

Encompassing Your Community

Prayer & Partnership

Exodus 17:8-16; Jeremiah 29:7; 1 Timothy 2:1-8

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Bethany Church

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This is the final of seven messages on *Prayer & Partnership*. Over the past weeks, we've considered how essential prayer is. Only with prayer can you live out your identity as a companion and child of God almighty. Only with prayer can you *embrace your purpose*. Through prayer you can shape your future as you actually *empower your leaders*. Prayer is a world-class weapon that just doesn't make a dent in what you experience. It is decisive. In prayer you *enjoin the battle* that truly dominates what we experience in this world. Prayer is a gift for intimacy and healing. It offers you the power to overcome past hurts and actually *enjoy your Father* in heaven. Prayer will help you *evangelize your neighbors*. In praying for them, you can bring them good that will bless them, heal them and give them great cause to believe. Prayer can *enhance your vision*. With prayer and celebration you will be able to see so much more than the circumstances that surround you. You'll see God's unfolding plan and great power. Finally, today, you'll discover how you can *encompass your community* in prayer and change it forever.

We believers are called to pray for our communities. God gave Jeremiah a prophecy. As Israelites were taken captive and spread throughout the Babylonian empire, God said:

...seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper (Jeremiah 29:7).

There are three truths immediately evident in that prophecy. First, our location in a community is not accidental. Although pagans, who neither believed or listened to God, forced the Israelites to relocate, God claimed that it was He who carried the Israelites there. If God uses unbelievers to carry out His purposes, how much more can you, who

believe, be certain of God's hand in your present location. My location here is not accidental. Neither is yours. Second, your fortune is tied to your community. "***If it prospers, you too will prosper,***" the prophecy says. You are not an isolated island. So much of what you experience is influenced by your community. You want peace and prosperity? Seek it for your community. Third, your prayers make a difference. Why would God instruct us to pray for our communities if that was a waste of time?

We are called to pray for our communities, and we are called to pray for all those living in our communities.

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone (1 Timothy 2:1).

God cares about everyone. When you as believers organize to encompass everyone in your community in prayer, you please God who wants all to be redeemed. We need to form with other believers a prayer net that lifts up all residents of our community. Nothing less fully responds to God's love for our community.

We are called to pray for our communities and everyone within our communities. We especially need to focus on our leaders. Their decisions affect our lives. When you pray for them, you change what you will experience from their leadership.

Right now, we are in a painful period when an election for President was extremely tight, and elected officials and legally appointed courts must eventually declare a winner. No matter who or how the winner comes about, don't be that leader's enemy. He'll have more than enough enemies. Be his prayer partner. Fulfill your call. Let requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for him. If you can't give God thanks for him, you don't love him; and you are resisting God's Spirit. Give thanks and pray, and you'll make a difference.

That difference is illustrated in what I call the Exodus Discovery. When the Amalekites attacked the Israelites as they traveled through the desert to the Promised Land, the Israelites learned two important lessons. First, they discovered the power of prayer. Joshua led the battle in the valley while Moses stood on a hill watching and lifting his hands toward heaven. You know what happened. Every time those hands were up, the Israelites prevailed. There was power in prayer. However, they learned a second lesson. Overcoming power requires persistent prayer. When the hands came down, the enemies prevailed. Thus, Moses with the help of two men held his hands up until the enemies were completely defeated at dusk. God told Moses to write what happened down so Joshua would understand the key to the victory.

Some years ago, a missionary was distributing Christian literature in a rural village on the Uruguay-Brazil border. The international border ran right down its main street. On one

side was Uruguay and the other side was Brazil. As the missionary passed out literature on one side of main street, many refused it. Some took it but immediately trashed it. The missionary was discouraged having worked nearly the whole morning with little to show. When he crossed over to the Brazilian side, something changed. People not only took the literature, but thanked him. Some sat down and read it immediately. It wasn't long before he saw a lady, who had refused the literature on Uruguayan side, cross the street and begin window-shopping on the Brazil side. "An experiment!" he thought. He approached the woman and offered her literature again. She not only accepted it, but thanked him. He couldn't stop there; he had to try it with others who had refused it on the other side, and he got similar results. They were very receptive. When he later prayed about his experience, a Bible verse came to mind.

...no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house (Mark 3:27).

Jesus had given this analogy to explain how he freed people from the control of demons. Jesus had been binding the strong man and liberating people from its influence. The missionary pondered the idea that a strongman was hindering people on one side from receiving the gospel, while the strongman had somehow been bound on the other side. Could that explain the other side of the tracks phenomena, where one section of town is depressed and others are vital? Could that explain what happened in prayer with the Israelites and Amalekites? Was the strongman on that battlefield bound as long as Moses held his hands high?

There is a lot suggesting that, because persistent prayer efforts are changing communities all around the world. At least a dozen have experienced radical changes as believers encompassed their community in prayer. Hemet, California has seen such power unleashed through organized prayer ministry. Hemet was a community of cults, corruption and depression. Since believers were mobilized in prayer over a decade ago, cult activity dropped dramatically. The percentage of residents in worship on a Sunday morning has doubled. With conversions multiplying so greatly, school campuses are changing. The dropout rate for students fell in four years from 470 students for every 10,000 to just 7. A decade ago some Hemet police served as drug couriers. Today the force is not only clean; drug traffic in the community may have dropped by as much as 75 percent. Again spiritual conversions have been key.

Colorado Springs is another community that has radically changed in one decade. Crime began dropping as soon as organized prayer efforts covered the city; and the city now has become a world center for prayer and mission. A coalition of churches work together for a one percent annual increase in the percentage of residents worshipping, in having prayer teams walk each street of the city and pray over each block at least once a year, and in sharing the good news of Christ with every person living in the community at least once a year.

What has happened in Hemet and Colorado Springs is being reproduced in many communities; and there are four ways of praying that is bringing these changes.

First, there is *closet prayer*. Believers are lifting up their neighbors, their leaders, their communities in secret.

Second, there is *coordinated prayer*. Believers are forming prayer chains like we have in this church. They are scheduling 24 hour, week-long or month-long vigils where with other believers they cover every hour of the day in prayer for some concern. Often they join these efforts with fasts. Last October in Tracy we recruited 300 people to pray five blessings, five days a week, five weeks, for five households. We covered 1500 households with five weeks of prayer. For the first time many of us could recall there were no severe accidents during the harvest period. Moreover, many noted a change in the spiritual receptivity of the community. One lady became discouraged as she prayed. She asked God for confirmation that her prayers mattered. She asked that a specific family on her list, members but non-attenders at her church, would show up that Sunday. When they did, she was so excited that she ran over to them. "Oh, you are an answer to my prayers," she exclaimed, "I've been praying for you every day." The man began to cry. It was no accident that they were in church that Sunday. It was no accident at all. Two days earlier, they were in his truck when he pulled over to use his cellular phone. A moment later, the vehicles they traveled with collided and burst into flames. They knew their lives had been spared, and now they realized someone had been praying for them. *Coordinated prayer* is powerful.

Concord prayer is powerful too. *Concord prayer* is prayer in agreement. It is when at least two people agree. When you pray for and with someone and they agree with you, that ministry is concord prayer. When you partner with someone and together pray about something, that also is concord prayer. Some of you may have prayer buddies. Each week you pray together over your personal concerns. Many find that their lifeblood. Some gather as teams and walk their community streets. Others form teams to pray for specific needs. This all changes lives.

A final form of prayer is *concert prayer*. The Israelites would get together and pour their hearts out all at once. Hundreds of prayers would be uttered at the same moment. Our songs of praise, when heartfelt, is concert prayer. Concert prayer is occurring in stadiums as well as other gatherings, and is unleashing unbelievable change.

The people of your community need your prayer. Will you go in your closet for them? Will you coordinate your efforts with others for them? Will you minister and partner in concord with others? Will you let your voice become a part of a great concert of praise and intercession in your city? Your leaders need you. Your schools need you. Your businesses need you. Your neighbors need you. Your community needs you. Your nation needs you. The world needs you. What will you do? Will you partner with your Father in heaven to redeem His creation?