time watching raunchy movies and television; if you want to dress like a hooker or defile your body in any number of ways; if you want to use profanity and participate in casual sex; if you want to promote homosexuality and abortion and same sex marriage; if you believe you have the right to dishonor and make fun of your parents; and if you

want to run up a total debt that far exceeds your ability to pay, God will allow you to do that. Or perhaps your particular ways of going along with the culture are more subtle. Maybe you cheat “just a little” on things, or you get drunk “only on weekends.” Or you covet only a little of what everyone else has. God will still allow you to do that if that is your choice, but He also will not answer your prayers either. He will, however, wait with open arms for you to come to Him asking for forgiveness so that your prayers might then be answered.

So now we come to the all important question, What can we do?

1) Revival begins with the house of God, with the people of God, with all who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and that should be the Church. God tells us in

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NLT):

Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.

What could be more clear? This verse isn't calling lost unbelievers to repentance. It is directed to the people of God. It is calling God's people to examine themselves, to humble themselves, and to seek Him. **God promises** to heal our land, to provide us blessing and remove the curses **if we** are only obedient, humble, repentant, and willing to seek His forgiveness. God's original chosen people, the people of Israel never learned this lesson, and it seems the people of the United States have cast aside this source of blessing as well in favor of pride and self-satisfaction. And we are

already paying for that mistake. If we don't turn things around we will pay the ultimate penalty as Israel did. I hope that when you get a notice of the next Culture Campaign prayer meeting there will be no doubt in your mind as to what is the right thing to do.

If we want to change our culture, that change must begin with us. We must, individually and as a community, examine our hearts, confess our sins, and change our behaviors so that we are living in obedience to all of God's Word. If we don't, all of our other efforts will be to no avail.

2) The second thing we can do is to **Look for and experience God's power.** It is real and it is powerful. If we really had a comprehension of the power of God and that we could tap into that power through prayer, we'd never get up off our knees! The power that created the universe, the power that brought Jesus Christ forth from the grave—that power is available to us if we will only call upon our God.

Philippians 3:10 NAS:

“. . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection. . . .”

Colossians 1:10-11, NAS

“. . . so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might.”

But if you really want to understand the power of prayer and the essential part it plays in the life

of individuals and the Church, then know your Bible. There are many reports of answered prayer in Scripture. Get to know intimately the God and Savior of the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments and what He has done. In fact there is a book that should be on the must read list of every true Christian. It's a little book by **Kay Arthur** titled, *How to Study Your Bible*. It is a real eye opener.

Now there is a possibility that some of us don't fully understand the power and glory and supernatural wonder of the God we're talking about here. We've "tried prayer" and it "didn't work" for us. So we see prayer as powerless and futile, something you leave for the last resort. If you have prayed, why on earth wouldn't God answer? The truth of Scripture is clear: God is powerful, and He does answer prayer, but we have to meet certain conditions in order to have our prayers answered. The first is that we must have a personal relationship with Him. That is, we must have believed that Jesus Christ died to take the penalty we deserve for our sins and that He is alive today, so that we may become part of the family of God.

Secondly, we must be doing all we can to live in obedience to God and His Word, the Bible. We can know if our prayers will be answered or why they might not be answered by again turning to the source of all truth, the *Bible*.

Psalm 66:16-20 (NLT):

¹⁶ *Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he did for me.*

¹⁷ *For I cried out to him for help, praising him as I spoke.*

¹⁸ *If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.*

¹⁹ *But God did listen! **He paid attention to my prayer.***

²⁰ *Praise God, who did not ignore my prayer or withdraw his unfailing love from me.*

Isaiah 59:2 (NLT)

² *It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.*

Micah 3:4 (NLT)

⁴ *Then you beg the Lord for help in times of trouble! Do you really expect him to answer? After all the evil you have done, he won't even look at you!"*

The Lord will not answer prayer unless the person praying has a pure heart. Is your heart pure when you go to God in prayer? Have you cleansed yourself from your sin by asking God with a sincere heart to forgive you through the blood of Jesus? If we would get down on our knees here and now and pray to God that He heal our country, would you be one of the reasons that prayer would not be answered? **Confession** and asking **forgiveness** are essential for prayer to be answered.

The Lord does not answer the prayers of, nor protect those people who ignore the evil they see going on around them. God does not answer the prayers of those who participate with others in behavior that they know is against the will of God. God does not bless those who remain silent when others blaspheme the holy name of God. And God does not answer the prayers of the

stubborn who ignore His Word of instruction to them through the Bible.

3) Thirdly, and the most important thing we can do to bring about revival is to **PRAY**. How simple. How obvious. Yet, how overlooked even though we talk about it freely. Have you ever noticed, when you do go to a prayer meeting, the percentage of time spent in talking about various things, including the prayer requests, as compared with the percentage of time actually spent in praying? That is why in our Culture Campaign prayer meetings, we try to bring in a list of things that should be remembered in prayer, possibly read a Scripture and make a few brief comments about the factors involved, and then we strive to spend the majority of time actually praying.

God is very clear throughout the Bible in calling us to pray:

Jeremiah 33:3 NAS

'Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.'

1 Chronicles 16:11 NAS

Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually.

John 16:24 NAS

Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

James 5:16 NAS

“The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

James wrote those words speaking of Elijah, who had first prayed that rain would stop and it did for three-and-a-half years. Then he prayed for rain to end the drought and God answered with a downpour. Now I call that **big time praying**. Anytime you can ask the Lord to stop the rain and it stops, that's really something. If it stops for a few minutes, I'd call that coincidence. But if it stops for three and a half years, I would call that *“accomplishing much.”* Then if, after intensive prayer, there is a huge thunderstorm, that is also *“accomplishing much.”*

A news story that only got a little press last month happened on November 14 and 15, 2007. As you had probably been hearing Georgia had been experiencing a tremendous drought and people were concerned about the dry lakes that usually fed the water supply. So last month the governor called for a prayer meeting on the steps of the capitol building. People came and prayed fervently, some of them bringing their umbrellas along. Even though they were mocked and criticized by some, they knelt, held hands and joined their hearts in asking God to send rain. And rain it did the following day and several times after that!

If we want change in our culture, we have to pray and take action to help bring that change about. God will send the wisdom, the power, and the direction. But we have to ask Him for it.

4) And we also need to **Cultivate the attitude of turning to God first in everything.**

Unfortunately, praying is often the last thing we do, if we even bother to do it at all. Yet prayer

should be the very first thing we do. If we're suffering financially, the first thing we usually do is ask ourselves, "*How can I get some more money?*" The first thing we **should do** is pray about the situation. When there are personal conflicts in the home, often the last thing the couple does is get on their knees together. Rather, they spend far too much time complaining and bickering, when they should be praying.

Do you ever get discouraged? Then James has some encouraging words for you.

James 5:13 NAS:

13 Are any of you suffering hardships? You should pray. Are any of you happy?

You should sing praises.

James is saying that when you suffer, talking to yourself or worrying isn't going to help you. The **first thing** you want to do is to talk to Someone who can help you, and that someone is God.

James says that if you're going through hard times, if you're hurting, then you ought to be praying. Instead of grumbling, instead of complaining, *you* ought to get down on your knees before God and say: "*God, my life is falling apart. I can't handle this on my own. I need your help.*" If that isn't your trigger response, your first response, your passionate response, then that means **you don't really understand the power of the Christian life.** You most likely don't really understand God and what a relationship with Jesus is all about.

The power of the Christian life comes from above; it comes from God. And that power is given to us through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ and His position as Lord and Savior to joyfully

answer the prayers of those He died for.

In fact, did it ever cross your mind that maybe, just maybe, God is allowing the suffering in your life so that He can finally **get you to pray**? God tried taking care of you and you didn't pray then, so maybe allowing some things to go wrong will get you to pray. God often uses suffering and circumstances in order to call our attention to Him. Because otherwise we think we can function independently and don't need Him. In fact it's all too often the only alternative we give Him to get our attention. Therefore, it's fair to say that we can create our own misery by ignoring a God who wants to love us. And God, because He wants to love us and provide what is best for us, has to make us miserable so that we'll turn to Him and receive His love. Kind of makes mankind look pretty foolish, doesn't it?

Now you might also be wondering how long you should pray. I would ask you to remember the little acronym **PUSH**, "*pray until something happens.*" Pray until God answers. That's how long you pray. If it's a need in your life, if it's a burden in your life, you pray until God does something. If it's for a revival in your country, you pray until God acts. You pray until He says yes or no; and if He hasn't said yes or He hasn't said no, you **assume he says "Wait!"** You pray until you hear from Heaven.

5) And finally please Pray with other believers. For those of you who like to insist that one can pray alone with the same effect as praying in a group of fellow believers, I lovingly say, baloney! You need to do both. Community prayer is essential to the sense of oneness in a church, Bible study, small group, committee, or any other organizational meeting among believers. Read through the book of Acts and you will see situation after situation where people were healed or

delivered from prison because the church of God was meeting together to pray.

When it comes to the culture we are engaged in serious spiritual warfare. One soldier doesn't go to battle alone. A company or battalion of soldiers encounters the enemy. There is much power in corporate praying, and we, as the army of the Lord, need to present a united front in prayer.

My wife and I personally are in the process of seeing this kind of power and effectiveness in corporate or community praying in a situation in Canada. A dear friend of ours and a brother in Christ is pastor (rector) in an Anglican Church in Ontario. Now if you have been following the news at all regarding what is going on in the Episcopal/Anglican church you know it is not good news and it certainly is not biblical. Our friend, however, is a staunch believer and teaches biblical doctrine. So for years now he has taken a strong stand against the unbiblical trends in the church. He has begun and leads a Network of other Anglican ministers who also hold to the purity of the Word of God. As a consequence, he has come into serious confrontation with his bishops and now even the highest level of church government. We, among many other people, have been praying for our friend for months. The situation is too complicated to go into here. But do you remember the snow and ice storm we had on Saturday, December 1, that carried over to Sunday? You remember how bad it was here? Well, on that Sunday, **the primate of the Anglican Church in Canada** had appointed a letter to be read in every Anglican Church in Canada, condemning our friend and the Network of churches that stand with him. Well, the power of God was demonstrated that Sunday by a snow storm, which we got a taste of here, and it so completely blanketed the whole nation preventing most people from getting to church to hear that letter! The God of Heaven sent a snowstorm to protect His obedient servant. And God continues to work mightily on the behalf of our friend and other pastors involved in the situation,

partly because the pastor's heart belongs wholly to God and largely because of the powerful praying being done by large groups of people.

Let's put Culture Campaign prayer meetings high on our priority lists and make it a point to be there to pray expectantly with other believers. Let Culture Campaign PUSH for culture change. That is **Pray Until Something Happens**.

So, in closing, I'd like you to remember that **God can do super-ordinary things with real ordinary people** who are in relationship with Him and who pray diligently. So, what is our conclusion? Our conclusion is **to pray!**

Now let's begin to really pray according to the way God has taught us and let us commit to pray together, and let it one day be said that the Great Awakening Revival of 2008 began at a Culture Campaign core meeting.