



**BIVOCATIONAL & SMALL CHURCH
LEADERSHIP NETWORK**

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**LEADING YOUR CHURCH
To Become A House Of Prayer**

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INTRODUCTION

Leading your church to become a House of Prayer is not an easy task. The Enemy knows the power of prayer better than you or me. He understands the love of the Father for His children. He has seen the Father respond to His children for centuries. He knows the power of God that is released when we pray. He plans on victory and he desires to steal what the Father loves. That all means that he is relentless in trying to lure us away from the Father's presence. He has had plenty of time to master the art of deception. He deceives us by thinking that the Father has far greater things to do than to help us with our earthly problems. He deceives us by causing us to think that the Father's sacrifice in Jesus is not enough to cover our sins, and, thus, we are unworthy to come before the Father with our needs. He deceives us by causing us to think that we can handle whatever situation we find ourselves in on our own. There are a multitude of other lies he tells us, but all have the aim of keeping us from humbling ourselves and praying. He also strives to detour us from coming to the Father. It doesn't take much for him to detour us, we are very vulnerable to being detoured from the Father's business. All he has to do is appeal to our loves, likes, desires. He knows us well. He has been watching mankind from the beginning and we are repetitive creatures. All he has to do is to entice us with whatever he has learned lures us away from the Father.

But the truth is we cannot blame Satan for our prayerlessness. We are the ones that refuse to draw near. We fail to do this as individuals and as a people. Though God's people often talk about the power of prayer, what they practice is the "power of doing". It is much easier to be a Martha than it is to be a Mary. Most of us see being a Mary as doing nothing, and this most often equates prayerlessness or prayer-lessness. Yet, I can tell you from more than 35 years of ministry in missions and prayer, that I have consistently seen more done in a few days of intense fervent prayer than I have in years of doing.

Many churches long to be a praying church, but few are known as such. I don't think it is generally a goal of most churches to be a House of Prayer. Most pastors don't endeavor to be men of prayer. Most pastors and churches prefer being known for their ministries. I think that most pastors and churches realize that being a House of Prayer is much more than a ministry or a period of time of intense prayer.

A phrase that I often use in talking about a House of Prayer is: A Point of Reference. I have found that most pastors and church members do not

have a point of reference when it comes to a House of Prayer. They have no memory, testimony, or example of what a House of Prayer looks like. If they do it is only about a short period of time or a brief moment in the life of a church or while overseas on a mission trip. Most cannot tell you of a true House of Prayer. They have no memory of a church that was a House of Prayer for an extended period of time or that is one now.

For thirteen years, I served as a member of the Southern Baptist Convention's Prayer Leaders Network and the question was often asked, "Do you know of any true House of Prayer in our Convention or out of it?" The answer was always silence. No one could honestly say that such and such church was a House of Prayer. The closest thing that any of us could come up with was Jim Cymbala's church in New York, Brooklynn Tabernacle.

You see, a House of Prayer is not a church that has lots of prayer; it is a church that is known and characterized by more than anything else by its heart for seeking God through prayer. It is not just how the people within its walls describe it, but how it is described by those outside. It is like the name Christian. The lost world named the first century believers Christians because of how these believers were constantly talking about Jesus and who were following Him. When those in the walls of the church and those on the outside call a church – A Praying Church, then you have moved in the direction of becoming a House of Prayer.

One other thing before we proceed: Is being a House of Prayer really what we should be striving for?

If prayer is only understood as a religious act that religious people do, then the answer to that question is NO. But, if prayer is understood as the reflection of the depth and nature of a people that are seeking God with all their heart, and, as a reflection of their belief in a God who they believe delights in His children's presence, and, responds by giving of Himself to them when they cry out to Him, then the answer is Yes.

Prayer, in the scriptural sense, is much more than "Lord" and "Amen". It is an expression of God's people's desire for true intimacy with Him. It is an expression of their dependence upon Him and their deep love for Him. It is the breath and life to their ability to follow Him daily. They love Him and so they seek His face. It is much more than a performance or an allotted time in the bulletin. These people delight in being in His presence and in communing with Him.

I challenge you to believe that becoming a House of Prayer can become a reality and that God desires it and longs for it.

Chapter 1

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

The cleansing of the temple is found in all four of the Gospels! On two separate occasions Jesus cleansed the temple: It is the first thing he does beginning his three years of ministry (Gospel of John), and, it is the last thing he does before withdrawing to spend his last hours with the disciples (Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke). There are very few of the things that Jesus did or taught that are found in all four Gospels. There are very few facts concerning his birth and burial that are found in all four of the Gospels. Yet, God chose to record the cleansing of the temple in all four. Why?

I believe the answer is found in the uniqueness of each Gospel's recording of the cleansing of the temple. In John, it is the first thing Jesus does in his public ministry and the difference is found in what he says and what the disciples remember. Jesus says, "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise." Here Jesus is cleansing in order to restore. The purpose has been lost. I would remind you that you don't have to sell anything in the House of the Lord for the purpose to be lost. Any time anything else becomes more important than seeking His face, then you are close to losing the true purpose of worship. You see, I do believe that a church ought to be "Seeker Friendly", but that being "Seeker Friendly" has very little to do with "others friendly". We are to be "Seekers" of the Almighty and to lead others to do the same. We are never to sacrifice seeking Him for seeking others. Any time you put the emphasis on anything or anyone else, you are close to missing the One we are to seek.

Notice that it is not anger that the disciples saw, but ZEAL. We so often hear these passages used to refer to Jesus getting angry, but I remind you that those who were there did not see anger but zeal. Not once in any of the Gospels' records of the cleansing of the temple does it refer to Jesus being angry. What right do we have to add to the Word of God by saying that Jesus was angry and righteously so? We don't have the right to think that we know more than those that were actually there. Those that were witnesses to the cleansing of the temple saw Zeal and not Anger. Can you tell the difference between the two?

We are to cleanse and restore not out of anger but out of zeal. It is much easier leading your church to become a House of Prayer when you are consumed with zeal and not anger.

Also, note that in John, we discover that Jesus is proactive and intentional in cleansing the temple. He sat down and made a whip. This is no fit of rage. He doesn't just pick up a whip and start slinging it. Instead, he marches into the temple in full control and with full intentions of restoring things back to the way they should be. He sits down and makes. Wow! He knows exactly what he is doing and going to do. This is the difference between zeal and anger.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the cleansing of the temple is during his last week and is just prior to his withdrawal from public ministry. In Mark 11:15-19 we gain some additional clues to the motivation of Jesus in the cleansing of the temple. He takes two Old Testament passages (Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11) and combines them to make one verse. We can't do that, but God can. Both of these passages were prophetic in nature, and, by Jesus' actions and quotation of these passages, he is declaring that, "Today these prophecies are coming to pass." I believe that the high priest and Pharisees knew this and that is why they take action to kill him now and not after the first cleansing. But there is another obvious truth being revealed: they have made the House of God a dark place ("den" or cave) instead of a place of light. They have also filled the house with those who "take" instead of "give". So there are two important truths gained from this prophetic statement: God's House should be a place of light and not darkness and it should be filled with givers and not takers. Anytime we make his house more about getting instead of giving, we have lost the meaning of his house.

One of the unique revelations in Mark is that Jesus stands guard after he cleanses the temple. This is found in none of the other passages. He would not let anyone carry any vessel through the temple. The temple had become a shortcut. If the closest well was on the other side of the temple you were not to cut through the temple. You were to go around or find another well. If the market was on the other side of the temple, you were to go around and not take a shortcut through the temple. But what happened was that everyone was using the temple as a shortcut. You see, he didn't just run the money changers out, he kept out those who were looking for a shortcut. This is still the case today. Many churches are very adamant about not selling anything in the

church, but they commit the other sin of using the church to achieve their own personal goals and desires. Many churches would never think of selling anything on the church property, but they allow the church to serve as a shortcut for people's needs instead of God's. Many come to church for their own needs and not for him. Remember cleansing the House of God is only the beginning, you will have to stand guard to maintain it the way He desires.

Luke 19:41-48 is the saddest of all the passages on the cleansing of the temple. It is here that Jesus is grieved over the fact that they have been missing his visitation. It is here that He pronounces judgment on them before he cleanses the temple. In Luke, the cleansing of the temple is directly connected to them missing his visitation. What was one of the primary purposes of the temple? The temple and the work of the high priest were to help the people have an encounter with God. The very thing that was supposed to help them know God had become an instrument causing them to miss God. This is still the danger today, and you don't have to sell anything in the house to cause this to happen. Anytime that God's people or His House stands in the way of others having a visitation by God, then you can expect a cleansing and a cursing. Is Jesus grieved over the fact that your church is causing people to miss a visitation from God? Many churches today are at war with one another and have been so over and over again. James 4 calls these churches "killers". They take life from people instead of giving life to people. This grieves God greatly because it causes people to miss a visitation from Him.

Matthew 21:12-14 records one of the most beautiful things that happen when the temple is restored to what it is intended to be. God makes a point of recording that, once the temple is cleansed and restored, those who were unable to come to him rush to him. I have found this to be true countless times. Once you make God number One, he will bring his people to you. Think about it: Would you put your child in a nursery that was abusive? Of course you wouldn't. God does not give his children to a house that would do them damage and cause them to miss him.

One other thing before we move on, did you notice that twice Jesus cleansed the temple? The first happened three years before the second. How many times must the tables be turned over and the temple cleansed? It must be cleansed as often as necessary.

So, as we seek to lead the church to become a house of prayer, may we remember some of the truths we have learned from these scriptures.

1. We must remember that it is Jesus that cleansed the temple and restored it and not the disciples. We must let Jesus do this as we come along side of him.
2. We must be consumed with zeal and not anger. It must be zeal that drives us in this pursuit.
3. We must be proactive and intentional. You may have to sit down and wait as He makes a whip. The restoration of God's house doesn't just happen; you will have to do something – Pray and Obey.
4. We must remember that we must not just run out the money changers but we must also stand guard against any who would like to use the House of God for their own agendas.
5. We must always keep it a place of light and empty of those who are all about “taking” instead of “giving”.
6. We must be fully aware that we have a mission of helping people see Jesus. We must guard ourselves from ever being a cause of someone missing a visitation with Jesus. (By the way James 4:1-4 is applicable to this situation as well. We must be givers of life and not takers of life. Churches that are in conflict may never sell anything but they are the worse of thieves. They are murders! Thieves of life.)
7. We must be grieved whenever anyone is robbed of an encounter with God because of what the church has become.
8. We must cleanse the temple so that even one lame or blind person can come to Him.
9. Just because you see the temple restored to a House of Prayer doesn't mean that you won't have to do it again in a few months.

May God lead us and use us in being what he desires.

Chapter 2

THE PASTOR WHO DESIRES A HOUSE OF PRAYER

If you are going to lead your church to become a House of Prayer there are some things that you must get right.

First, I know you don't want to hear this but YOU are the man! You are the man of God that God has called and led to this church and that leadership can't be transferred. God hasn't called your deacons or your prayer ministry leader to this task. This is not an assignment that you can hand over to your wife, other staff, or some preacher in training. Jesus never delegated this task to anyone else and you can't either. The truth is, Jesus wouldn't have had to cleanse the temple and restore it if the high priest had done his job. You are the one that he will hold accountable. You are the one he has called and placed to lead this church, and, if you can't lead them to be a house of prayer, then why are you there?

Nowhere is his house called a house of preaching or singing. It is true that these things take place, but the one word that he chose to describe his house, is prayer. Is prayer the thing that describes your place of worship? Or could it be that your place of worship is described by a ministry that you have, like youth or senior adults? Or is it described by you, your preaching, your visitation, your love? Prayer is the most basic spiritual discipline. All other spiritual disciplines are only as strong as the prayer life of the person trying to carry out the spiritual discipline. True prayer cannot be faked because it is not to the people, or even for the people, it is to God. A house of prayer only exists when the pastor is a man of prayer.

Second, I am not talking about a pastor who prays. All pastors pray. All churches pray. In order to lead your church to become a house of prayer, your prayer life must be real, exceptional, and vibrant. Many pastors have a "Blessing and Benediction" prayer life. This kind of prayer life is insufficient and shallow. I know this from experience. You say, what is a "Blessing and Benediction" prayer life? It is when your prayers amount to nothing more than saying a "Blessing" before

you do anything and saying a “Benediction” when you are done. This kind of pastor would never think of eating, or preaching, or doing anything without praying, but it is more ritual than it is real. This pastor has the “preacher” talk and praying down. But they make God sick. They sound like a priest or a Pharisee when they pray. You do not want to know how many times I have heard pastors pray like this. I mean, get real! They talk to God like they were living in the Middle Ages. They have learned praying from some of their pastor friends, but they have not learned to pray like Jesus. Get real, how many of you would really talk to someone you love in the way you talk to God? I have no patience for these preacher guys who pray like they are preaching or who pray like God has to be educated. They need to get real. God is not impressed by your words or your performance. If your heart doesn’t reach out to him, then you have just drawn near unto him with your mouth and lips, and, that means you are actually worse off than if you hadn’t prayed at all. You do know that you are held accountable for every word? That also applies to your prayers too, you know that don’t you? Most of the preacher prayers that I have listened to over the years could have been recorded and played back over and over again. They are like tinkling cymbals, all words and no heart. Well, wake up! God is not mocked and he is not impressed by a “Blessing and Benediction” prayer life. He is looking for a true seeker. One who seeks him with all of his heart. God is looking for and expecting more from those that he has called to lead his people.

You cannot lead your church to become a house of prayer if you are not first a true person of prayer!

You must begin first with yourself. Prayer can no longer be something that you do. You must become a man that delights in talking with God. This is not described by your quiet time or your prayers in the pulpit or your prayers at the hospital. For this to happen, honestly seeking God with all your heart must be who you are in your closet, car, office, home, and in His house.

Third, there are some things that you must begin to truly believe and not just preach. You must believe that God answers YOU, more than you believe that God answers PRAYER! God responds to His children and not to some religious activity. We have never believed that God answers prayer, period. We have never believed that he answers the prayers of the Muslim, Buddhist, Pharisee, and so on. We have always believed that he answers the prayers of His children. You

must stop saying God answers Prayer! You must take a leap of faith to a higher ground and start declaring that God answers ME! I challenge you to study the Word and you will find that over and over again God declares that He answers people and very few times does He even refer to answering prayer. When He does talk about answering prayer there is almost always another word between “answer” and “prayer”. That word varies from “my”, “our”, “their”; the emphasis is always on the person that He is answering instead of the religious activity that He is responding to. Hebrews 11:6 is critical in all your prayers and not just your first prayer. You must believe that He is a rewarder of “you” who call upon Him.

You know this; this is not new to you. You just have been repeating what the world has said. You do understand that it requires greater faith to believe that God answers you than it does to believe that God answers prayer? A person who believes that God answers prayer may never pray, especially if they don't believe that God answers them. Because they believe that God answers prayer but do not believe that God answers them, they will turn all of their prayer needs over to someone that they believe God will answer and they themselves may never pray. But a person who believes that God answers them, will always pray, and, if they ask others to pray, it will only be because they are asking others to join them in their praying and not for others to do their praying for them. As a pastor who desires for God's house to become a house of prayer, you must have a greater faith than God answers prayer. You must believe that God answers you. Without this kind of faith, you will have nothing more than the house of prayer of a Pharisee.

Fourth, you must believe that God desires for his house to be a house of prayer and that he has called you to lead them to become such a house. You do not have the right to give up because the people don't follow you easily. You don't have the right to delegate this task. You don't have the right to move away from God's purpose just because it is hard. Becoming a house of prayer is not easy. At times, it will appear like everyone is following, and, then at other times, you will feel all alone. You will want to settle for scraps, but you must not. You will want to offer a token instead of all, you must not. You will find that having a form of godliness is very appealing, but always beware that you will sacrifice the power of true godliness.

Fifth, you will have to move at times like a mad man and other times you will feel like you are to “wait and be still”. Just like in all that God calls you to do, you must learn the difference between doing what you should and what you could. I pray that you will choose to do what you should and not what you could, and that you will have enough discernment to know the difference between the two. Only God can tell you when to move and when to wait. Remember an important element of leading: if you look around and no one is following, then you have just been out for a walk. To lead means to do so in a way that others can follow. God doesn't want His house to be a house of prayer just for you. It shall be a house of prayer for all people. One of the main reasons we lead people to Jesus is for a life of worship and prayer. Don't ever forget that.

God has called you and he desires to use you in this challenge of leading His people to be a people of prayer. You must get your heart right before you can lead them to get their heart right. Remember a house of prayer is not about a lot of prayer, it is about His people seeking Him with all their heart.

Chapter 3

THREE TYPES OF PRAYING CHURCHES

Years ago there was a magazine called Pray. In that magazine I read an article on the Three Types of Praying Churches. That article changed my life and perspective on church and prayer. Many times I wished I had kept that article, but all I have is what I remember. As I served as Prayer Coordinator and Consultant for the Tennessee Baptist Convention, I often encountered two of the three types but the third type was rare. I believe that understanding these three types of praying churches will be helpful to you in your pursuit of becoming a house of prayer.

A Prayer Less Church

This church's prayer life is characterized by ritual. They always pray before they teach, eat, preach and everything else for that matter but it is shallow, weak, repetitive, and ritualistic. There may even be emotion at times but there is little heart. They don't really pray until there is a crisis or an emergency. Their prayer list is always full but almost always full of crisis needs. They pray the hardest when there is a crisis and know very little about saturating their services and ministries with the same kind of passion in prayer as they do if someone has cancer. They generally talk a lot more and a lot longer than they do praying. There is usually a Prayer Warrior that everyone knows about and who they often depend on for doing their "real" praying for them (though they would rarely admit it). All the true powerful and fervent praying is done outside of the church by a few and not by the whole. They generally call themselves a praying church, because they have a prayer list and update it regularly but they rarely spend intense time praying over the needs. They are convinced that writing them down is the same as praying for them. When they do write them down, they will spend great amounts of time talking about the need and generally will offer up one very short generic prayer for the whole list. By the way, if I am ever in need of true prayer don't ask this kind of church to pray for me, I want more than a listing of my name on a prayer list when I am in need, and I want more than a generic prayer where my

name is thrown in with a hundred others. I desire fervent prayer and not fervent discussion of my need. I bet you do too.

It is often called the prayer less church, not because there is no prayer, but because there is much less praying than a true house of prayer. Sadly, this description describes 90+% of our churches. Perhaps that is why we see so little in the way of God's miracles. Don't get me wrong, these churches will break down and pray when cancer strikes, but they don't expect much praying over Sunday services and the things that they are called to do. They often forget that Sunday is coming during their Wednesday night prayer meetings. And the only prayer for Sunday or anything else they do is generally done right after they have started. A long time ago they forgot what they were called to do and be. They only know one type of prayer request: Crisis. If you want fervency and power in prayer in this church, you will have to go to one of the Prayer Warriors to find it. Don't expect to get it from the people. Generally, this type of church has designated people to do their praying for them. Most of them do not pray and do not want to be asked to pray. The bulk of the fervent praying in this church is done outside of its walls by a few.

The Prayer Ministry Church

This church is not really all that different than the Prayer Less church. The main difference is that this church has institutionalized their praying. They have taken some of their prayer warriors and created a room or ministry and gave them a title, but there really isn't any more praying now than there was before. They just made themselves and everyone else feel better. What normally happens in this situation is that the number of people praying remains the same but everyone talks about how they now have a prayer ministry. At the beginning, there is usually a rush of interest, but, rather quickly, the heart is revealed and the only ones left praying are the ones who were already praying before the ministry was created. Frustration sets in and even a spirit of self-righteousness. Guilt is laid on those that signed up but who haven't followed through. This prayer ministry eventually dies because it was dead to begin with. Their type of praying is the same, they just institutionalized it into a "ministry".

In the beginning everyone feels like they are better than they were before, but let me ask a painful question, Are they? In my

opinion, this is not necessarily a better thing but can actually become something worse. A ritual that is institutionalized is still a ritual. Now I do know of some Prayer Ministry churches that are better off than they were before, but most would not call their church a House of Prayer. Please don't institutionalize your praying and call your church a House of Prayer.

Another thing I have noticed about this type of church is that they think that by creating a "prayer room" and creating an elaborate folder for various categories that they have achieved the goal of being a House of Prayer. Let me ask you a simple question, if this was all it took, then why didn't Jesus do that, and give us clear direction to do so? A House of Prayer is much greater than a "prayer room", even one that is well used.

A House of Prayer

A House of Prayer is not about a ritual, a ministry, or even a designated room for prayer. It is not isolated to a few of your members or to a period of intense prayer in the midst of a crisis. A House of Prayer is used to describe a church that is saturated in prayer when gathered and when scattered. It is more than the practice, it is the heart of the people. The people have become a people of prayer and not a people that pray. Prayer has become such a natural thing that at any moment a person could start praying, and, they do so often. It is not prayer that is programed or scheduled, but it is the life of the church. All three types of prayer requests are prayed for. All three levels of praying are found, these will be shared in a later section. There is freedom in prayer and the belief of God answering them is just about universal. There is a great spirit of expectation and anticipation when they pray. There is an atmosphere of hope that is based on dependence on God and not in themselves or someone else or anything else. Prayer is spontaneous and the norm. They still have the "Blessing – Benediction" praying, but there is so much more praying. The fervency of the praying is constant. The praying that is seen in the walls of the church is the same as found outside of its walls. This is a prayer-saturated church because people live lives that are saturated in prayer.

A House of Prayer can be a reality when God's people understand that it is not something that they do, but something that they are. It is found where God's people are broken and contrite. It is found when their leaders are more humble than proud. It is found when

their leaders are dependent more than independent. It is found when their leaders take the lead in prayer and who are always ready with clean hands to pray over the sick if need be in a moment's notice. It is found when the people have learned that relying on God and seeking His face in all things is much better than leaning on one's own understanding and strength. A House of Prayer is a possibility when it is sought by seeking Him and His Kingdom and His righteousness.

There is hope, my friend. Believe!

Chapter 4

BECOMING A HOUSE OF PRAYER: PART 1 – MODELING

I have always thought that it was intriguing that the disciples did not ask Jesus to teach them to pray until after they saw him praying. Every morning Jesus got up and went into a solitary place to pray. The disciples observed this habit of prayer and noticed that it was different than any man they had ever observed. Remember these are Jewish men, they have lived their whole lives in families, and, in a culture, that was saturated with men praying. But Jesus prayed different than any man they ever knew. They longed for a prayer life like Jesus'.

I have found that this principle is true, especially for men. People are very selective in who they ask to teach them something, especially men. We ask people to teach us who we believe have something that we don't have and who have something that we want. You must be a pastor that prays and has a habit of prayer different than any other pastor or man that your people have ever known.

This is not about self-righteousness; this is simply about being the man of God that God has called you to be. You must set aside all artificialness and fakeness in your prayer. You must become a real man of prayer. You must become a man who really desires to encounter God and to live for him daily. This is more than just learning how to pray beautiful public prayers. You must kill the "preacher" praying habit and become a man that is broken and desperate for God. Be REAL!

At the same time, you must let your guard down and start truly listening to yourself when you pray. You must first listen as God does and then listen as though others are listening. This is about passing on a legacy of prayer to your congregation. We model and teach most of the spiritual disciplines, like evangelism, discipleship, and giving, but we rarely take the same intentional effort to do the same with prayer.

In my church, we are fast approaching the day where we have more people who have not been raised in church than those that have. I have noticed that those who have been raised in church pray differently than those who haven't. Those raised in church use a lot

of preacher and church words that really don't mean anything. They have learned a habit of praying that is sometimes superficial. They have learned this from their pastors and the leaders in their church. You must not be a pastor who teaches them wording that has a form of godliness but no power. You must be a pastor that is transparent and real in your conversation with God. When you finish praying, you should do so as though God was sitting right next to you (He is) and those listening should feel like He is when you finish. Slow down and truly speak to Him from your heart and not your habit.

Your church can not become a House of Prayer until you model it for them.

Chapter 5

BECOMING A HOUSE OF PRAYER: PART 2 – TEACHING

You need to become an expert on what the Bible says about prayer. I warn you, you will have to unlearn some things that you have been taught. You must remember that a half truth is not true at all. After the disciples saw Jesus pray, they then asked him to teach them to pray. Notice that nowhere does it say that Jesus taught them HOW to pray, but TO pray. Being taught TO pray is not the same thing as being taught HOW to pray. Anyone can be taught the HOW TOs of praying and still not pray. Being taught TO pray means that the person is praying after he has been taught. This type of teaching comes not by the mere transfer of information but by being TAKEN PRAYING! Jesus taught them some basics of prayer but then there was a major change in how Jesus related to them in prayer. He started inviting them to join Him in His praying. Prayer like most spiritual disciplines is as much caught as it is taught. If you only preach it and teach it without creating moments for you to take them praying, you will only create disciples that know more but don't know how to pray more.

Every time I come to a truth of prayer in a scripture that we are studying or that I am preaching on, I take the time to help them understand the significance of it. Each year we have a conference on Becoming a House of Prayer where I, or I have someone come in, teach on prayer in a more in-depth way.

Teaching your people about prayer is a must. We assume that they understand this spiritual discipline simply because they can pray over an offering. Remember, just because the Pharisees prayed often and could teach on it, did not mean that they understood it in their heart. Many of our people quote passages on prayer often, yet in my experience most do not understand what it is saying and most quote it out of context. For example, are you familiar with a simple truth about the King James Version of the Bible, where a “y” is plural and a “t” is singular? What I mean by that is this. In the old English, when someone wanted to address two or more people, they would use “you”, “your”, or “ye”. If they wanted to address an individual, they would

use “thee”, “thine”, or “thou”. This truth changes many of the passages that we quote. Almost all of the passages that I hear quoted on prayer are actually in the plural and not the singular. You are probably thinking, so what. I don’t know about you, but I take the warning seriously that says not to add to or to take away from the Word of God, and, because of that, plural and singular are important to me. Most of the prayer passages are directed to the church and not to individuals. For example, 1 Peter 5:7, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” This is a challenge to the church to cast their care upon Him and not addressed to an individual. Why would He challenge them to do so? Would it be because they are not doing so? God rarely commands us to do something that we are regularly doing. It is always an encouragement to do so. Would you agree that it is one thing for me to be told to cast my care upon Him because I am not doing so, but something of far greater diligence when a whole church is told to do so? This challenge is to a church that needs to be doing this. It is true that individuals make up a church, but this challenge is for the people as a whole to be doing so and not just an individual or even for a few. Oh, that the church would have “A Care” and not a list of things that is more on the paper than on the heart. A care comes from the heart, you understand that don’t you?

The taking of God’s people praying has to be intentional. You must stop assuming that God’s people know how to pray just because they were raised in the church. Jesus did not turn to the disciples and say, “You were raised in Jewish homes in a Jewish culture, you can pray.”

Has anyone ever taken you praying or did they just teach you the How to of praying but failed to teach you TO pray?

Chapter 6

BECOMING A HOUSE OF PRAYER: PART 3 – REMINDERS THAT IMPACT

Remember that becoming a House of Prayer is not about having a great prayer meeting. It is about becoming a prayer saturated church where the people seek to walk in a constant spirit of fervent prayer. The things that I am about to share are characteristics of prayer that I have consistently observed in the pastors of churches that are saturated in prayer.

Seize the moments – As you pray and seek the Lord about becoming a House of Prayer, you must stay in a spirit of anticipation and expectation that God is working to turn his house into a house of prayer. He will offer situations where he desires to teach you and your people how to pray fervently and persistently. Be waiting and watching for crisis moments in your leadership's lives which can serve as calls to prayer for your people. Seize these moments to call your people to prayer. Each of these moments should cause you to take your people to a level of praying that they haven't been before. They will be faith moments that will challenge you and your leadership as you pray. Some of these God will miraculously answer, and, others, he will redirect you and your people in their prayers to what he desires for you to ask. Let me share some life stories from my journey. Right after I came to the church which I am presently pastoring, one of my deacons had a minor accident at work where he flipped over in his chair and hit his head. Several days had passed and he still was having headaches. His boss told him to go to the emergency room. He was thinking it was just a headache, but, when the doctor came in, he was told that he had a brain tumor. It had nothing to do with his fall, but God used the fall to reveal the tumor. I had been asking God to turn our church into a house of prayer and I had been waiting and watching for that James 1 thing, that God moment that would mobilize our people in prayer. This was it! Immediately our people responded. They saturated this family in prayer. We called them to the front of the altar and laid our hands on them and anointed him. We continued to seize moments to pray over them, on Wednesday nights, in ladies meetings and men

meetings. Prayer cards were sent and some of our people fasted. For months we prayed and watched. The day of surgery came and God did a miracle, and, to this day, the man has had no side effects. God taught our people how to pray during that time.

When I was a Director of Missions, we had a well-known pastor die suddenly while working at the church. The church and his family were in grief. I had been praying, “Lord, make this association a praying association.” When I heard about what had happened, I asked the deacons of the church if the association could gather at their church to pray for them and the pastor’s family. They agreed. But I remember them saying, “Do you think anyone will show up?” Honestly I hadn’t been there long enough to know if they would or not, but I hoped and believed. The call was sent to all the churches. That night the church was full! The association never had had a meeting like that. We prayed non-stop for over an hour. We wept, we laid our hands on the deacons, and we asked God for his mercies. God taught that association how to pray that night.

Seize the moments! Seize the moment regularly. Our church now has quarterly Calls to Prayer on the fifth Sunday night. We use it to pray fervently for what is coming up as well as any urgent needs. The time is open and free. It is not a Bible Study and it is not preaching. Sometimes I urge them to leave their homes without talking and not to talk until they return. These times have been the most intense. Sometimes we have used prayer stations. I find that variety helps in the teaching of them to pray. Some people need more help than others especially in relationship to those who have been in the church awhile. These that have always been there feel that the “Blessing and Benediction” prayer life is sufficient and will be resistant to going deeper in prayer.

Seize the moments! Seize the moment for ministry needs. We do a lot of mission trips at my church and we have a lot of individuals who go on solo mission trips. We seize the time during the morning services prior to them going to lay our hands on them and pray over them. We do the same for VBS. We prayer walk the facility and the town. We will lay our hands on all of our workers prior to the VBS. We do this at the beginning of the new church year for all of our new and old leaders.

Seize the moment for transitions in life! We lay our hands and pray over our graduates. We lay our hands and pray over our mothers and fathers on their days.

You may not be familiar with an incredible resource called Plant-N-Prayers. You can find this on line. This inspirational prayer tool was developed by a Southern Baptist mother in a time of need for her daughter and has grown to be a business and ministry. Our church and my family utilize this resource regularly at time of death, marriages, sickness, and any other occasion that we can think of. The idea is that 30 days of prayers are sent to the individual or family. The same prayers are sent to the sender. Each day they open a scrolled prayer and pray. I have utilized this resource in my own children's weddings. I have always received tons of comments about how meaningful this resource has been.

Seize the moments! Jesus had a ministry of interruptions. People were constantly interrupting and He always seized the moment not only to minister to them but to also use it for a teaching and modeling moment. We need to have a ministry of interruptions. Seize the moments!

Make yourself vulnerable and transparent! – Do not be afraid to ask for prayer. Each Sunday morning I come forward to the altar right before the offering and all the men of the church come up and lay their hands on me and pray over me, the offering, and the working of God during the service. I look forward to this time of intense praying each Sunday.

I go to one Sunday School class each week and kneel and ask the class to gather and pray over me. I do this from the nursery to the seniors. I don't do any more than one class a week. Once I have been through each class I start over again. Some of the most intense times have been in the children classes. I take several months to do this in each class.

I share when I am struggling, when I am down, when I am tired, and when I am sick. I get cards, texts, and phone calls from people praying for me nearly every day.

I try to text and Facebook message at least 20 of my people and visitors each day to let them know I am praying for them. I pray for each one and I have found that most will let me know that they are praying for me. I now have several that do the same thing to me even before I can do it to them.

I know that there are some that don't like Facebook, but we have a Church Facebook page that has become one of our most popular ways of sharing prayer needs. This tool has exploded among our young

people and the way God is using this to keep our people up to date on prayer needs has been phenomenal. Now most of our adults have joined our page just so that they can be kept up to date on what is happening in our church and our families.

IT Praying – IT Praying is the most common and most powerful praying found in scripture and in real life. I have a separate book on IT Praying so I am not going to spend tons of time on this truth. What I do desire to do is introduce you to this kind of praying and to call your attention to the fact that a House of Prayer is most often characterized by this kind of praying. In Matthew 7:7, Jesus introduces IT Praying. “Ask and IT...” There are very few prayer lists in scripture, instead what you find are God’s people praying about their IT. IT prayers are the most commonly recorded in the Bible. They are intense and persistent in nature. The person of prayer has something that they desire, and, instead of rambling in their prayer about many things, they camp out on the ONE thing. They will pray all night and even fast for weeks for their ONE thing. Hannah prayed for years for her ONE thing. You can go to any ICU waiting area and you will find people practicing IT praying. We will plead, we will weep, we rejoice over IT prayers. When you have an IT prayer, you never miss when God answers it and you never fail to give him glory for IT. When you have an IT prayer, you never have to think about what you should be praying about because it doesn’t come from the head but from the heart. When you have an IT prayer, you are most likely not going to be doing a vain repetition. When you have an IT prayer, you don’t have to worry about praying from the mouth only.

God has IT prayers too for his people, and, He waits for us to ask for his IT. We know this, but we are so busy asking for our ITs that we often fail to ask for his IT. God has filled his Word with directives on what his ITs are. We don’t have to create them; we only have to pray them. For example, in the Lord’s Prayer we find at least seven of God’s IT prayers. When he tells us to pray for laborers, he is telling us what is on his heart, his IT. When he tells us to pray for wisdom when we are going through trials, he is telling us his IT. How often have you heard God’s people put His ITs before theirs? Not often. That is because they have not been taught or had it modeled for them. We spend all our time reminding them of the passages about our asking instead of what he is asking for us to ask. We tell them to seek him first, but we don’t think that applies to asking for his ITs first. As a

pastor, you must get this right, you must model asking for God's ITs first before you ask for yours. You and your family must get this right. Remember a House of Prayer is not just a lot of praying. It is a lot of seeking Him first!

Our altar has the carpet removed and permanent markers are kept in a basket for people to come and right their IT prayers on the altar. These have been there since I have been their pastor. Many of them now say, "Answered", or "Praise God". Our people visit their ITs often. During our Calls to Prayer, that is one of the places most often visited. Each service I let our visitors know that if they see someone going to one of the places in the back of the altar that they are probably going there to pray for one of their ITS.

We also have a large wooden cross to the side of the altar which has names pinned to it. These names are people that are either lost or who are far from God. These are IT prayers with a name to them. Our people often come to the cross to pray for these ITs. We put green name tags over the yellow and red name tags whenever God brings one of these IT people to him. When that happens, our people explode as they watch someone coming and putting up a green name.

House of Prayers practices IT praying. Just think of the Publican who comes to the House of Prayer. Do you practice IT praying? IT praying is more than a list of people in need. IT praying is the one thing that your people long for God to do in their lives.

Each Christmas my kids and grandkids know that we will be gathering their IT prayers from them. That one thing that they each long for God to do in their lives during the next year. My wife collects these and shares them with everyone. We spend the rest of the year praying for one another's IT. We all rejoice when God answers one of our IT prayers.

What is the one thing that God desires to do among you? What is the one thing that you desire for God to do among you? What should be the IT prayer of your church at this time?

All 3 Types of Prayer Requests – Scripture reveals that there are 3 types of prayer requests. Yet most churches only know one type – Crisis Prayers. I think that the reason most churches only have one type because they have never been taught or taken the time to study the Word to see that there are 3 types. A House of Prayer must have all 3 types regularly as part of its praying. The 3 types are: Kingdom, Calling, and Crisis. I have put them in the order that I believe God desires for them to be.

Kingdom Requests: These are called Kingdom Requests because they originate from the throne of God and they concern his kingdom. You and I can't create these, all we can do is pray them. They come as directives from God where he says, "Pray..." The Word of God is filled with these and God waits for us to pray them. These are what reveal the heart of God. Praying these is part of seeking him first. These prayer requests are timeless and have eternal significance. No preacher or denomination can add to this list.

Calling Requests: These are personal and directly relate to what we are called to do and to be. These prayers reflect our calling. For example, when a pastor asks for help in preparing sermons or in preaching, he is reflecting his calling. When a church prays for VBS or Sunday School, it is praying for what it believes God has called them to do. Anything that is on the calendar of a church should only be there because the church believes God has called them to do this, and therefore, it is prayer worthy. A group going on a mission trip should be prayed over because they believe that they are called. Praying for the deacons and teachers is part of callings. Calling requests reflect what the church believes they have been called to do. Calling requests are not eternal but they do impact the kingdom. They are our contribution to the kingdom but the kingdom is much bigger than these requests.

Crisis Requests: These are easy for us to understand because they relate directly to our present situations. These are not eternal, these are temporal. These are about that which will pass away. Yet most churches only pray about these. We will fill prayer lists with these each week and never include a kingdom or calling request. Why? We are more self-focused and temporal focused than Kingdom focused and Calling focused.

A House of Prayer has all 3! It strives to begin with Kingdom and Calling but it realizes that Crisis praying is a result of loving one another. It takes intentionality and persistent leadership to lead a church to consistently pray for all 3. When you look at your church's weekly prayer requests, are they heavy on the Crisis nature or do you have a balance of all three?

An Open Altar – We are so used to doing church the way we do that we think that it always has been this way or that it is the only way to do it. Let me remind you of a few things about the House of Prayer that God designed. First, there was only one chair. It actually wasn't a chair as we know it; it was called the Mercy Seat and only God got

to touch it. Neither the tabernacle nor the temple had any chairs. The house of prayer was not designed for man's physical comforts. Second, preaching wasn't done in the House of Prayer but on the steps of the House of Prayer. There was no pulpit area in the House of Prayer. The synagogue's design was much more in keeping with our church's design than the temple. Third, the House of Prayer was open at all times. You came and went as you needed to. There was always someone there to assist you with your needs (sacrifice, offering, prayer).

Though I am not an advocate for us turning our churches into a temple, there are some things that I believe should be encouraged for us to have a House of Prayer that is honoring of God. One, though comfort may seem to be important to us, it is not important to God. A House of Prayer that is all about the physical comforts of its people takes a risk of helping people to forget that it's not about them but God. I have worshipped and prayed all over the world and the one thing I have learned is that it takes very little to truly worship. The main thing necessary is a heart that is seeking him. Second, praying and sitting is not the NORM in scripture. We pray to the One who sits on the greatest throne of all, and you enter his presence as a servant in a state of humility. Third, the ability for God's people to respond to God immediately when he begins to draw them is critical. This is the primary reason for this emphasis.

Let me check to see if you know a few things: 1.) Is it better to obey God or man? GOD! 2.) To know to do good and not do it, it is what? SIN! 3.) So to know that it is always better to obey God than man and to do so immediately and then to wait until a man tells you it is ok to respond would be what? SIN! So when does an invitation begin? When it is in the bulletin, or when it is good for the pastor, or when it is your custom? NONE of those, right? Why? Because the invitation begins when God calls or speaks to an individual. To wait for a man to give the invitation would be sin if God is already calling you to respond.

For over a decade, I have been leading pastors and churches to allow God to define when the invitation begins. Because I anticipate God to begin to call His people to respond to Him before I can, I have an open altar. What does that mean? It doesn't matter how you do this but somehow you must allow for God's people to respond to Him immediately. I prefer the following manner. Prior to each service I divide the altar up with at least 3 sections: A side for those who need

some alone time or private time. On this side, they understand that no one will bother them. They can come to this side alone or as couples or friends or families, but the rule is, the way they come is the way that they want to be. Another side is for those who have burdens that they desire for others to pray with them. If they come to this side, they know many will gather around them and pray with them. The third side is wherever I am. At any moment, prior to the message, during the message, or after the message they know that I am accessible to them. If I am preaching, everyone knows that I will turn the mic off and act like Jesus would and minister to them as though they were the only one there. I have been doing this for almost two decades nearly every day and the freedom that it has created has been incredible. Now that I have been pastoring again for two years my people know that this is so. For example, this morning we had people at the alone side from before singing began until way after the message. It is a regular thing for people to come to the side for others to pray for them, and, when that happens, there are usually so many people praying over them you cannot see the person who came for prayer. I cannot tell you how many times I have had people come to me in the middle of a sermon or in the middle of leading them in prayer.

Freedom to respond to God when people need to must be encouraged by the pastor and the church leadership. Be careful that you don't become an Eli and almost cause someone to miss a visitation from God.

Guided Prayer – Read the following statement carefully: You can let sheep lead you or you can lead the sheep. The word pastor means shepherd, his role is one of leading sheep and not sheep leading the shepherd. In most of what we do as pastors we acknowledge that God has placed us in a place of leadership. We strive to lead God's sheep in just about everything we do. We understand that sheep must be lead. But, for whatever reason, we relinquish this role and responsibility when it comes to prayer. Almost every prayer meeting I have ever been in was led by sheep and not shepherds. We don't do this in any other area of ministry, but for whatever reason we think it is good in prayer.

Think about another statement: You have two sources for prayer requests: Sheep or The Shepherd. Where you get your prayer requests says a lot about where you want to go. There is another way of saying this: You can get your prayer requests from the Pew or the Throne. Pastors have a tendency to do what they learned themselves. So it is

no surprise that when it comes to prayer, most pastors are just doing what they have learned. I challenge you to think through why you are not leading God's people in prayer. Some of you think that by that statement I mean that you must always do the praying. You think that because of a phrase we use often, "Brother Paul, will you please lead us in prayer." Of course, Brother Paul begins to pray. We understand the phrase "lead in prayer" to mean that that person will do the praying for us. I do not mean that at all. No, I mean truly taking the lead and guiding God's people in how to pray and what to pray for. I believe that a pastor must take the lead in guiding and training God's people in prayer. Jesus did this often. He was able to do that because he himself stayed in constant contact with the Father and knew what His will was, and, so, He directed the disciples to pray accordingly. The pastor is supposed to be the one that God has placed in leadership of the church, the pastor should know better than anyone else what God is trying to do among His people and should direct God's people to pray accordingly. Instead, they abdicate the right to direct God's people to pray by letting the sheep generate the prayer requests. Thus, it should be no surprise to us that almost all of our prayer requests are crisis centered. People have a tendency to be self-focused and not God-focused, and that is even evidenced by our praying. We know that we are to seek the Kingdom of God first, but when it comes to praying we seek our agendas first.

Note: What you pray about reveals your heart. Everything that comes from the mouth comes from the heart. So, if all my prayer requests are Crisis in nature, then I am more focused on the "here and now" than the eternal, and more focused on what concerns me than what concerns Him.

I have found that seeking the Kingdom of God in prayer is rare. I believe it is because we are not being led to do so when we pray. Jesus was constantly redirecting the prayers of His disciples, and, I believe that pastors must do the same thing for God's people today. Most of the time that just means reminding them of the things that scripture tells us to pray for. Sometimes it means asking guiding questions like: What would Jesus have us to be praying for in this situation? What is Jesus waiting for us to pray for our VBS? It's Wednesday night, let's not forget that Sunday is coming, what would God want us to ask in relationship to our coming Sunday services?

It is as though God's people have forgotten that they have a mission and a calling when they pray.

Please, understand that I am not saying that the pastor should be doing all the praying, but he should remind the people of what is on God's heart and direct them to pray accordingly.

Prayer Saturation – To become a House of Prayer your church must become prayer saturated. What does this mean? Well, it is more than a lot of prayer in a prayer service. It means that you and your people become people of NOW PRAYERS. Whenever anyone shares a prayer request at any time you stop and pray with them. Whenever you or they think of someone in need, pray. It doesn't matter if they are going out the back of the church or if they are mowing their grass. Prayer becomes natural as breathing. Prayer has to leave the realm of a defined moment in a religious setting. Prayer becomes real because they really believe in it and not just talk about it a lot. That reminds me of a grave error we have a tendency to make. We tend to talk more about people's needs than praying about them. A long time ago I decided that I did not want to be on a church's prayer list where they spent more time talking about my need than praying for my need. I have been in churches where prayer requests were shared for nearly an hour and then a generic 30 second prayer was offered for all those needs. When I am in need that is not what I am looking for. And I bet you aren't either. But please give my name and need to a church that spends more time praying than talking about prayer!

A prayer saturated church covers all that it does in prayer. They bathe their VBS, their worship services in prayer. They bathe their Sunday School teachers in prayer long before Sunday morning. Families are covered in prayer long before there is a problem. A prayer saturated church has a lot of praying but it isn't confined to its prayer meetings. These people pray at home for one another and not just at the House of the Lord.

A prayer saturated church must start with the leaders. The pastor and the deacons must be men of prayer. For the likes of me I cannot understand a church having a deacon that will not pray in public. Do they think that they are better than Jesus? Do they not know that the first qualification of a deacon is that he is to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Do they not know that the Holy Spirit prays constantly for us, so should not a deacon or pastor filled with the Holy Spirit be praying constantly for God's people?

You will have a very difficult time leading your church to become a House of Prayer if any of your leaders will not be men of prayer. How will you ever be able to fulfill James 5 if they will not pray? By the way, a call by a family in need to come to them and pray over them is not the time to get caught up on your praying. A House of Prayer has leaders that are not afraid to pray and who are ready to offer righteous prayers at any moment because they stay cleaned up and prayed up.

What kind of man of prayer are you?

A Church of Faith and of the Word – A church that is faith-filled has no problem in moving in the direction of becoming a House of Prayer. Biblical faith, as it relates to prayer, is always connected to a revealed will of God. For example, the prayer for salvation is faith based on the promise of Romans 10. Another example would be the prayer for wisdom in James 1. Prayer faith is deeply connected to the Word and will of God. In a House of Prayer the people believe that what the Word says is true and they not only seek to live by it, but they also strive to pray by it. Their faith is Word based. Now I don't know many churches that will say that they are weak on faith or that they don't believe in the Word, but I will tell you that all churches are not the same when it comes to faith and the Word.

Churches with weak prayer are generally weak in faith. Churches that are generally weak in faith are generally weak on the Word. Now you are thinking that I am talking about some liberal church, and that is generally true for them, but I have seen many theologically conservative churches that were very weak in their praying because they were very weak in their faith when it came to prayer. That weakness in their praying came as a result of a weakness in their understanding of the Word. For example: Which do you believe more? Does God answer prayer or does He answer you? We are not like the other religions of the world. All other religions believe that their god answers prayer, but none of them believe that their god answers them. We believe that God answers His children and because we believe that God answers His children we believe that He answers us. We believe that God has a relationship with us and not with a religious activity, like prayer. His commitment is to His people and not to prayer. That is one of the major distinguishing characteristics of Christianity. We also believe that the most important thing is not the praying but the submitting to His will. Would you not agree that it is more important

that we live according to His will than just pray according to His will? Some may be praying according to His will but they are not seeing anything happen when they pray because they refuse to live according to His will (Psalm 66:18).

Most of the churches where I have found weak faith in relationship to prayer, it is because of some “story”, some testimony that they share in common. As a Prayer Consultant for the Tennessee Baptist Convention, there were many occasions where pastors would share a story with me that robbed them or their church of their faith. Generally there was a situation that arose and they asked God to do something and they felt that He didn’t. When He didn’t do as they asked Him to do, something happened to their faith. They still prayed but not with the faith that they had before.

A “prayer story” is common with people that are struggling with their faith as it relates to prayer. I have seen this affect pastors, church staff, deacons, church members, and even whole congregations. Let me illustrate this by sharing a “prayer story” that was related to me by a pastor several years ago. I had just finished speaking on this subject at an association event. A pastor asked to have breakfast with me on the next morning. I agreed. The next morning I met him and one of his staff. He immediately began to tell me his church’s “prayer story”. Two very vibrant and committed teens answered the call to ministry through the church’s ministry, one a male and one a female. These teens were children of two of the church’s secretaries. The teens fell in love and were married and went off to seminary to prepare for a very promising ministry. Not long into their studies the young girl found out that she had cancer. The church mobilized in prayer. They prayed and fasted with great anticipation and expectation of perfect and complete healing. Healing as they desired did not happen. The young girl died. The pastor shared with me that when she died his faith and the faith of his church died as well. He said that they all believed with full confidence that she was going to be healed. They believed that it had to be the will of God for her to be healed. They prayed and she died. He said we still pray but not with faith any more, at least not like we use to.

Through my years as a Prayer Consultant I heard many “prayer stories” like this. Of course, I have heard of the “prayer praise stories” too, but stories like this are not uncommon. These stories affect the faith of the person of prayer and the congregation of a people of prayer.

That pastor asked me a strong and powerful question, “How can we return to a “prayer faith” like we had before?” Let me share what I shared with him and with others since then.

First, I am uncertain that a “prayer faith” that does not allow for God to do what He desires to do is healthy. “Prayer faith” has to allow God to be God. When things don’t go as we desire in prayer we must still hold on to God and on to prayer. We must be able to be teachable through that moment and recognize that only understanding God answering prayer in the way that we want makes us Lord and not Him. That kind of faith is not biblical faith. The belief that only understands God answering prayer when He does exactly what we ask is not biblical faith. The biblical understanding of God answering prayer is much greater than God doing what we ask. The biblical understanding of God answering prayer is much more about God showing up in a way where His will is done and not just ours.

Second, I shared with him the three P’s of growing and restoring “prayer faith”. These three P’s are: Proclamation; Praise; and Prayer. Romans 10:17 states, “so then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Faith grows in an environment of the Proclamation of the Word of God. This is critical to knowing Him and to understanding His will, which is critical to praying with effects. God’s people need to hear what God did when they prayed. But God’s people also need to hear what He is doing today as they pray. This is called Praise. We aren’t good at praise. We make two grave errors when it comes to Praise: We don’t do it often enough and we only do it when God does exactly what we ask. Biblical praise is not based on God doing exactly what we ask. Praise is still giving God glory even when He does something new and unlike what we asked Him to do. Praise is not about Prayer, it is about God. Faith grows where God’s people Proclaim the full counsel of the Word of God and when they Praise Him regardless of the response of God to our prayers. Faith also grows through steadfast and continuous prayer. At some point those with “prayer stories” must begin to pray again. Like the father with the sick son, they must say to God, “help me in my unbelief.” At some point they must dare to believe again.

A House of Prayer is deeply rooted in its faith and in the Word. Are you?

A House of Prayer has all of the types of prayers – I think it is a shame that for most churches the only type of prayer they talk about

or know anything about is Asking Prayers. Prayer is much more than Asking. There are at least six types of prayers recorded in scripture: 2 types of asking; Petition and Intercession, then Praise, Thanksgiving, Worship, and Confession.

Petition – Petition is the most common in our churches today. This is asking for something from God for you or for those you love. In all petitions “you” is somehow connected. It is either for you, your family, your church, your... There is a need and you have come asking. I often hear people say I never ask any thing for myself. They think that this is a good thing, but they fail to realize that it is a statement of PRIDE. I have often said to these individuals, “So you think that you are better and stronger than Jesus?” They always answer with a quick NO. I then point out that Jesus was constantly asking for Himself and constantly encouraged us to ask. Sometimes these individuals will say something to the effect that God has much bigger things to do then to spend taking care of their needs. Again this is a statement of pride and of very shallow theology. God is not like them, he is never overwhelmed. He is never too busy. He is already taking care of them and they don’t even realize it. Their god is not the real and only God of the Bible.

Intercession – Intercession is often confused with Asking prayer in general, but, biblically, intercession is beyond you and yours. Intercession is praying for others, for missionaries, pastors and church leaders (in the purest sense intercession is praying for pastors and church leaders of other churches other than your own), the lost, the sick, and those that are in need. Intercession, like petition, is an asking prayer of supplication.

Thanksgiving and Praise – The difference between thanksgiving and praise is often lost in most Baptist churches today. The difference between the two is simple: Thanksgiving gives thanks for a bounty received from God. In thanksgiving you can name exactly what you have received from the hand of God. Thanksgiving is giving God thanks for what He has done. Praise is giving God honor for who He is. Praise focuses on His attributes while Thanksgiving focuses on what has been received.

Worship – Worship prayers are the least understood today. In the Bible they are repetitive in nature. The person is caught up in the person of God and is in a state of awe that God would be mindful of Him. Praise and thanksgiving will generally surround the prayers of

worship. Many of the modern praise songs of today are repetitive in nature because the writer was overwhelmed by the presence of God. The prayers of worship are generally some of the shortest prayers in scripture. I believe that in their purest sense they have few words because the person of prayer is speechless in the presence of God.

Confession – Prayers of confession are more than naming ones sins. There are three things that are confessed in the prayers of confession in scripture: Sin, Need, and Lordship. The prayer of salvation begins with this type of praying and has all three confessions. For example, the prayer of the Publican in the parable of the Publican and Pharisee is an excellent example of this: “God have mercy on me for I am a sinner.” He confesses Lordship in calling upon God. He confesses need when he expresses his desire for mercy. He confesses sin when he declares himself to be a sinner. Of all the confessions, the confession of lordship is of greatest importance. One day every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Today many come to our altars and superficially confess their sins but never surrender to His Lordship and so they return to their sins because they have never dealt with His Lordship. Salvation is not just confession of our sins but surrender to His Lordship. Confession is often a missing element of our prayer meetings. We rush in and out and never deal with our sins.

A House of Prayer is characterized by all types of prayers and not just asking prayers. Most of our prayer meetings and prayer rooms are all about asking instead of giving God what is rightly His – ourselves.

Leading your church to become a House of Prayer is not a goal among many, it is about being God’s people.

CONCLUSION

Becoming a House of Prayer is not beyond reach; God wouldn't expect His house to be a house of prayer if it were impossible. It's not that hard either. Becoming a House of Prayer is all about the heart. A pastor who has a passionate heart for seeking God through prayer will find that it comes natural and his people will see it and sense it.

But it does take consistent praying and consistent modeling. It will not happen by a man who just wants more praying for a season. It only comes from a man who truly desires to be a man of God, and, thus a man of prayer. This kind of House of Prayer is more contagious than taught, but for it to be caught the pastor must be infected by a heart that is afflicted for things of God and who believes that God is waiting for him to humble himself before Him and seek His face for what God desires to give.

Are you that kind of pastor?

CONTRIBUTOR BIO:

Don Pierson served as the Tennessee Baptist Convention's Prayer Strategist for almost 13 years. He has been blest to teach on prayer for a couple of decades. He has intentionally sought to mentor pastors in prayer for more than three decades. For nearly 12 years he served as a Church Planter, both nationally (North Carolina) and internationally (Belize). He is the author of, *IT Praying: What is your IT?* and *Desperate For God*. He presently serves as pastor of Stewart's Chapel Baptist Church, Flintville, Tennessee. He has devoted most of his life to leading God's people in intercession that is focused on the callings of the Church: praying for God's name to be hallowed, His kingdom to come, and His will to be done in all of the earth. He longs for a true spiritual revival of God's people and a spiritual awakening in the world. He invites you to join him in praying for such a movement of God.



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