

# OF THE GLOBAL PRAYER MOVEMENT

WE MAY BE LIVING IN THE DAYS OF THE GREATEST

prayer movement of history. Despite some familiar patterns of prayerlessness in the church, more Christians are praying now, certainly, than at any time in history. More than 200 million believers pray every day for the advancement of world missions. At least 15 million groups around the world pray weekly for missions in their communities, probably many more. Prayer events and gatherings abound in many countries.

In the 1990s, millions assembled to "March for Jesus" in public worship. But those numbers were eclipsed by the even larger, and perhaps still-increasing, Global Day of Prayer gatherings that emerged after the turn of the millennium. Reportedly, on Pentecost Sunday 2011, believers in 220 nations took part in this global prayer meeting.

BY STEVE HAWTHORNE





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I've heard prayer leaders from several countries tell the same kind of story: Ten or 12 years ago, it was typical to see a few prayer meetings or seasons of prayer called every year. Some leaders would dutifully try to coordinate these initiatives on the same national or regional calendar.

But in recent years so many prayer events are taking place that it is nearly impossible to keep track of all the meetings, prayer watches, initiatives, fasts, and solemn assemblies in just one country or region. National and global prayer initiatives are now commonplace. Instead of leaders seeing these as competing events, many of them recognize that the explosion of prayer is evidence of a variegated global prayer movement far beyond anyone's control.

### Prayer with Greater Substance

The rise of this global movement is remarkable in that we are not merely praying more, we are praying differently. We're praying with greater clarity and proximity for people far from God. Better publishing and instant Internet distribution of information easily alerts us to urgent needs and long-range trends. We are prayerwalking and networking to saturate entire cities with prayer.

Not only is our praying better informed and focused, we are much more organized on local-church and citywide levels. We are praying together as never before. Positive reports of huge stadiumsized, interchurch prayer gatherings confirm the hope and value of gathering in united prayer.

It's no longer an outlandish idea to enlist ordinary, busy believers to pray in unbroken prayer chains 24 hours a day. It's common practice. Not only do churches set aside rooms for intercessory prayer, but now entire buildings are dedicated as houses of prayer that draw praying people from many diverse churches.

What are we to make of this phenomenal flourishing of prayer? To celebrate growing numbers is fine, but far better than the great size of the prayer movement is the great substance of the prayers themselves.

### Extraordinary Prayer Inspired by Christ Himself

I'm convinced that the risen Christ is now at work, deepening, uniting, and sustaining our prayer even more. He's instilling in us the joyous conviction that God is on the verge of fulfilling some of His greatest biblical promises to complete His global purpose for the earth.

Why else would there be a global prayer

movement unless God is about to act in a global way?

The upper room prayer movement, as seen in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, gives us the best example of the kind of extraordinary prayer we are engaged in today. A look at this movement shows ways in which Christ may now be inspiring, instructing, and leading the global prayer movement.

With the exception of one short prayer dealing with a leadership issue (Acts 1:12–26, replacing Judas among the apostles), we don't have any record of what the apostles prayed about during those ten days of constant prayer. But we can be fairly sure that what they had been *praying* was related to what they ended up *saying* on the street on Pentecost Day.

First, I think their words on the street show they were praying over God's promises in the Bible. The way they quoted Scripture on Pentecost morning (see Acts 2:16-21, 25-28, 30, and 34-35) indicates they had been dwelling on these very texts in the Prophets and Psalms, praying over them for days. The Scriptures they quoted focused on the culmination of God's unfolding purpose for all the generations and nations of the world. In fact, the one prayer we have from the upper room is prefaced this way: "Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled" (Acts 1:16, NASB).

Second, they were praying for God to do great things. The people of various nations who had gathered said the apostles were "speaking of the mighty deeds of God" (Acts 2:11, NASB). The apostles were utterly convinced that God was about to outdo Himself, to bring an astounding finish to all He had ever been pursuing in all the earth.

### Beyond Pentecost: An Ongoing Movement

We misunderstand the upper room prayer gathering if we think that the only thing they were praying for was the outpouring of the Spirit. That was certainly part of what they expected, but they saw the giving of the Spirit as one marvelous part of a far greater fulfillment of all that God would ever do on a global scale.

In fact, we see them continue in organized ways. They gathered at the temple at particular hours. They gathered in homes with regularity and discipline (Luke 24:33; Acts 2:46). The upper room prayer movement was anything but a spasmodic series of crisis prayers. But when there was a crisis, they gathered again, praying, as they had before Pentecost, "with one accord" (Acts 4:24–31, NASB).

In their time of prayer, we see the "upper room way" demonstrated: They distinctly prayed from the Scriptures, worshiping God as He is described in Psalm 146:6 (compare Acts 4:24), and then basing their appeal on what Psalm 2:1–2 revealed about God's purpose among all peoples (compare Acts 4:25–28).

They basically asked God to keep on doing the great things He had purposed long before.

## Passion that Sustained Their Prayer

The account describes their praying as being "with one mind," or as it is sometimes translated, "with one accord." The Greek word behind this expression is a fascinating word: homothumadon. It simply refers to sharing the same (homo) passion (thumadon has to do with zeal, desire, passion). The English word enthusiasm is built on the same word group as homothumadon.

The word *homothumadon* is common continued on page 15

in Luke's description of prayer and occasions where people responded to God with one heart and mind and passion (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25). The word is even used negatively about mob mentality (Acts 7:57; 18:12).

The New International Version presents a rather weak translation for homothumadon, only inserting the English word together. This translation fails to convey that they prayed with an extraordinary measure of common zeal, shared passion, and united mind. It means much more than merely being physically gathered together. It means far more than praying in agreement. It has everything to do with pursuing what God has promised because of an earnest, united desiring and a confident expectation that what God had promised He would certainly do—and soon.

This aligned desiring was not an emotional state or a personality trait. The risen Christ Himself formed this united desire within them. Luke says that during the days following His rising, Jesus emphasized one prevailing teaching: the Kingdom of God. Jesus unfolded the ancient story about God, ultimately bringing about global glory for the King of the Kingdom, "the Christ" Himself (Luke 24:46).

The followers Jesus was addressing on the road to Emmaus were losing heart with every step (Luke 24:25). He did not scold them or pep-talk them. Instead, He gave them a much greater framework in which to see the present moment. He did this by recounting a story much different than the one they thought they were in. The largest story they dared to imagine was that something happy and good would come upon their own people. Their big hope was that someone would come "to redeem Israel" (v. 21).

Jesus told them instead a truly great story, beginning with the books of Moses and somehow drawing from "all the prophets" (v. 27, also later in vv. 46–47). This was not a simplistic triumphal tale with a cheap, happy ending. It involved

drastic suffering for the Messiah and those who followed Him. But astoundingly, the story would culminate in the King of all the nations becoming known throughout all peoples as the One who enables transforming repentance to overcome sin (see vv. 46–47).

This proclamation, bringing Him renown throughout the world, is *part* 

of what Jesus meant by saying that the Christ would "enter into His glory" (Luke 24:26, NASB). While the risen Jesus walked with the two men on the road to Emmaus, unfolding this epic story from the Scriptures about His global Kingdom, their "hearts were burning" with passion, confidence, and hope (Luke 24:32).



# HE GLOBAL PRAYER MOVEMENT IS SURGING AND CONVERGING.

### The Risen Christ Instills Passion and Stamina Today

We can look for the risen Jesus to do for us what He did for His first followers. Jesus was patient with them, willing to repeat Himself until they finally got it: "This is what I told you while I was still with you" (Luke 24:44). Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures" (v. 45).

Will He do less for us if we welcome Him to instruct us? We can expect Him to lift our vision beyond our own concerns and countries. He won't allow us to get stuck in cycles of "selfism," in which we seek for God to take us back to the good old days. In Acts 1:6, the apostles asked,

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus pushed them past their self-absorbed despair, instilling a bold confidence that God was going to exalt Jesus as King (Acts 2:24-36). That zealous certainty that God was doing great things for His Kingdom was like a fire ablaze in their hearts.

May God find our hearts flammable today so that the movements of prayer will increase with steady, jealous passion—the homothumadon factor—that we may pray "with one accord" as they did in the upper room.

We can expect the risen Christ to temper our souls with strength to pray as those who wait—to "wait for what the Father [has] promised" (Acts 1:4, NASB).

Since they kept praying daily with that same passion after Pentecost (Acts 2:46; 4:24), they must have expected God to do even more than He had at Pentecost.

In our day, many global prayer movements are finding that their prayers are not just surging, they're converging—as we pray for His Kingdom to come and His glory to be great. May our Lord impart the passionate stamina of the upper room, so that we may resolutely focus on what He will accomplish to fulfill all of His purposes in every people and place.

In this global purpose, He has given us much to do. But He is giving us even more to pray. PC



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