

BECOMING A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS - By Pastor Ryan Linkous

A wince of pain came over the pastor's face. One mention of a "prayer meeting," and it was clear that prayer is not a blessing in his church. He loves Jesus and believes in the power of heartfelt prayer, but in his fellowship, prayer has become synonymous with an endless listing of prayer requests: 50 minutes talking about problems and 10 minutes asking God for help. The prayer meeting at his church is a need-driven, discouraging hour that he would rather avoid. Have you ever been there?

I felt the power of God in the room as Doug Small led our morning conference session in prayer last year. The Holy Spirit spoke and moved throughout the crowd. People wept, the Word of God was strong, and I felt the glory of God resting on the room. As Brother Small challenged, people pressed in, and a longing woke in my heart to explore prayer. My heart hungered to be near HIM. I wondered if my church could experience the power of God in prayer as we had experienced with Doug Small. I wasn't sure how, but I determined to explore what it would mean for CLI Church to be a House of Prayer for the nations.

All ages and stations of people at CLI have rallied around the call to be a House of Prayer. I discovered a hunger, birthed out of COVID and fueled by desperation for more of God, and I am seeing God move. We still have a lot to learn, but becoming a House of Prayer for the nations is the most incredible adventure I've ever enjoyed with a group of Jesus followers. We are learning scriptural and practical prayer and growing individually and corporately.

Through all the adjustments, there are several reasons why we chose to be a House of Prayer for the nations:

1. THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT FAILED TO BRING AWAKENING IN OUR CITIES AND NATION

You've got the books. So do I. Have you been to the church growth conferences? Me, too. I have information on visitor techniques, media options, and sermon illustrations. According to my material, if I work the formula, a crowd will respond. I get to celebrate nickels and noses while exhausting myself running the show. Although church growth plans often generate excitement and train us to lead and care for people, when I look around at my city and get brave enough to be honest about America and her stumbling, I must admit that our decades of church growth haven't done the trick. Our nation needs an awakening, not more techniques.

2. IT'S JESUS'S VISION FOR HIS CHURCH

Not long ago, I had an opportunity to join a meeting with other pastors as Pastor Jim Cymbala shared his vision for the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church. He said, "I have people

that always ask me what my vision is for the Brooklyn Tabernacle. You want to know the truth? You want to know my vision for the Brooklyn Tabernacle? I have no vision for the Brooklyn Tabernacle. Jesus had enough vision for His church without me trying to add to it.” I wiped tears and said, “Amen!”

What is Jesus’s vision for His church? For His people? In Mark 11:17, Jesus cries out over the temple, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations...” He turns over the tables and then heals the blind and the lame. Jesus is zealous for a place of prayer, a people of prayer, because that’s where a broken world finds God. Jesus wants a House of Prayer for all nations.

3. A PRAYING CHURCH IS THE MODEL IN ACTS

Read the pages of Acts. Examine their patterns and learn what led the gospel advance. What will you find? You will discover a people of earnest and desperate prayer. In Acts 1, Jesus tells them to wait for the promise, so they set themselves to prayer. Acts 1:14 says, “They all joined together constantly in prayer...” In Acts 2, they continued praying, were baptized in the Holy Spirit, and “devoted themselves to prayer.” In Acts 3, they are praying, and a man is healed. In Acts 4, they suffer, respond in heart-felt prayer, the place where they are praying is shaken, and they are filled again with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, and many other locations, the people of God continue to call on God, and He opens the doors. The book of Acts is not about the works of the apostles. The book of Acts teaches the actions of the Holy Spirit carried out through a prayer-soaked, Jesus-loving community.

4. PRAYER IS THE FASTEST WAY TO RAISE UP MISSIONAL, JESUS-LOVING PEOPLE

Matthew 9:37-38 speaks of Jesus’s instructions, “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” These verses share a thought that blesses our church. Father God ordained that when we see the harvest – see the crowds, the need, and hear the cry – we are to respond in prayer! He doesn’t say to respond in meetings or evangelistic strategies. He ordained that His harvest field be connected directly to prayer. When you see the harvest, get on your face and pray for God to raise up laborers. When you feel the need, call on God; He will answer. There is a heavenly link we must see. If we want to see the harvest – we must learn to pray. There is no other way.

These are just a few themes God is using in our fellowship. We are growing and learning to be a people of prayer. Doug Small’s words ring true for us, “Extended time in God’s presence brings humility - and humility brings unity – and unity brings community – and it’s that community that God blesses with His glory.” Amen.