

Articles and Sermons :: We Are the Church

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We ARE the Church

I am often asked how to institute a prayer ministry in a small group or congregation. Actually, I feel a congregation is to BE a prayer ministry—a house of prayer. Isn't that what Jesus clearly said in Matthew 21:13:

And He said to them, "My dwelling place will be known as a house of prayer, but you have made it into a hangout for thieves!" (TPT)

Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 56:7:

"I will welcome you into My holy mountain and make you joyful in My house of prayer. I will accept every sacrifice and offering that you place on My altar, for My house of worship will be known as a house of prayer for all people." (TPT)

The "house" of God is no longer a building, a temple made with hands. We, the children of God, are now His house, temple or dwelling place. Our spirits are the new Holy of Holies. (The word "temple" in 1 Corinthians 6:19 is the Greek word naos, reserved for the Holy of Holies, not the entire temple.) Each of us individually is God's temple, of course - Holy Spirit indwells each of us. Yet, in another sense, we are one "living stone" of His overall temple, His corporate house, the church. No one of us can house or represent Christ the way all of us can. However, regardless of whether referencing a person or a congregation, people are God's "house", NOT the building in which they meet.

The same misconception is often believed when referring to "the church" - it, too, is often considered a building. This is horrible theology and devastating in its ramifications. The church is a people, never a building. Ligonier is a ministry dedicated to making the truths of God's Word clearly known, a discipleship ministry. In their Tabletalk online magazine, they point out that:

"When Jesus says, 'I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' (Matthew 16:18), the Greek word for "church" is *ekklesia*. In all 114 instances that the New Testament uses this word, it designates a people, or an assembly of people, responding to the call of God in Christ. It sometimes refers to the whole people of God and other times to a local congregation (Ephesians 5:27; 1 Thessalonians 1:1). In the New Testament, *ekklesia* always designates a people, never the place where they meet." (1) (Italic mine)

The point is very simple: whether speaking of one person, a small group in a home or office, or a larger formalized congregation

regation, people are God's "church" and "house" - NOT buildings. And Jesus said His house - His people - would be houses of prayer.

When Ceci and I had a congregation in Colorado Springs, we, as well as our staff, worked hard to instill this into the mindset of our congregants. We instituted prayer into everything we did. Actually, our services were largely worship and prayer meetings. We spent a significant amount of time praying for the nation, and we prayed for many other things on the heart of the Father.

Each department was encouraged to ensure that intercession was a primary part of everything they did. From our children and youth to our men and women, our home fellowships and prophetic ministries, we were a praying company. Some prayer meetings were based on topics, such as covering every aspect of our city in prayer. Others targeted individuals: we had a prayer meeting to call in our prodigals, another for government leaders, soaking prayer for individuals, and physical healing prayer times were also conducted regularly. Many people across the city came to receive ministry; we never considered our house of prayer ministries to be only for those calling us their home congregation and we never proselytized others when they came. We also initiated many national prayer calls to prayer and coordinated many prayer journeys, sometimes taking as many as 70 people.

There are a few people I consider experts in developing houses of prayer. Cheryl Sacks, a prayer leader in Phoenix, AZ, wrote *The Prayer Saturated Church*. Alvin Vander Griend, who calls himself a prayer evangelist, wrote *The Praying Church Sourcebook*. And Terry Tekyl has given us several books on prayer, including *Blueprint for the House of Prayer*. All of these are excellent sources for you in learning how to form a group into a house of prayer. There are others, but these are a few to help you.

Let's look at some things these leaders tell us about making your gathering a house of prayer:

Cheryl Sacks

If Jesus were to visit your congregation next Sunday and given complete freedom to conduct the service, what do you think He would do? I'm not sure what would happen, but most likely our agenda would be flying out the window.

At least once, Jesus did visit a "gathering" and take over the service. Matthew 21:16 contains this memorable story of Jesus, in righteous anger, running the money changers out of the temple.

In this passage, we discover the progressive steps for building a house of prayer. The first thing Jesus did was cleanse the temple of impure motives and activities, making it a house of purity.

Next, Jesus reminded us of His Father's words, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." Isaiah talks about those who will come to the house of prayer. It's a place where the broken, the foreigner, the eunuch can come and worship. This is a place where all will find acceptance. A congregation doesn't get to this place unless hearts are changed. That's one thing that happens when we pray.

Prayer and worship are all about focusing on the Lord. When we open ourselves up to Him, He will clean us up, fill us up with His nature, and send us out to change the world. We'll see salvations, miracles, liberal giving to the poor, and Christ-like living. (9)

Alvin Vander Griend

Prayer and worship belong together. From the beginning call to worship, to the benediction, between God and His people. Prayer is the most direct way to acknowledge that God is present in worship. We speak directly to God and listen for His voice in response.

Vander Griend recommends the following as some of the ways to incorporate prayer into a worship service:

- Plan a brief prayer meeting before the service.
- Incorporate prayer throughout the worship service.
- Ask different people to participate in leading prayer throughout the service.
- Encourage members' spontaneous participation in prayer during the worship.
- Encourage the congregants to pray silently while the Word is preached.
- Ask everyone to pray aloud at the same time on a specific request or topic of prayer.
- Make an altar call and ministry time a regular part of your worship service. (3)

Our corporate gatherings should become "houses of prayer" for all nations. We must incorporate prayer strategies in our gatherings. We should teach our congregants to pray and make sure everything we do is covered by prayer. Let's obey Christ - becoming presence-filled congregations and gatherings, ekklesias, exalting Jesus and making Him known in the earth.

And so you are no longer called outcasts and wanderers but citizens with God's people, members of God's holy family, and residents of His household. You are being built on a solid foundation: the message of the prophets and the voices of God's chosen emissaries with Jesus, the Anointed Himself, the precious cornerstone. In Him you are being built together, creating a sacred dwelling place among you where God can live in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-20 and 22; The VOICE)

Pray with me:

Father, forgive us for ignoring or redefining what You wanted when we come together. You are looking for intimacy with us, and ekklesias operating as houses of prayer. We often look for support networks, places to fellowship or gatherings that teach us how to be good Christians. We've missed the mark. Remind us to gather for the primary purpose of connecting with You, exalting Your name, hearing Your voice, and interceding from Your heart.

Holy Spirit, You are hovering over the church today, rebirthing something ancient, which will be new once again. You're creating fresh interaction between the church and Yourself. As we move into the Third Great Awakening, intercession will go to new levels. We will see Your life explode in the church, gifts poured out and anointings released for the cause of the great harvest.

We pray and release this in Jesus' Name! Amen.

Today's decree:

The church IS becoming a house of prayer, just as Jesus commanded.

Click on the link below to watch the full prayer.

<https://youtu.be/bzNqFbylonA>

For more information on this prayer and our sources go to www.givehim15.com