

RENOVATING THE WEDNESDAY NIGHT PRAYER MEETING
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Proposal: To prepare a written project regarding reviewing and overhauling the Wednesday night prayer service by presenting a Biblical and practical plan of ministry.

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RENOVATING THE WEDNESDAY NIGHT PRAYER SERVICE

The Wednesday night prayer service was once known as the Hour of Power but it has become the Hour of Sour. Scores of churches are committed to the Wednesday night prayer service because they have always had one, but most churches are experiencing a midweek service that lacks power and attendance. The old adage of, “Prayer changes things, and prayer changes people” is biblically true, but churches are abandoning their prayer service because no one attends. If the least attended and the most cancelled service is the prayer meeting, what does that convey about the state of the church? Could this be the reason why most churches have no spiritual depth? There is a definite correlation between the two. The Wednesday night prayer service is in danger of becoming extinct with many church doors closed on Wednesday night.

According to internet sources, attendance figures for the Wednesday night service were not even available. Ministry leaders need to be conscious of not allowing attendance to determine the validity of the service. To have a crowd on Wednesday night is not the point; we need to pray regardless of the size of the crowd. Even though we desire to develop the prayer service and we want our people to participate, we must be careful to keep our emphasis in the right place. The primary purpose and objective of the prayer service is to focus upon our dependence in Jesus Christ and cultivate a heart for prayer among His people.

According to the Scriptures, conducting a prayer service on Wednesday night was not instituted by God. A prayer meeting can be held on any day and at any time of the week. For example, Charles Haddon Spurgeon had Monday night prayer meetings at the

Metropolitan Tabernacle Church in London, England. The revivals in New York City began with the noon-hour prayer meetings that were held during the weekdays. Spurgeon reported that the Monday night prayer meetings at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, had the entire floor sections filled to capacity with overflow crowds in the balcony. According to Spurgeon, “It (the Monday night prayer meeting) accounted for the success of the ministry.”¹

The power of a praying church is undisputable, so why are we seeing such a decline in the effectiveness of the Wednesday night prayer meeting? God’s people ought to be a praying people, drawing nigh unto God in prayer. God’s church ought to be a “house of prayer” where we fight our battles on our knees. When you find a praying church, you have found a powerful church. When you find praying individuals, you have found powerful men and women of God. What the church needs today is more prayer warriors like Elijah; by whose praying the clouds kept or released their rain.

I. The History of our Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting

The Wednesday Night Prayer Service had fallen on hard times at the Medora Community Bible Church. In 1991, nearly 60 people were attending the Sunday morning service, but only six to ten people would participate in the midweek service. Sadly, the church board decided to close Wednesday night service completely and focus on building our Sunday morning services. After a year without a midweek service, individuals within the church began to ask for the prayer meeting to return.

After expressing their desire to gather together for prayer and hearing their commitment to attend, we reinstated our midweek prayer service. Like most fundamental churches, our service consisted of basically announcements, hymns, prayer requests,

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *Only a Prayer Meeting* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1973), 6.

message, and then we scattered out in groups of two to five people to pray. At this time, the church was growing through conversion and people would often visit on Wednesday night, but hardly anyone stayed. We seemed to be in the same phase as before, listless and lethargic. For the next eight years, the Wednesday night service was by far the least attended service. Many churches in our city had already closed their doors on their midweek service, and we felt that same despair.

By May of 2000, the Sunday morning attendance was averaging around 380, but less than 10 percent were attending the Wednesday night service. I sought the Lord's counsel in my prayer time. I prayed, "Lord, the people need to mature; we need prayer time. Why won't the people take part? How can I help this congregation understand the importance of individual and corporate prayer?" The principal thought the Lord laid upon my heart was this: change the manner in which the people pray. This idea began a major focus and thrust in renovating the Wednesday night service. Along with a college course entitled, "The Local Church: Building and Growing in the 21st Century", we began to implement changes that not only renovated our service, but restored the purpose, power, and fire to our prayer service.

II. The Biblical Purpose for Prayer Meetings

The Scriptural purpose of a prayer meeting is evident in its name; it is a time set aside for the congregation to pray sincerely to God. Churches typically give only lip service to praying, because a majority of the time is not spent in prayer. If there is one Scriptural requirement for a prayer meeting it would be that the people pray. The prayer service upholds all of the activities and plans of the local church through intercessory prayer; this is corporately done in the prayer meeting. The prayer service should be the

spiritual catalyst for the church and all of its ministries.

The Bible is clear in stating the importance of prayer. Jesus said, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”² The Apostle Paul explained in Romans 8:26 that, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” This verse teaches us how the Holy Spirit helps in our prayer life. He helps us pray when we do not know what to pray, and the Holy Spirit provides guidance for us to the Father. In Ephesians 6:18 we read, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” The New Testament teaching continues in Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

According to Scripture, corporate prayer is important. In his book *Basic Theology* Charles C. Ryrie commented that, “Prayer was practiced both individually and corporately according to Acts 4:24-31; 6:4; 10:9; 13:3; and I Timothy 2:1-8.”³ The pattern for praying was modeled by the saints of the early church in Acts 2:42, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Acts 4:31 states further, “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.” We also read in Acts 6:6 another example of corporate prayer, “Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.” There are at least another dozen verses on praying

² Luke 18:1.

³Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1986), 498.

recorded in the book of Acts alone.

One of the key ingredients of an excellent local church is prayer. In Acts 12 we see an example of a praying church. The church in Jerusalem demonstrated the many aspects of how a church should pray. First of all, in Acts chapter 12 we observe the frequency of prayer, “Peter, therefore, was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing by the church unto God for him” and they continued praying for him late into the evening. The early church continually prayed and so should we (I Thessalonians 5:17). In the New Testament, the Apostle James explained the fervency of prayer, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”⁴ Two of the major components of prayer in the first century church were frequency and fervency.

Secondly, when we examine further the church at Jerusalem, we see that they practiced corporate prayer, “And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.”⁵ The book of Romans also encourages us, “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation, continuing diligently in prayer.”⁶ From these Scriptures we see that many in the early church were uniting together in prayer.

Thirdly, let us examine whom they addressed in their prayer. They did not pray unto angels, Mary, other saints, or Mother Earth; they prayed to God. Many people today are confused and simply ignorant of the One they are addressing in prayer. How can prayer possibly be successful when people do not know to whom they are praying? Jesus demonstrated the correct way to address our prayers in John 17:1, “These words spoke Jesus and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, ‘Father.’” Jesus also taught us in the

⁴ James 5:16b.

⁵ Acts 12:5, 12.

⁶ Romans 12:12.

Lord's Prayer to pray after this manner, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name."⁷ Our prayers are to be addressed unto our heavenly Father.

George Barna on his website noted, "The research suggests that large numbers of people who have no type of personal relationship with Jesus Christ or who possess an unorthodox view of God nevertheless pray to God on a regular basis. The emphasis upon prayer during the past five years has influenced many people. However, many people pray without any sense of assurance that there is a living and powerful God who hears their prayers, or that they are praying to a God who has offered forgiveness for their sins. For many Americans, prayer is like snacking—we don't really think about it, but we do it out of habit and without much passion."⁸

Fourthly, the prayers offered up by the church at Antioch were specific. According to the passage in Acts 12, they were interceding for Peter. They were not praying rote prayers or praying for general blessings, they were bringing before the Lord a specific need. A great deal of prayer time today is just wasted babble. Many individuals often pray monotonously with little thought or purpose to their requests. These types of prayers end up being nothing more than vain repetitions. Others attempt to communicate with God by reading prayers. This type of prayer is not heart-felt or Holy Spirit guided; in essence they are simply reciting mere words without thought and passion.

Finally, in Acts 12:17 we read how answered prayer creates excitement. The recently released Peter, "... beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison." These saints had

⁷ Matthew 6:9.

⁸ Barna Research Online.

prayed corporately, frequently, and specifically for Peter’s release and God answered their prayer! There is nothing that generates excitement and deepens faith more than witnessing the direct intervention of God in answered prayer.

Throughout the Bible we see abundant examples of the Lord responding to prayer. The Lord grants wisdom to those who pray, as in the case of Daniel, “And while I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people, Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD, my God,” and the Lord answered, “I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved.”⁹

Sometimes prayers are answered immediately and sometimes they are delayed, “He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out; he hath made my chain heavy. Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.”¹⁰ The Lord also answers in times of trial, “In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God; and he did hear my voice out of his temple and my cry did enter into his ears.”¹¹ The Lord often times answers our prayers, “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” according to Ephesians 3:20.

Conversely, God does not answer every prayer. He is not a genie that rescues distressed individuals from the consequences of their sin. According to Proverbs 1:24-29, the Lord has a definite response to these types of prayers, “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come upon you.

⁹ Daniel 9:20-23.

¹⁰ Lamentations 3:7-8.

¹¹ II Samuel 22:7.

Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me, For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.” An additional verse gives credence to the fact that the Lord will not always hear prayer, “And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king whom ye shall have chosen; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.”¹²

Another reason prayer is not answered is because we pray with the wrong motives. In James 4:2-3 we read, “Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” The scribes and Pharisees were rebuked by Jesus in Matthew 23:14 because “for a pretense” they made long prayers. Jesus said they would therefore receive a greater damnation. Some prayers can even bring judgment, “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.”¹³

The Father is willing to hear and answer prayer and Jesus encouraged us come before Him with our requests, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”¹⁴ It is also important that when we pray, we come before Him with a clean heart and pure hands, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. But verily God hath heard me; He hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer or His mercy from me.”¹⁵ However, I John 5:14-15 offers the believer the following encouragement, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will,

¹² I Samuel 8:18

¹³ Proverbs 28:9

¹⁴ Matthew 7:7.

¹⁵ Psalm 66:18-20.

he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”

Many of the great heroes of the Word demonstrated the importance of prayer in their lives: Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Paul, with Jesus being the supreme example. The Scriptural command is clear, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”¹⁶ God’s Word says be anxious for nothing; do not worry, fret, or get nervous. Everything is to be handled by prayer and supplication, bringing our needs and the needs of others to the Lord in prayer. In Ephesians 6:18 we are instructed, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” The church today has a biblical purpose and mandate from the Scriptures to pray. Yet in our churches people do not pray. The question that comes is this, “Why are we neglecting this spiritual command?”

When people complain about not seeing God at work in their lives, some of the questions to ask are, “How is your prayer life? Do you ever make it to Prayer Meeting?” Many do not see God actively working because they are not in communication with Him. God has clearly instructed His church to pray. Why then is the prayer service the least attended and most neglected service in the church?

III. The Cultural Tendencies Regarding Prayer Meetings

Nationwide, the prayer service has come under attack more than any other service. The most commonly prescribed cure for the ailing prayer service is to just cancel it. With plummeting attendance and powerless services, many churches have responded to their dilemma in one of two ways.

¹⁶ Philippians 4:6.

First of all, some ministries try to protect the old fashioned prayer meeting, and dare anyone to change it. Steeped in tradition and a mindset of, “We’ve always done it this way” can eventually suffocate and stagnate the service until it eventually dies. On the other hand, others quickly jump for new and alternate plans, which may include substituting the prayer service with an entirely new program. The premise for Wednesday night becomes, “Something is better than nothing.” I personally do not have deep-seated convictions against offering different ministry programs on Wednesday night, but I strongly believe the church should gather for prayer.

IV. The Reasons Why Many Prayer Meetings Do Not Succeed

One of the primary reasons prayer meetings do not succeed is that those in charge of the service do not consider the working person’s time and energy. Individuals who make the effort to attend after a long day of work find that the service starts late and therefore ends even later. It is important that the prayer meeting start on time so people do not sense they are sitting around, wasting time, waiting for the service to start. If you want your prayer meeting to succeed, start it on time and end it within the hour. Some of the Wednesday night crowd will drive a long distance to come to church, even skipping supper to get there, so we need to be sure we are ready to begin when they arrive. The length of the service is not the measuring stick for a successful service. The prayer meeting that languishes drives people away.

Another major reason why many prayer meetings do not succeed is related to publicly taking prayer requests. The time wasted in taking prayer requests delays and sometimes drowns the service. Sharing a prayer “request” can sometimes become gossip disguised as concern for a particular individual or situation. The information shared at

the prayer service is then repeated to others. Instead of sharing through prayer in the needs and hurts of others, the service resembles a coffeehouse where individuals “request” prayer for someone’s great aunts’ sister in California who has an ailing pet. Instead of a prayer filled service many churches have a yakking service about needless things. More time is spent in taking requests than in actual prayer.

Churches that provide a prayer list for their midweek service often make the mistake of allowing the list to become the focus of the service. Bombarding people with a long list of depressing prayer requests can leave those in attendance feeling depressed and overwhelmed with needs; there needs to be a balance. Focusing on the prayer requests can also foster a “me” centeredness to the service instead of focusing our attention upon God and His power to answer prayer.

Some conservative churches have prayer services where the preacher prays for all the requests. During his long, lengthy prayers it is easy for people to wander in their concentration, losing track of the significance of what is taking place. Individuals in these types of services often feel left out of the whole prayer process, or they may sense that only the pastor has the correct spiritual language to effectively pray. Shouldn’t the purpose of the prayer meeting be for each individual to pray, bringing their heart and requests before an almighty Father?

Another reason people are discouraged from attending the prayer service is that they simply do not know how to pray. This is often the case with a new Christian. He desires to communicate with his heavenly Father but feels inadequate in addressing his Lord. Not only do people not know how to pray, they also do not know what they should pray for; should I pray for the Lord to bless me, or give me everything I want?

Many Christians have never been taught how to biblically pray. When pastors ask new believers to gather with others for prayer, they often feel intimidated and inadequate; frequently they do not return. The disciples sought guidance from Jesus in Luke 11:1, “And it came to pass that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’” If the disciples, who had the privilege of living and being with the Savior, were seeking instruction, we should not assume that those attending the prayer service know how to effectively pray.

An additional factor in the failure of the midweek service is that no childcare is provided. Many a parent, after wrestling their children to the church, spend the entire service distracted and subsequently head for home wondering why they even bothered coming. C. Sumner Wemp in his book *The Guide to Practical Pastoring* encourages ministries to, “Have a good nursery and nursery staff. Don’t come in and ask for volunteers at the last minute. No mother wants to leave a baby with a halfhearted volunteer. Young mothers won’t come back if they find, at the last minute, that they have to keep their own baby and a couple of others during the prayer service. No wonder many young couples do not come to church.”¹⁷ Often the response to nursery on Wednesday night is, “We have difficulty staffing our Sunday services. How can we possibly get volunteers to come in the middle of the week?”

Numerous ministries do not place an importance or emphasis on their prayer service. If the people never hear about the exciting things taking place in the prayer service, answered prayers and upcoming special events, the incentive to attend is not understood. On the other end of the spectrum is the preacher who makes his people feel guilty for not attending the antiquated prayer meeting. Individuals should attend the

¹⁷C. Sumner Wemp, *The Guide to Practical Pastoring* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1982), 249.

midweek service out of a desire to gather together to hear God's Word and pray, and not to just get the preacher "off my back!"

Sadly, an additional reason why many midweek services do not succeed is because the preacher is just plain lazy. No Wednesday night service means one less sermon to prepare and a night off during the week. The three-sermons-a-week pastor can easily fall prey to "doing in" the prayer services. He may also be tempted to think, "Since no one is coming anyway, why should I spend my time preparing a sermon no one is going to hear?"

V. The Changes Implemented in our Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting

One of the most important changes implemented into our prayer service was changing the way we prayed. Instead of breaking up into groups, we went to praying silently and individually, which allowed us to pray more. We encouraged our people to kneel or sit and to pray for at least seven to ten minutes. One of our goals was to put at ease those who were not used to praying out loud or with other people. Our congregation was made up of primarily newborn Christians; praying individually was more personal and less inhibiting for them.

Altering the way we prayed proved to be beneficial in teaching the people to concentrate and lengthen the amount of time they spent in prayer. Prayer is a discipline that can be learned. This structural change has made the greatest impact and brought about the most visible results in improving our prayer service.

A valuable tool we have used to improve our prayer time is our prayer sheet. Each week we distribute to all who come a copy of the various requests. In order to get a concern or need listed on the prayer sheet, an individual must submit the request in

person, letter, or by phone to the church secretary by Wednesday noon. If an individual has an urgent request the evening of prayer meeting, we ask them to write it down and give it to the secretary before the service begins. She then prepares a copy for the pastor and he determines if and how much of the need should be shared with the congregation.

It is important to keep the prayer sheet updated; it is a valuable tool for directed prayer, and it also reminds people of upcoming events at the church that need prayer. On our prayer list we include: ministry needs (events, meetings, board members, financial needs); missionaries (each with their country listed); shut-ins and the sick and injured (listed by name); all pregnant ladies and expectant due dates; our country (government, president, and national sins); the youth and college students of our church; spiritual needs (names of those who need salvation or other spiritual needs); and finally an additional section for the various miscellaneous requests. Highlighting in bold type any urgent prayer need or upcoming event has also been beneficial.

The overall purpose for the prayer sheet is to communicate prayer requests to others, and to encourage prayer outside of the prayer service. Individuals may place this list in their Bible and are reminded to pray. It is important to include, along with the requests, the many ways the Lord has answered prayer. Relating answered prayer to the congregation increases our faith and it also creates excitement in the hearts of those praying and encourages them to continue on. According to Psalms 100:4, we are to, “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise.” In the midst of all our praying, it is vital that we do not neglect to praise our Savior as well. The Lord delights in the praise of His people.

We have also included into our prayer service a spotlight on missions. This is

usually a short update (two minutes or less) given by one of our elders. This helps our people to be familiar with the missionaries they are praying for, and it has served as a good means in communicating their most urgent needs to the congregation. With missionaries e-mailing their newsletters and frequent updates, our people sense they have almost a direct contact with their brothers and sisters serving on the field.

The midweek service can be an exciting one; keep the service interesting through change. Changing the order of the service helps keep the people guessing what will take place this week. Sometimes our prayer time is early in the service; other times we switch things around and pray at the end of the service. This has added a little dimension of surprise to the prayer service.

Adding a music leader who is creative in choosing songs has added another facet to our service. Our music leader has introduced our fairly young congregation to some of the old forgotten hymns. Hymns that contain a tremendous biblical message have been eagerly received and greatly enjoyed. Many of the old hymns are no longer found in the church hymnal, so we photocopy the old songs onto the back of the prayer sheet. Each month we feature a different theme song to open the service. By the end of the month, the song is so familiar that many in the congregation do not even need their song sheet to sing along. Those that attend the midweek service leave with an additional blessing: a new spiritual song to brighten their spiritual walk.

It is also good to have people come and sing special music. Incorporating a youth choir on a regular basis along with college-ministry teams adds variety to the Wednesday night service. We are currently in the process of developing a small orchestra made up of our teens and adults; it will be led by a trained orchestra man. Giving the opportunity to

minister with a musical instrument at a Wednesday night service will help produce confidence in the musician, and that will hopefully extend their ministry to the Sunday morning service.

An idea that we have used this past summer is a concert series. Once a month for three months we featured a different musical ministry team for our midweek service. The concerts have been glorifying to God and a source of encouragement to the people. Again, offering this concert series helped change the order of our services, and it also brought out individuals to the Wednesday night service that would not generally come.

Another aspect we have added to our midweek service is taking up an offering. This has been very helpful to those in our congregation who may have to work on Sundays or were away from services the past week due to illness, vacation, etc. It has allowed them to give of their tithes and offerings without waiting until the next worship service. The offerings have been of good size and it has been surprising. We usually go over the Prayer List during the offering time (when we have a special instrumentalist, they will play during this time).

For the young teens who attend on Wednesday night we have integrated a discipleship training course. This course has been beneficial in preparing our teens to comprehend and effectively share their faith with others. We also encourage those who are discipling others to meet with their partner either before or after prayer service. Meeting at the church provides a neutral location and the opportunity to also attend the prayer service.

We have prepared a well staffed nursery to provide childcare for infants through age three. Parents who bring their young children are no longer distracted in the prayer

service and their children are not distracting others.

Bringing in a special speaker is another way to draw interest to the midweek service. On occasion we have also featured men who are “apt to teach” from our own congregation and our young men who are studying for the ministry. Several months ago our youth led the entire Wednesday night service. They were in charge of the announcements, special music, led the congregational singing and two young men provided the challenge from God’s Word. The entire service was a tremendous blessing to all involved. Allowing someone besides the pastor to bring the Wednesday night message helps add diversity to the service and provides an opportunity for others to minister the Word of God to the saints.

The ushers play a key role on Wednesday nights in greeting the people and being hospitable hosts. It is important that the Ushers arrive early and make themselves available to serve wherever needed.

After receiving numerous requests from our people we began recording our midweek service. Many have commented how much they appreciate getting the sermon to take home.

Hospitality and fellowship are an integral part of the Wednesday night prayer service. A light meal prepared for the church family 30-45 minutes before the service or a simple snack offered after the service can help foster fellowship among your people.

Sumner Wemp offered a legitimate idea for developing the prayer service. He gave the following account, “During the Sunday school hour I went to two men and gave them a genuine pitch for prayer meeting. My opinion was that prayer meeting should be one of the most blessed services in the church. I wanted people to come in the middle of

the week and get a spiritual boost to keep them going the rest of the week. I told them that I needed their help and asked if they and their families would be my special guests the next Wednesday night. Both readily consented. Their combined families meant eleven new people already planning to come.”

“During the announcements in the Sunday morning service, I once again gave encouragement to attend the Wednesday night service. I asked all who attended the week before to stand. All twenty-three stood. Then I told of my special guests who were going to be there. Finally, I asked who else would come the next Wednesday and help us build a great Wednesday evening service. A couple of other families stood. The next Wednesday we had fifty-seven in the service. It was the most ever in that church on Wednesday evening.”

“The next Sunday I followed the identical procedure during Sunday school and church service. All who were there the Wednesday before stood. It was quite impressive. Many were surprised to see who was coming. In two months we were having over two hundred come, and it never went below that number.”¹⁸

VI. The Means to Renovate the Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting

Trying to revive the prayer service can be likened to trying to correct a vehicle that has slipped off the shoulder of the road. An astute driver will gently and gradually guide his vehicle back onto the highway, reducing the chances of a rollover and catastrophic damage taking place to his vehicle. The same is true with re-directing the Wednesday night prayer service. Helpful changes can be simply and gently implemented with the ultimate goal of keeping the service on track, headed in a direction that pleases the Lord and fulfills His desire for us to come together and pray.

¹⁸ Wemp, 250-251.

The same planning and fervor that goes into other church services and events should be given to the Wednesday night service. If you are committed to revising and renovating your Wednesday night service, I offer the following proposals:

Preach on it - This has been key in developing hearts for prayer meeting. The pastor must set a high value upon this service. Christians realize that prayer is an integral part of walking with God, and Wednesday night helps them discipline themselves to pray at length.

Messages - Take the time to prepare practical and pertinent messages. Leftovers will not suffice; preaching dry messages without much study and little energy will not do. Bring a dynamic Biblical message by putting great effort into it. “Good singing, special music, and fresh messages from God are a must.”¹⁹ We need to give those that attend something worth coming for.

Preaching an entire book, verse by verse, and occasionally intersperse with other brief series, gives the people variety and stability. Try to plan a series of messages on exciting themes. A series can generate a lot of interest if you use fascinating titles. If you can get the people to the first message of the series, hopefully they will commit for the rest of the sermons. Reading a newspaper article, or commenting on current events in the light of the Scripture, adds to the sermon and relates to the people that their preacher is in touch with the world around him.

Encourage it - Emphasize the Wednesday night prayer service by announcing one Sunday morning, “Folks, if you have been missing Wednesday nights, you’ve been missing something!” The preacher should promote the service but not to the extent of making people feel guilty for not coming. People should want to come based upon their

¹⁹ Wemp, 248.

own personal desire and conviction.

Invitation time - Give an invitation during the service, challenging the people to heed God's Word and make needed changes. You may have the people come forward during a song and pray at the altar for a few minutes, or encourage them to pray silently in their seats about what God has laid on their hearts.

Informal structure - The Wednesday night service is a tremendous time to share on a more personal level with those in your congregation. Take time to share personal, informal information with your people. They will sense they have a closer relationship with their pastor after attending the midweek service. Keep the people updated on various happenings within the church. Strive to keep an informal atmosphere with a family spirit in the service. Living in a day and age where time is of the essence, it is refreshing to enter a service where the church family can come together for a time of spiritual renewal.

Prayer Requests - Implement the suggestions previously mentioned regarding prayer requests. Remind your people to call in their requests, and then have the secretary prepare the list late in the afternoon. We made a note on the bottom of the prayer sheet to call the office or to inform the secretary before service begins with individual requests and it has worked.

Children - Develop a structured program for the children who attend the prayer service. Expecting young children to sit quietly for long periods of prayer time is implausible. Instead provide an activity for them, perhaps in a separate part of the building where they could gather for singing, missionary story, Bible stories, and prayer time. Consider the Patch the Pirate program for your children on Wednesday nights. A

scaled-back version with no gimmicks to get children to attend keeps the main focus on the prayer service. A prerequisite for the children's program is that the parents attend the prayer service. The outcome of providing an interesting children's program along with the prayer service is that both the parent and child are encouraged to attend.

Fellowship - Every three months provide an activity with a fellowship emphasis (a watermelon feed; dessert night; potluck supper; etc.).

The Wednesday night prayer service can be successful. In less than twelve months, our attendance has grown to over 100. The Wednesday Night Service has become one of the most special services of the church.

A successful prayer meeting is usually the outcome of pre-service preparation and Holy Spirit direction. When no preparation has been made by the pastor, it is foolish to expect an effective prayer meeting. The pastor is not wholly to blame, but he is certainly instrumental. To get a good group and keep them coming consistently on Wednesday night, you must work at it. People will tire of a preacher that is primarily negative and discouraging; be optimistic and cheerful. Instead of bellyaching about how many did not come, rejoice over those that did.

One of the grievous sins of a prayer meeting is boredom and monotony. The service opens the same way, sing the same number of songs, follow the same order of service 52 weeks of the year. Strive to keep the sparkle in your prayer service and do not let it fall into a rut.

The overall purpose of the Wednesday night prayer service is to develop a service that centers on prayer. That purpose is the prime essential. Nothing should supplant the praying that takes place in the prayer meeting. Do not allow your prayer time to be the

last thing tacked on at the end of the service.

Renovating the Wednesday night prayer service is not an impossible task. With much prayer and effort, the Hour of Sour will once again become the Hour of Power.

“Sweet Hour of Prayer”²⁰

**Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father’s throne
Make all my wants and wishes known:**

**In seasons of distress and grief
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter’s snare
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer.**

**Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer,
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless:**

**And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His Word, and trust His grace,
I’ll cast on Him my ev’ry care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer.**

²⁰ William W. Walford, “The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration” (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Music, 1986).

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