

# Our Only Hope: Regional Prayer Movements

More churches must be planted, effective conferences and events must take place and biblical church growth should be a focus. This cannot be debated.

My attempt in this article, however, is to highlight what the predominate strategy must be—an emphasis that has to become non-negotiable for every pastor, leader and every Christian in a region. The focus must be prayer. Not only prayer, but regional prayer. This means that local emphasis must give way to regional emphasis.

Instead of people asking, “Where do you go to church,” I believe we need to start hearing, “Where do you go to pray?”

When the primary call of every Christians shifts from attending a local church to gathering continually for Spirit-fueled prayer in the region, this is the question people will begin to ask.

## Regional Prayer Movements

*“And day by day, attending the temple together ...” (Acts 2:46)*

*“They were present at all the times of public worship, and joined together in prayers and praises to God ...” – Adam Clarke’s Commentary*

Unless everything we are giving energy to in our church and ministry growth strategies begins to yield to the call to pray, our hopes of experiencing any measure of revival or effective Kingdom advance are futile.

I travel quite a bit, and I find it nearly impossible to find a regional, ongoing movement of prayer in cities I visit. Of course, I can find churches and occasionally I can find houses

of prayer, but a fervent, strategic, regional strategy of prayer is extremely hard to come by. In fact, other than my experience with the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri, I have not found a regional prayer focus that is the predominate experience, ahead of Sunday services, programs and events.

People who are well trained by the American system of leisure, busyness and independence find it laughable that someone would suggest gathering together every day for corporate, Spirit-fueled prayer. The religious system hasn't helped either. The Sunday service model of ministry has unwittingly communicated to a busy culture that attending a worship and teaching service a couple of hours a week is the expected maximum level of participation.

I firmly believe this has resulted in a generation of churchgoers who don't know God, people who have a form of godliness but deny its power.

*"... traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying its power. Turn away from such people" (2 Tim. 3:4-5, MEV).*

People who love God have a yearning to pray. This is beyond debate. Instead of avoiding those who don't desire to be with the one they say they love, as is the instruction in the above verse, we are actually building our churches with them! Before you get too defensive, I do understand that growing in prayer is a bit of a process. But, it certainly is not to be resisted as it is by so many professing Christians today.

Our primary focus should no longer be faithfully attending a church once or twice a week, but rather gathering together with Christians in the region for Holy Spirit driven intercession.

In order for this to happen, pastors are going to have to be OK with a diminished attention to their own programs and as

they lead the people under their care to the regional prayer events.

We don't need another church plant, another church growth seminar or another amazing program—unless they are founded on regional, continual, fervent and Holy Spirit saturated prayer. One hundred percent of those who attend our churches should be on their faces day after day “in the temple” devoting themselves to prayer. This isn't a call only for the mature or those specially called. Every believer should be baptized with fire in corporate prayer in their city. A new church culture is necessary. We can no longer validate people's devotion to Jesus if the most basic, defining call is ignored—the call to pray without ceasing.

In my city of Branson, Missouri, I am currently working on a regional prayer strategy. I contacted churches inviting pastors and others to gather together every Friday from 10pm-midnight for regional prayer. I'm excited at the response so far, but my heart broke when one particular church replied to my email invitation. They simply informed me that they already have a prayer meeting and that I am welcome to join them any time. Now, I'm thrilled that they actually have a prayer meeting! That is rare in today's church. What broke my heart is that they dismissed the call to regional collaboration in prayer in favor of their own local focus.

Will pastors in your city give preference to regional focus ahead of their own local focus? Most probably won't, but you should lock arms and move ahead with those who will.

### **Regional Impact**

*“At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's shackles were loosened” (Acts 16:25-26, MEV).*

Your city doesn't need another great church program. They need to experience the power of prayer!

When we pray, the prisoners will be listening—and the earth will quake as it sets the captives free!

The enemy is working wonders and imprisoning millions of people—most of the people in the very city you live in—and we must bring impact through fiery prayer. I'm not talking about naturally minded petitions. We need a movement of fire that erupts through the groans of the saints! Every Christian must flow powerfully in prayer that is too deep for words!

*“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27, MEV).*

This type of prayer is not reserved for a few. It is absolutely mandatory that we emphasize the critical need for every Christian under our care as leaders to pray at this depth! Prayer that is devoid of Holy Spirit fuel like this leads more often to frustration than breakthrough.

As we gather together continually with the other Christians in a region to pray on fire with groans that cannot be uttered, the anointing of the Spirit of God will overcome the church. Messages will explode out of yielded vessels that will carry a supernatural anointing that can only come through this type of prayer. Regions will be rocked!

*“Pray in the Spirit always with all kinds of prayer and supplication. To that end be alert with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. Pray for me, that the power to speak may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may speak boldly as I ought to*

*speak" (Ephesians 6:18-20, MEV).*

Did you notice the command in verse 18? We are required to pray in the Spirit at all times! How strange is it that prayer meetings are empty and churches are devoid of the spirit of prayer today. Prayer is not an extra-curricular activity! It is not optional. I believe a lifestyle of fervent prayer in the Spirit is an evidence of our relationship with Jesus!

## **Regional Voices**

When we pray in the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a regional church, bold messages pierce cities and nations! Check out what happened after the Holy Spirit was poured out in Acts chapter two. After explaining the move of the Spirit of God, and boldly, prophetically declaring the Word of the Lord, Peter didn't hold back:

*"Therefore, let all the house of Israel assuredly know that God has made this Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ." When they heard this, they were stung in the heart and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:36-38, MEV).*

Peter didn't hold back in his accurate accusation against the religious in attendance. He declared the divinity of Jesus and he rebuked them for crucifying God! They cried out for an answer and Peter simply called them to repent, be baptized and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We must see regional voices emerge out of a movement of prayer in a city. When the Holy Spirit flows through people, and the water level of his activity in a region increases, messengers of God will begin to boldly call out religious systems, apathy, theological error and other hindrances to the advance of the gospel.

Trust me, as this happens, many pastors and leaders will strike out against such a bold, confrontational message. Apathetic people will reject an advance like this. People with a local focus instead of investing in the regional church will give preference to lesser activities.

I believe it's time to see every pastor, every leader and every Spirit-fueled Christian in a city gather together every week (or every day!) for hours of Holy Spirit driven prayer.

We have to transition our understanding of church from local to regional. In Acts 2 the people met as a region every day in the temple for prayer AND they met day by day in homes.

In today's busy culture such a devotion is soundly rejected. People would rather sleep or play than pray. The emphasis is given to a couple of hours on a Sunday morning.

Maybe Sunday morning should shift to nothing more than a prayer meeting. Then, the pretenders would stay home and the true church would show up and pray, in the Spirit, and set in motion an earthquake that prisoners in our city are waiting to experience. {eoa}

**John Burton** has been developing and leading ministries for over 20 years and is a sought out teacher, prophetic messenger and revivalist. John has authored nine books, has appeared on Christian television and radio and directed one of the primary internships at the International House of Prayer (IHOP) in Kansas City. Additionally, he has planted two churches, has initiated two city prayer movements and is currently directing a prayer- and revival-focused ministry school in Detroit called the School of Prayer. John's mandate is to call the church in the nations to repentance from casual Christianity and to burn in a manner worthy of the King of kings. He is equipping people to confront the enemies of God (established religion, Jezebel and so on) that hinder an extreme, sold-out level of true worship.