

## Devotional Thoughts :: PRAYER REVIVAL by Jim Cymbala

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Revivals have never been dominated by eloquent or clever preaching. If you had timed the meetings of old with a stopwatch, you would have found far more minutes given to prayer, weeping and repentance than to sermons. In the "Prayer Meeting Revival" of 1857-59 there was virtually no preaching at all. Yet it apparently produced the greatest harvest of any spiritual awakening in American history: estimates run to 1,000,000 converts across the United States, out of a national population at that time of only 30,000,000. That would be proportionate to 9,000,000 today falling on their knees in repentance.

How did this happen? A quiet businessman named Jeremiah Lanphier started a Wednesday noon prayer meeting in a Dutch Reformed church here in New York City, no more than a quarter mile from Wall Street. The first week, six people showed up. The next week, twenty came. The next forty . . . and then they decided to have daily meetings.

"There was no fanaticism, no hysteria, just an incredible movement of people to pray," reports J. Edwin Orr. "The services were not given over to preaching. Instead, anyone was free to pray."

During the fourth week, the Panic of 1857 hit; the bond market crashed, and the first banks failed. (Within a month, more than 1400 banks had collapsed.) People began calling out to God more seriously than ever. Lanphier's church started having three noontime prayer meetings in different rooms. John Street Methodist Church, a few doors east of Broadway, was packed out as well. Soon Burton's Theater on Chambers Street was jammed with 3,000 people each noon.

The scene was soon replicated in Boston, New Haven, Philadelphia, Washington, and cities throughout the southern United States. By the next spring 2,000 Chicagoans were gathering each day in the Metropolitan Theater to pray. A young 21-year-old, newly arrived in the city, felt his first call to do Christian work in those meetings. He wrote his mother that he was going to start a Sunday school class. His name? Dwight L. Moody!

Does anyone really think that America today is lacking preachers, books, Bible translations, and neat doctrinal statements? What we really lack is the passion to call upon the Lord until He opens the heavens and shows Himself powerful.