

Revivals And Church History :: Concerts of Prayer info from the Revival library

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Concerts of Prayer – Part 1

Introduction

Prayer is essential in all God's work. S. D. Gordon said "You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." Another said, "Prayer is striking the winning blow . . . service is gathering up the results." E. M. Bounds declares "God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil The prayers of God's saints are the capital stock of heaven by which God carries on His great work upon earth. God conditions the very life and prosperity of His cause on prayer." If these things are true, then prayer should be the main business of our day.

God has limited himself and His activities to our prayers. He desires our partnership in the release of his grace and power. This is why John Wesley said, "God will do nothing but in answer to prayer." Christians hold the balance of power in the world today

The modern prayer movement

Today we are witnessing an extraordinary and unprecedented phenomenon. People are praying worldwide in such a volume and intensity as never before.

It began in 1984 at the International Prayer Assembly in Korea, which included 2,000 prayer-mobilizers from 70 nations who issued an "International Call to Prayer" amongst Global Christians "to call out to God for a worldwide outpouring of the Holy Spirit, to apply the work of the Cross to men and women, to awaken the church, to break the power of Satan over people's lives and to unify and empower the church for world evangelisation."

At the end of 2002, these 70 grew to almost 300 prayer network leaders from all 15 world regions. At a meeting in Cape Town, South Africa, they resolved to work together for the glory of Jesus Christ and the healing and transformation of the nations.

The Global Day of Prayer was launched on May 15, 2005, in South Africa, where in four years a single stadium event of 45,000 Africans grew to more than 2,000 venues across 56 nations and 23 million people across the continent of Africa. Like a wave, it is then spreading across the globe.

By June 2006, an estimated 250 million Christians were praying in 198 countries around the globe, and in 2007 an estimated 500 million believers were calling on God to visit the nations!

Something is happening! Today you can find prayer mountains, prayer retreats, prayer vigils, prayer conferences, prayer walks, 24/7 prayer and 30 days of prayer "When God is about to do something new He sets His people a-praying." God's end-time army is taking its place, preparing its heart for a massive, unprecedented outpouring of the HS never before seen in history!

The term "Concerts of Prayer" is commonly used to describe these gatherings for corporate prayer for revival.

The History of "Concerts of Prayer"

Joseph Tracy, the primary historian of the (First) Great Awakening, wrote "...the Concert of Prayer for the Conversion of the World was first suggested by the leading revivalists in Scotland, in October, 1744. They determined that for the next two years they would set apart some time on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings every week for prayer and it was decided that the first Tuesday of each quarter (beginning with the first Tuesday of November) would be time to be spent in prayer. People were to pray for either the entire day or part of the day, as they found themselves disposed, or as circumstances allowed. They would meet in either private prayer groups or in public meetings, whichever was found to be most convenient.

As a result a group of ministers covenanted to give themselves weekly to united extraordinary supplications to the God of all grace...earnestly praying to Him that He would appear in His glory...by an abundant effusion of His Holy Spirit. .. to revive true religion in all parts of Christendom...and fill the whole earth with His glory.

The results were positive but not particularly extraordinary. The movement spread and the evangelical cause was strengthened and the church enlarged in a small way. The practice spread throughout Great Britain, and a memorial printed in 1746 recommended that evangelicals on both sides of the Atlantic establish a formal spiritual community through a Concert for Prayer.

John Erskine, a notable evangelical leader and theologian, of Edinburgh, a Scottish Presbyterian minister who was greatly influenced by the Cambuslang Revival in 1742, sent a copy of this little book to Jonathan Edwards in New England. He had seen two periods of revival one in 1734-5 and the other between 1740-1742 and he was so moved that he wrote a response which grew longer than a letter, so that finally he published it in 1747 as a book, entitled: *A Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of All God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on earth pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies concerning the Last Time*.

He already knew that such efforts worked. He had organized meetings for prayer and praise since before the revival of 1734-35. He knew of similar awakenings in Scotland were sustained by weekly prayer meetings. The result of his research and writing was a strong case from scripture for an international Concert of Prayer.

From then on "concerts of prayer" became part of the Anglo-American evangelical scene. But enthusiasm waned when no immediate results were seen. Then there was a period of almost 40 years when this new seed was incubating.

The Concert of Prayer in the Second Great Awakening

Then, in 1784, this burden for prayer was awakened again by the same John Erskine of Edinburgh. He re-published and distributed Jonathan Edwards' earnest plea for revival prayer. Denomination after denomination devoted a monthly Monday evening to prayer, first in Britain, then in the US.

In 1791, the year John Wesley died, the storm clouds broke. The beginning of the revival can be traced to the industrial towns of Yorkshire in late 1791, spreading through all areas and denominations. The Methodists alone grew from around 72,000 at Wesley's death in 1791 to almost a quarter of a million within a generation.

At the same time, the churches in Wales became packed again and thousands gathered in the open air. The Haldanes (Robert and James) and Thomas Chalmers, with a few others, saw phenomenal awakenings in Scotland. Ireland too, saw local awakenings, especially among the Methodists.

A remarkable result of these UK revivals was the founding the British and Foreign Bible Society, The Religious Tract Society, The Baptist Missionary Society, The London Missionary Society, The Church Missionary Society and a host of other evangelistic agencies. It also achieved considerable social reform; evangelical Anglicans successfully fought for the abolition of the slave trade, prisons were reformed, Sunday Schools began and a number of benevolent institutions were commenced.

In 1794, Isaac Backus and Stephen Gano, along with twenty-three other New England ministers, distributed a circular letter which called for a concert of prayer of believers to pray for a general awakening. They agreed to begin a Concert of Prayer for a general awakening to be held at two o'clock on the first Tuesday of the four quarters of the year. They began in January 1795.

By 1798 the awakening had broken out everywhere. Every state and every evangelical denomination was affected. Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards, took over Yale College in 1795 and saw over half the students converted in just one year. Other colleges enjoyed similar movements of the Spirit.

James McGready and Barton Stone witnessed an astounding revival at Kentucky in 1800, with much trembling, shaking, tears, shouting and fainting. In 1801 Barton Stone was invited to minister at the Cambridge meeting house in Bourbon County. A second visit attracted 20,000 people to a 6-day camp-meeting, which witnessed astounding revival scenes, with hundreds falling at once, with shrieks and shouts and many conversions.

The 1859 Revival

In September 1857 Jeremiah Lanphier, a businessman and convert of Finney's (a decade before), began a noon day prayer meeting on Wednesdays in a New York church. The small but growing numbers decided to meet daily in early October.

ber. Within six months over 10,000 business men were meeting in similar meetings across America; confessing sins, being converted and praying for revival. It was a lay-led movement that harvested a million souls in two years. In 1858, from February to June, around 50,000 people a week were added to the church - in a nation whose population was only 30,000,000.

Across the Atlantic another million were won to Christ by 1865. This was in Britain's population of 27,000,000. Ulster saw 100,000 converted, Scotland 30,000, Wales 100,000 and England 500,000.

And we need not mention the Welsh revival! For thirteen years Evan Roberts prayed for a gracious outpouring of the Spirit, first alone, then with his friend, Sydney, then with a small group of recommitted young believers.

To be continued

Tony Cauchi
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