
mission:world News - The Power of Strategic Prayer

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Tue, Mar 21, 2023 at 7:02 AM

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N E W S

The Power of Strategic Prayer

By Heidi Sorrells, Pastor Advocate



Every Christ follower would agree that prayer is both a foundational discipline and a MUST for intimacy with Christ, godly leadership, and church health. Bill Elliff says, "Prayer has become a side room" instead of a church's foundation. Statistics say the average pastor prays only fifteen minutes a day! If healthy leaders make healthy churches, we have a sad picture of what prayer is in many North American churches.

Leaders must solemnly and humbly pursue prayer and intimacy with God to lead others to be obedient Christ followers. Church and ministry leaders should recognize a problem in this area and humbly bow before God. This is the beginning of a path to fruit that remains and the healthy lives and churches sold out to God's vision and plan. So is prayer a tool, the means to an end, or a doorway to God's presence, our highest treasure?

For four years the vision of Activate and Healthy Church Solutions has been more intentional prayer, dependance on the Father, and training pastors to guide their people in prayer. This requires a commitment to meeting with God in a spirit of humility and dependence. Promising to pray is not the same as praying. Thinking about prayer is not the same as bending your knee and crying out to God. Bill Elliff says the most powerful person in the room is the person who prays. Do you want your church to be known as a praying congregation that loves so much that revival is happening?

Here are prayer strategies God has initiated in the last few years:

- three trainings on building a strong culture of prayer
- prayer breakouts at national and state meetings
- National Day of Prayer zoom
- Re:Charge conference (pastor and leader conference every fall)
- prayer retreats for Missions directors, pastors, and church groups

God has used these for his glory, but testimonies have the most impact.

Pastor Chris Polk of First in Matthews, Missouri, attended one of Larry Barker's first pastor retreats and said, "What a great group of guys and a great time of growth! That 24 hours still impacts how I approach God's throne and open up in my prayer time. I'm no prayer warrior like Bill Elliff or George Mueller, but it improved when I discovered things about myself that I continue to work on." Chris was so impacted that he hosted a prayer retreat for the SEMO association and plans another this spring. He says the challenge is "convincing folks how impactful a prayer-and-solitude weekend is because we're all so busy."

Pastor Randy Stimach of Herman in Bono, Arkansas, used what God revealed at a prayer retreat to disciple his church and said, "Eilliff's statement is true that prayer is the work of the church! In 2022 our church began an intentional, focused effort on prayer and we have seen tremendous results! Aiding in that effort was a BMA-sponsored pastors' prayer retreat I attended with Bro. Larry Barker. The tools I received from it are what we use in discipling others to learn the great ministry of prayer!"

The breakout at the BMA Arkansas meeting was a direct result of God's work at a prayer retreat Michael Battenfield (First in Cave Springs, Arkansas) attended with Arkansas and Oklahoma pastors. He said, "The burden of intentional focus on prayer was already churning in my mind as I prayed about breakout sessions and speakers, so Larry was an obvious choice with his church health focus. Imagine the possibilities of what God might do in our churches if genuine, humble, and 'effectual' prayer was a priority. We have no idea what ministry might look like if a church was completely dedicated to that kind of prayer!"

Pastors and leaders spoke about the beauty of being with others and having accountability and discipleship through a prayer retreat:

"Prayer is essential in the life of every believer and critical to the service of every minister; however, we struggle to spend time in prayer. To maintain your health as a leader you need to hear from God." —Pastor Robert Forrest (O'Quinn in Pollock, TX)

"The prayer retreat didn't just recharge my batteries but energized me by challenging the priority of my prayer life and equipped me to have a more fervent prayer life. The fellowship and training created a greater awareness of what I had been missing and what I needed." —John Meriweather, Vice President of Global Operations

"This was the first prayer retreat I have attended that was just for pastors. It was encouraging to have other men with similar experiences to pray with. Bro. Larry did a great job of presenting a format for prayer retreats that was not rigid but provided several excellent places to build from. I felt spiritually renewed and prepared to organize a church retreat. Time spent at the retreat reinforced that if my prayer life is not adequate, I won't effectively lead and accomplish the Lord's will." —Pastor Saul Petty, Mt. Calvary, Carthage Texas

"The need for 'together' prayer isn't just about private prayer but having other men we can share not only prayer with, but the product and conviction OF that prayer, which

leads to accountability. The kind of connection during the retreat represents a missing ingredient of real, effective, biblical discipleship.” –Pastor Michael Battenfield, First in Cave Springs, AR

“The retreat was an opportunity to spiritually connect with guys I only knew by name. It was an opportunity to realize I’m not alone in the struggles. At annual meetings or camp retreats we rarely get the opportunity to dig down and open up about what’s really going on in our lives.” –Pastor Chris Polk, First, Matthews, MO

Last summer, Larry and his wife Shelby led a church congregation through a family camp at First Baptist in Blackwood, New Jersey, with Pastor Dave McMurray. Dave had this to say about God’s impact on the congregation: “The first and most significant response was the deep and lasting refreshment that occurred from a simple prayer exercise. People still talk about how helpful and enlightening it was to discover the commonness and ease with which Satan tries to deceive us. How little it takes for us to be distracted and miss wonderful times of personal and corporate intimacy with our Savior.”

Prayer retreats and training also took place in Portugal where attendees enjoyed a time of prayer and encouragement with Larry and Shelby Barker and Eliezer Semedo. Eliezer commented, “It was the first time for these Portuguese brothers and sisters to pray in a triad. God moved and soon they connected and shared burdens. They realized how much we should depend on God and his power in everyday life. Participants decided to continue praying for each other through WhatsApp triads (similar to FB Messenger).”

Pastor Marco Gaspar added, “The Bible teaches us to pray for one another (Ephesians 6:18). Paul always prayed for his brothers and sisters and encouraged prayer for himself and one another. I felt encouraged knowing someone is still praying for me. It was awesome and beautiful to see how they were praying with reverence for one another. We could see the Spirit of the Lord working through prayer, which impacted me and improved my prayer life!”

Having uncovered a well of need, we continue offering prayer retreats, resources, and training to people to not only have healthier prayer lives but to empower others to schedule personal prayer retreats or host retreats with others. Prayer unifies, strengthens, and reminds us that Christ is Lord.

As Mike Book from Prospect in Jonesboro, Arkansas, said, “...with an open Bible, heart, and notebook, we were led to the beauty of Jesus’ creation. God’s promises from Jeremiah 29:12–13 are true: ‘You will call upon me and go pray to me, and I will listen. You will seek and find me when you search with all your heart.’”

If you are interested in leading your people toward greater health through prayer, contact heidi@bmaam.com for more information.

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