

Prayer Evangelism Ignites the Church

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By Dave Butts

There's a fascinating change taking place in the way the Church perceives prayer. From dusty devotions and meeting personal needs, prayer has taken center stage in our attempts to reach the lost. Prayer seems to have become the Divine Strategy for the completion of the task of world evangelization. Wherever the church is growing the most, you find the Church praying the best.

The explosion of prayer evangelism is happening in Korea, in Argentina, in many places in Africa...and it's beginning to happen in North America as well. Christians are creatively bringing together prayer and evangelism in ways that are overcoming both natural and spiritual barriers to Christian conversion.

I think it's important at the outset to understand that prayer evangelism is not some sort of mystical weirdness where we pray and then sit back and do nothing else. It is rather, a releasing of God's power through prayer that is focused on overcoming barriers to evangelism and on preparing the soil of an individual's life to receive the gospel. We pray powerful biblical prayers and then our evangelistic efforts follow, with far greater effectiveness.

We shouldn't be surprised by this. The New Testament speaks of the connectedness between prayer and evangelism in a number of places. When Jesus told His followers to look around them at the white fields (potential spiritual harvest), His first instruction to them was to pray. *"Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the*

workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field'" (Matthew 9: 37-38). Later, when Jesus had given His disciples the assignment to go to all people everywhere, teaching, preaching, baptizing and making disciples, their first step was to have a prayer meeting. "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (Acts 1:14).

Paul wrote to Timothy that God wanted us to pray...interceding for everyone (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Why? Because God wants everyone saved. The New Testament teaches us much on the power of prayer in evangelism. Somehow the Church has lost the connection. My friend Terry Teykl of Renewal Ministries says that sometime after the first century the great divorce occurred—the divorce between prayer and evangelism. Prayer became devotional and liturgical, but not very practical, while evangelism was more and more a matter of human effort or even coercion at times. Fortunately, this New Testament concept is being recovered as prayer and evangelism are once again wedded together.

It's happening in many exciting ways. One preacher in Texas asked his congregation to turn in the names of 100 people who needed to come to Jesus. Those names were prayed over by a trained team of intercessors and by the end of the year 92 of those people had come to faith in Christ. This type of focused praying by those who have been well-trained is central to effective prayer evangelism.

One way of praying for the neighborhoods around your church is an innovative method known as prayerwalking. Christians gather at the church building for a time of prayer and preparation. Then they go in groups of two or three through a particular neighborhood, walking up and down the street, praying for each house, that God would be at work in each home. It's done quietly, without calling attention to those who are praying, but effectively releasing God's power into people's lives. There's a great resource book written on the topic entitled "Prayerwalking: Praying Onsite with Insight" by Graham Kendrick and Steve Hawthorne.

One minister I spoke with some time ago prays for everyone in his church by name every week. To help him remember who is who, he has put all of their pictures on his laptop computer so that he can see their faces as

he prays. Oh, did I mention that their attendance has gone from 150 to 1300 and he still prays for everyone by name every week!

Many churches are sending cards to homes in their neighborhood asking if there is anything they can be praying about. They are not asking them to come to church...not asking for money...or advertising a special program...just wanting to know if there is any way they can pray about what is important to them. It's not long before such a church is attracting people who are looking for a church that cares enough to pray.

The power of blending prayer and evangelism is not something that is limited to local churches. Whole groups of churches and large evangelistic outreaches are beginning to see the importance of prayer. One of the most exciting and ambitious efforts to reach this nation for Christ is called Table Coalition (formerly Mission America Coalition). Its goal? To pray by name for every man, woman and child in the U.S. and to present them with the gospel. It's a goal that no one group within the Church can do by itself. It will take the cooperation of many organizations, fellowships and congregations.

One of the things I like about Table Coalition is its emphasis on local congregational involvement and voluntary cooperation. There is no monolithic program for everyone to buy into. It is simply a networking of ideas and strategies with a common goal—"The whole church taking the whole Gospel to the whole nation in this generation."

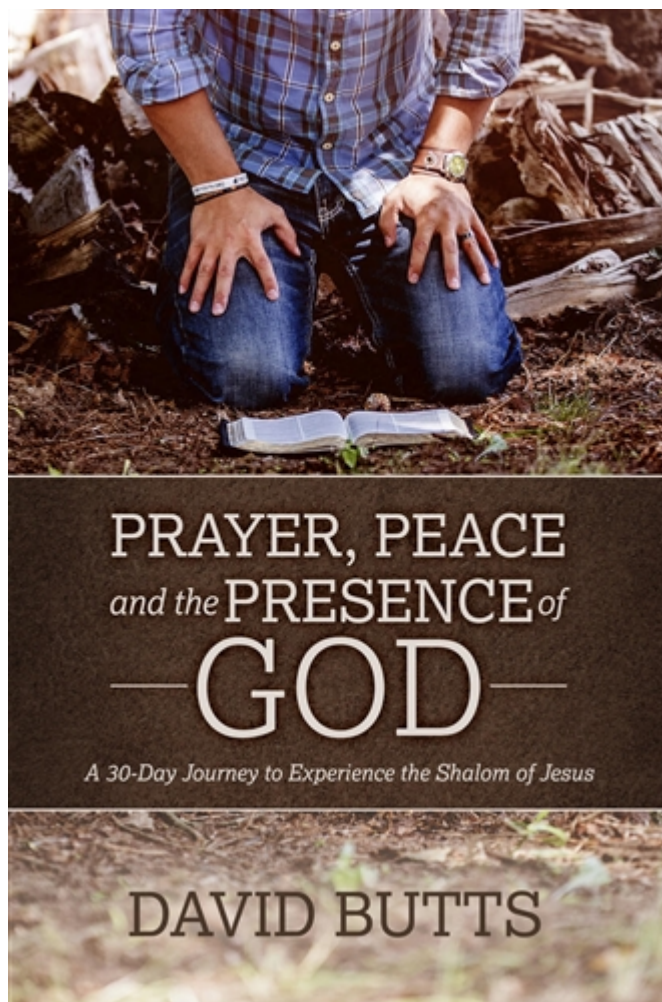
Another missional way to pray for neighbors and nations is to establish Lighthouses of Prayer. Over one and a half million Lighthouses of Prayer have been established in the United States with many more being added daily. A lighthouse is any person, family or group of people who will commit to pray, care and sensitively share Jesus Christ with their neighbors, co-workers, schoolmates or friends as God directs.

Billy Graham has said of this effort: "The Lighthouse Movement has brought the Body of Christ together in a way that is unique in American history. I am praying that God will use this movement to help bring about a massive nationwide renewal and spiritual awakening in the months ahead."

It is exciting to see what God is doing in the midst of His people as he draws us to Himself in prayer. Prayer is re-igniting the Church's fire of

evangelism as we reach out to this nation and to the ends of the earth. "Lord, teach us to pray...in your way...and in your will" seems to have become the battle cry of the Church in these exciting days!

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PRAYER, PEACE, and the PRESENCE of GOD by David Butts

As believers, we are supposed to walk in the peace of Christ, yet we all have stressful issues and circumstances that rob us of this peace. Subtitled "A 30-Day Journey to Experience the Shalom of Jesus," *Prayer, Peace and the Presence of God* powerfully encourages the reader on how to hold onto that peace in any circumstance.

The author, David Butts (1953-2022), started writing this book and 10 days into it he got word that he was in stage 4 with a rare form of lymphoma. God allowed him to live in a greater way for five additional years of full-strength ministry. Dave

has challenged readers in *Prayer, Peace and the Presence of God* to seek after His best life, no matter what it holds.

His 30-day devotional will encourage, inspire and challenge you that you, too, can experience and walk in the peace of Jesus no matter what circumstances you are walking through.

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