Lesson 12: The Heartbeat of a Live Prayer Meeting

In a small church a group of fifteen or twenty believers gathered on Tuesday nights in a semi-circle eager to unite in prayer to face life's battles in the strength of the Lord. Most of the group were married and in their late thirties or early forties. They were joined by three or four grandparents. Sharing their burdens and blessings in prayer helped blend their lives into one body.

The life of this prayer meeting was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who was present and actively in charge. He was there because this group very earnestly prayed, "Lord, we want you to be present and actively take charge of us. We want you to change each one of us as you see fit. We want to become like you. Bring us into heaven's harmony with our Father and with one another."

The leader prayed for the meeting ahead of time and for those he thought would attend. He came prayerfully prepared to lead. However, he was ready to scrap his plans and follow the Spirit's leading.

He liked to start by singing songs like "Marching To Zion," "Higher Ground," or "Standing On The Promises." Everyone joined in and sang heartily without a piano or hymnal. They were making progress in their prayers as they stepped heavenward together. Some favorite choruses were: "The Lion of Judah," "Faith Mighty Faith," "Got Any Rivers You Think Are Uncrossable" and "God Still Moves." Anyone was free to start up a song anytime during the meeting. However, they spent about fifty minutes out of the hour praying.

After one or two stanzas of a song, someone read a few verses of Scripture. Then several people offered sentence prayers asking the Lord to take charge, praising Him for His wonderful character and thanking Him for His goodness and mercy which follow all the days of their life.

Then the men went into another room where they divided into small groups of three or four. The ladies stayed in the main room and met in their small groups. They never prayed around the circle because some were not ready to pray aloud. In these small groups burdened believers poured out their hearts to God about personal problems. They felt the strong arms of loving support from their group.

Even some of the most reserved folks had freedom to pray in a small group. A major in the Marine Reserves explained, "I have to get warmed up for this." Once he warmed up he was ready to pray in the larger group. After about 20 or 25 minutes, all the small groups returned to the main room to assemble again in a semi-circle for another 20-25 minutes.

The leader emphasized that the prayers should be short, but after others had an opportunity to pray once anyone could pray a second or third time. Some prayed only one sentence and a few prayed four or five sentences and many participated. Some prayed several times.

As everyone shared these prayers a wonderful thing happened. The group discovered that together they were building one prayer. For example, while praying for the spiritual life of the congregation, one person would pray, "Unite us in complete love and devotion to You Lord." Others would add, "Convict us of sins that hinder our love for You." "Give us a spirit of real repentance." "Teach us to love one another as Christ loved us." This was exciting evidence that the Lord was in charge.

The heart cry for the spiritual life of the congregation was patterned after Paul's prayers in Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Phil. 1:8-10; Col. 1:9-12 and others. Herbert Lockyer's book *All The Prayers Of The Bible* is a large resource for those who want to share the heart of God in prayer. The promises and instructions of the Bible can be turned into prayer, too.

Prayer for the spiritual life of the church sometimes focused on the plea that the Spirit of prayer and supplication might be poured out on the whole flock.

Winning the lost and reaching the unreached peoples of the world was the next subject. One would pray for one of their missionaries, "Lord, keep Mr. and Mrs. Jones and their children in good health." Others would add, "Encourage them when they are lonely and face meager results from their labor." "Remind them not to get so busy that they neglect their own family life or their time alone with You, Lord."

Prayer cards with specific requests for the 52 neediest nations in the world were used as reminders to pray for these countries. Prayer for an evangelistic outreach in their own community was included.

Finally, they prayed for the key 16 public officials. These were: the president, the nine Supreme Court justices, the two senators for their state, their congressman, governor, state senator and state representative. The battle to stop abortion, sodomy, pornography, crime, and racial prejudice was bathed in prayer.

The high point of the meeting came when the whole group stood together in a circle where they shared answers to prayer and reports on what God had been saying to them through their prayer meetings. Joy and rejoicing filled the room and they closed by singing to the familiar tune of "The Bells of St. Mary"

The Lion of Judah shall break every chain

And give to us the victory again and again."

(Repeat)

The heartbeat of a live prayer meeting is the fact that Christ is present and actively in charge. Even two people who mean business with God can have a live prayer meeting.

In 1949 two sisters, Peggy and Christine Smith, were burdened to pray for the dying churches on Lewis Island off the coast of Scotland where they shared a small cottage in the village of Barvas. Peggy was 84 and blind. Christine was 82 and bent almost double with arthritis. They turned their cottage into a sanctuary where they met with God. One night, God gave them a promise: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground." Day and night they pleaded this promise until empty churches were crowded with spiritually hungry people who were being saved.

James Stewart once said, "I found it almost impossible to preach the gospel with holy unction if there has not been a red hot prayer meeting before hand."

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

* Have you ever noticed how much has been said or accomplished by a very short prayer?
* Read the following short Bible prayers and make notes on your observations:   
  Matthew 6:9-13; John 11:41b-42; Romans 15:5-7, 13, 33; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 13:14; Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Philippians 1:8-10; Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; 5:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; 16-17; 3:5.
* Then read Ecclesiastes 5:1-3. Now encourage your class to keep their prayers in a group very short. Anyone can pray more than once, but they should practice limiting each prayer to not more than 5 or 6 short sentences.

RESEARCH FOR INSTRUCTOR

* What experiences have you had with various prayer groups?
* What is each individual's responsibility to make a prayer meeting successful?
* Review the four major elements of effective prayer groups found in this study.
* What is the main element in a live prayer meeting?
* Why is it advisable not to pray around a circle?
* What are the advantages of sentence prayers?
* What is the role of the leader in a live prayer meeting?
* How can brief spontaneous singing be incorporated into prayer times?
* What other factors mentioned in this chapter were an encouragement to praying in faith?
* Would you like to be part of a prayer meeting similar to the one described in this chapter? Why not get started?
* How could a couple adapt the concepts of this chapter to their prayer times? How could a very small group do this?