

7 Characteristics of the End-time Praying Church

The end-time role of the praying and worshipping church

Right now, all across the earth, the Holy Spirit is raising up a worship-based prayer movement that will culminate in the second coming of our King, Jesus. This isn't a new idea, but one rooted in history and, more importantly, in the Bible. This prayer and worship movement that we see exploding across the planet was prophesied many years ago, as recorded in the Scriptures. I believe that what we're witnessing today, with the rapidly growing worldwide prayer and worship movement, is the beginning of the fulfillment of biblical prophecies about the end times.

This conviction that God is raising up a worldwide prayer movement that will precede Jesus' return has strengthened my resolve to build a 24/7 worship community. We started on May 7, 1999, and for the last 12 years the International House of Prayer Missions Base of Kansas City (IHOP-KC), consisting of full-time missionaries who serve as worship leaders, singers, musicians and intercessors, has continued nonstop in worship and prayer. Our hearts are set on gathering corporately to worship Jesus 24 hours a day, seven days a week, every day of the year. Partnering with Him in intercession, we contend for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and for the release of justice, both in our own city and in the cities of the earth. What started with 20 full-time missionaries has grown to more than 1,000 full-time staff and 1,000 students and interns in our Bible school.

Why do I mention this? Because if weak and broken people in Kansas City, Mo., can do this, anyone can! And that's exactly the point God wants made. The Lord is determined to establish a culture of prayer in the entire body of Christ worldwide

before He returns. Over the last 10 to 20 years, we've watched the prayer movement grow especially fast in Asia and Africa. Yet this rapid growth is only the first fruits of what Jesus is doing in His church in this generation.

I believe this is the hour in history when many of God's people from a multitude of ministries, churches and denominations will align themselves with Jesus' commitment to build His church. It will be in such a way that He Himself will call it "a house of prayer for all nations" (Is. 56:7).

The Scriptures describe several characteristics of the end-time worship and prayer movement that are involved in releasing God's presence and power. When people pray, the spiritual atmosphere over cities and regions is changed. Demons are driven back from their place of influence, angels are more active, and the Spirit releases a greater measure of grace on our labors. Thus, the preaching of the gospel and the works of the kingdom become more effective. Jesus taught us to pray for God's kingdom to be expressed on earth as it is in heaven (see Matt. 6:10). This includes worship—the Father desires to be worshipped on earth as He is in heaven.

The apostle John wrote more on the end-time worship and prayer movement than any other writers of Scripture. From two of their books—Isaiah and Revelation—we can define seven characteristics of this global movement.

1. It will be God-centered (Rev. 4:8; 5:11-14; Is. 24:14-16).

The worship order of heaven is decidedly God-centered. Night and day, day and night, those nearest God's throne proclaim the truth about who God is and what He does. He desires that His creation would encounter His majesty, love and goodness and that, in turn, they would offer up their praise and adoration for all He is, all He has done and all He will do. Treasuring God and adoring Him endlessly is the priority of the prayer movement. It is the necessary and fitting response

to His matchless beauty and immeasurable worth.

Worship is a witness on earth to the indescribable value of Jesus. The truth of His greatness must be declared in song and in proclamations because it is the ultimate truth on which the created universe exists. This truth of the greatness of God is powerful. God loves the truth, including the truth about Himself.

The power and supremacy of the grand truth about God demand expression on the earth. If the people do not worship our great God, Jesus said the rocks would cry out in our place (see Luke 19:37-40). The end-time worship and prayer movement will extol the majesty and worth of God as it joins the symphony in heaven, where the worshippers are forever crying out, "Worthy is the Lamb!" (Rev. 5:12).

Our prayer life is best energized when we experience intimacy with God's heart. The Father relates to us with tender mercy. Jesus relates to us with fiery desire as our bridegroom God (see Is. 54:5, 62:5). In Revelation 22:17, John prophesied that the Spirit and the bride would say, "Come, Lord Jesus!" This is one of the most informative and significant prophecies describing the end-time church. In it, John describes an end-time church in unity with what the Spirit is saying and doing.

What is the Spirit saying? He is speaking to believers about their corporate identity as Jesus' bride. What is the Spirit doing? He is interceding for Jesus to come in power and calling thirsty people to come to Jesus, the bridegroom God.

In the end times, for the first time in history, the Spirit will universally emphasize the church's identity as Jesus' bride. It is not the Spirit and the family who will say, "Come!" or the Spirit and the army, kingdom, body, temple or priesthood. Rather, it is the Spirit resting on the church as a bride. Forever, we will rejoice in our identity as God's family, body, temple, priesthood and more.

As sons of God, we are to experience God's throne as heirs of His power (see Rom. 8:17). As the bride of Christ, we are to experience God's heart—His desire for us. The bridegroom message is focused on Jesus' emotions for us, on His beauty, on His commitments to us (to share His heart, home, throne, secrets and beauty), and on our response of wholehearted love and obedience to Him.

Understanding this message begins with experiencing His affections for us. Jesus delights in us, enjoys us, partners with us in the work of the kingdom and is committed to our eternal success.

Isaiah described the end-time prayer movement as deeply relational, a quality that would stem from the revelation of God as our bridegroom (see Is. 54:5, 62:5). In no way should "the bridegroom God" term conjure up images of our Lord and King as some sort of sensual lover or "boyfriend God." That is grossly inappropriate and dishonoring to Jesus.

One reason people burn out in intercession and ministry to others is because they lack intimacy with God through encountering Jesus as their bridegroom God. The revelation of the church as Jesus' cherished bride is essential for keeping our hearts alive through the years as we diligently do the work of the kingdom.

2. It will be continual (Rev. 4:8; Is. 62:6-7; Luke 18:7-8).

In Revelation 4-5, the apostle John describes the heavenly worship order around the throne. In His vision of God's throne room he witnessed celestial beings who "do not rest day or night, saying: 'Holy, holy, holy'" (Rev 4:8). As already mentioned, God desires to be worshipped on this earth just as He is in heaven—continually and unceasingly.

Moreover, the prophet Isaiah saw a prayer movement on earth that would not rest night and day until God's purposes were fully established (see Is. 62:6-7). In these last days God is

raising up a prayer movement that will continually worship Him and cry out to Him for His plans to be executed and His justice to be released (see Luke 18:7-8).

The call to 24/7 worship and prayer is not an invitation to organize it all under one roof. Continual prayer usually is expressed by the body of Christ together as prayer is offered up from many different buildings across a city or region. The call of 24/7 prayer is to build a prayer culture among God's people across cities and regions so that Jesus receives continual, corporate worship from many different ministries and locations. Each does its own small part, but together all offer night-and-day prayer and worship.

I do not believe the Lord is calling most churches to start a 24/7 prayer ministry in their *building* but instead to build a prayer culture in their *church*. Unless the Lord specifically calls you to start 24/7 prayer in your congregation, it is best to view it as what will result from the collective efforts of hundreds of prayer meetings held in homes, churches, universities and businesses across your city.

3. It will be global (Is. 24:6-7, 42:10-12; Mal. 1:11).

The Scriptures are clear that the end-time worship and prayer movement will extend all across the earth, even to the most remote and difficult-to-reach places. Isaiah prophesied that even in the remote islands of the earth God's people would sing to the Lord in worship and intercession (see Is. 42:10). He witnessed worship going forth in the wilderness, or desert places—even in Islamic villages such as Kedar in Saudi Arabia and Sela in Jordan—and that God's people would worship from one end of the earth to the other until Jesus returns (see Is. 42:11, 13-15).

Simply put, the end-time worship and prayer movement will be in every place, even the hardest and darkest places (see Mal. 1:11). That means it will be international. King David had a

continual, musical worship movement in Jerusalem. About 300 years after him, Isaiah said, in effect: "The worship moment will go far beyond what David did. David was limited to one location. The end-time movement will be global."

4. It will be musical (Is. 24:14-16; 26:1; 27:2; 30:29; 32; 35:2, 10; 42:10-12; 54:1).

Some who lead prayer ministries struggle with the idea of prayer meetings being led by music, but the idea is biblical. One aspect of the kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven involves music in our prayer meetings. This is seen in Revelation 5:8-9.

When I first began having daily prayer meetings, we did not include music led by a worship team. We spent more time shouting at the devil than we did talking to God. It seemed like the mark of a good prayer meeting was exhausted and hoarse intercessors. Eventually I introduced music, and our prayer meetings became not just bearable but enjoyable!

The end-time prayer movement is musical. The human spirit is deeply musical because we were created in the image of God, who is very musical. Few things touch the human spirit in the way that anointed music does.

5. It will be missional (Rev. 7:9, 14).

The end-time worship and prayer movement will be instrumental in ushering in the greatest harvest of souls in history (see Matt. 24:14; Rev. 7:9, 14). Jesus said in Luke 10:2 that we must pray for the Lord to release laborers for the harvest. Throughout the Scriptures we see a pattern in which communities, such as the one in Jerusalem in Acts 2 and the Antioch community in Acts 13, gather together in worship and prayer. From those prayer meetings, missionaries are sent out and evangelism movements are unleashed that result in a significant harvest of souls.

Jesus connected night-and-day prayer to the release of justice on the earth (see Luke 18:7-8). He spoke of this in the context of the end times, with specific reference to His second coming (see Luke 17:24-37; 18:8). John spoke of the end-time prayer movement as being deeply connected to the release of God's judgment to remove oppression from the earth (see Rev. 6:9-11; 8:3-6).

6. It will be youth-oriented (Mal. 4:5-6).

The end-time prayer movement will consist primarily of young people. We know historically that most people who turn to Jesus do so before they are 25 years old. Most great revivals of history were focused primarily on youth. This will be the pattern again because the majority of the world's population is under age 25.

Malachi prophesied that the Holy Spirit would turn the hearts of the fathers to a focus on the youth during the generation in which the Lord would return (see Mal. 4:5-6). This means spiritual fathers and mothers will focus on God's purpose for young people in the end times. Thus, the end-time prayer and worship movement will comprise youth who walk in a spirit of humility and honor.

David spoke of a time when young people would declare the excellence of God's name throughout the earth. This will happen, in the fullest sense, only in the generation in which the Lord returns.

David went on to prophesy of the power of this worship movement that would flow from the mouths of babes. He said that even through the youth God would release His strength to silence the enemy and the avenger (see Ps. 8:1-2). Jesus referenced David's prophecy during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It was at this time that He declared His house would function as a house of prayer.

Matthew tells us that immediately after this the scribes were

indignant at seeing children cry out in worship to Jesus. Jesus answered them by quoting David's prophecy that from the mouth of babes God would perfect praise (see Matt. 21:13-16). David's prophecy of young people worshipping God was so important that Jesus emphasized it in the context of calling God's house a house of prayer. On another occasion, David prophesied about young people volunteering for the Lord's end-time army at a time when God's power would be openly manifested in the nations (see Ps. 110:3, 5).

7. It will be unified (John 17:21-23; Eph. 3:18).

In His high-priestly prayer, Jesus prayed and prophesied that He would pour out His glory, enabling His people to walk in unity and greatly enhance the effectiveness of the gospel (see John 17:21-23). The end-time worship and prayer movement will function in gracious cooperation because God has entrusted different aspects of His purposes and plans to separate parts of His body. Out of necessity, but borne of love, the prayer movement will be profoundly unified as the church experiences the fullness of God's purpose by honoring and serving one another in relationship. This will be achieved by a supernatural grace that God will pour upon His body, enabling it to walk in love and a spirit of unity. For unity is the place where God commands His blessing in the greatest measure (see Ps. 133:1-3).

The Holy Spirit is calling the church to rise up in unity as the end-time prayer movement to offer fervent, continual intercession and worship that flows from prophetic music and intimacy with God. From this position of strength we will work together to fulfill the Great Commission and bring in the greatest harvest of souls in history. And Jesus will respond to the voice of His bride calling out as one with His Spirit for Him to come in power, vanquish His enemies and fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord.

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What the Bible Says About the Prayer Movement

Revelation 22:17 speaks of the Spirit and the bride—the praying church—crying as one to the Lord Jesus, saying: “Come!”

No one knows the day or the hour of Jesus’ coming. But we do know that He will come in response to a worldwide worship and prayer movement beckoning Him to return. Check out all the indicators of this in Scripture:

- Psalm 68:32; 96:1, 9, 13; 98:1-9; 102:15-22; 149:6-9
- Isaiah 12:4-6; 19:20-22; 24:14-16, 23; 25:9; 26:1, 8-9; 27:2-5, 13; 30:18-19, 29, 32; 35:2, 10; 42:10-15; 43:26; 51:11; 52:8; 54:1; 62:6-7
- Jeremiah 31:7; 51:8
- Joel 2:12-17, 32
- Zephaniah 2:1-3
- Zechariah 8:20-23; 10:1; 12:10; 13:9
- Matthew 21:13
- Luke 18:7-8
- Revelation 5:8; 6:9-11; 8:3-5; 9:13; 14:18; 16:7; 18:6; 22:17