

Whatever Happened to Old-Time Prayer Meetings?

Last weekend I was invited to join a prayer gathering at a local church in Hopelawn, New Jersey—a community so close to New York City that you can see the Big Apple's skyline in the distance. In recent weeks, Abe Rolon, the pastor of Life Mission Worship Center, has urged members of his church to gather on Friday nights at 9:30 p.m. to pray for the United States and the upcoming presidential election.

When I arrived I was so encouraged to see more than 50 people—mostly young adults in their 20s—gathered at the front of the church for prayer. They were all passionately engaged in worship; when it was time to intercede, they eagerly took the microphone and cried out to God.

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They asked God to have His way in the Nov. 5 elections. They prayed that Jesus would deliver America from the evil entrenched in our media, in the entertainment industry, in politics and in our educational institutions. Before the night was over, we also prayed that God would stop the spread of communist dictatorship in Latin America.

When Pastor Rolon said the last amen, nobody left the building. The young people lingered at the altar as the worship team continued singing a worship chorus about the fire of God. Some were lying prostrate on the floor while others were dancing or lifting their hands. I didn't leave the church until 1:30 a.m.—and I could have stayed longer if the musicians had kept playing.

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I wish I could say that what happened at Life Mission Worship Center is typical. But the uncomfortable reality is that prayer meetings aren't a regular part of church life these days; for churches that still have scheduled prayer meetings, they are poorly attended.

Nobody can explain what happened to prayer meetings. There was a time in our history when churches had a designated time in the week for corporate prayer. Today, those meetings have been replaced by other events. Corporate prayer was once considered to be the furnace of the church. Today, the fire has died out, and the furnace is cold.

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