

We Must Bow Down and Cry Out

On the anniversary of 9/11, I learned that we need extraordinary prayer in this time of national crisis.

Last week I attended a prayer gathering across the street from the World Trade Center site in New York City. Several dozen Christian leaders met in a cramped room overlooking the place where terrorists destroyed the tallest monument to America's financial power and killed more than 2,700 people in the process.

It was the eighth anniversary of 9/11. Flags in the city flew at half-mast while a drizzling rain made the gray mood even more somber. New York City firemen and police officers got respectful applause as they marched in a small parade along Church Street. A few blocks south, in Battery Park, thousands of people filed past a mobile monument that bears the names of all 9/11 victims—including those killed in Washington, D.C. and Shanksville, Pa.

"Tears have always preceded the outpouring of the Spirit. We must allow the Holy Spirit to pray through us, even if that means He will intercede 'with groanings too deep for words.'"

The 50 or 60 Christian leaders who met that day at the Millennium Hotel in lower Manhattan did not come to create a spectacle. No one on the street knew we were there. And no one in the room was making small talk or working deals. Billy Wilson, the leader of the Awakening America prayer initiative,

told us at the beginning of our two and a half-hour gathering that we were there to simply cry out to God for a spiritual awakening in the United States.

We were originally supposed to have our meeting on the 55th floor, in a room with sweeping views of the city. But Billy explained to us the night before that a group of lawyers who were working on an important case needed their meeting suite for an extra day. So we were moved to the fourth floor.

I later realized how fitting that was for a gathering of this kind. We did not need to be high. God wanted us low.

There was nothing fancy about the event. Robert Stearns, leader of the Eagles' Wings Ministries, led us in worship with a single keyboard. Denominational executives from the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), the Assemblies of God and the Foursquare Church wore casual shirts instead of their trademark suits. Mart Green, the Christian millionaire who owns the Mardel company, read from the book of Proverbs and then led us in a simple prayer for a restoration of integrity in the American workplace. A group of students from Lee University sang their songs *a capella*.

And Vonette Bright, the widow of Campus Crusade founder Bill Bright, reminded us of how God answered prayers in the 1970s when a group of leaders cried to God for revival. She said the Jesus movement of that era was triggered by prayers for the youth of the nation.

At one point in the middle of the program Wilson interrupted the schedule. He asked if we could have a time of unscripted prayer, and he encouraged us to "cry out" to God in a humble entreaty for His mercy.

I really cannot explain what happened next. I felt compelled to fall on my knees, so I slid to the floor and buried my head in my hands. Suddenly I felt overcome with emotion. I had not felt stirred that day by any of the 9/11 events, and even

being near the World Trade Center site had not evoked sorrow in my heart. But all of a sudden I was sobbing.

These were not like the tears that occasionally well up in my eyes when I attend a wedding or when I hear a particularly moving song. This was different. These tears were guttural. They were being pulled out of the deepest part of my soul. It seemed as if this weeping did not even originate with me. It felt like a holy cry that God had initiated.

What I was praying went something like this: "Lord, please forgive us. God have mercy on the United States. Forgive Your church, Lord, for our backslidden condition. Cleanse us from our moral failure. Reach down and awaken us. Set our hearts on fire again, for You and for the mission You called us to. We are crying out to you for another chance to reach our generation before it is too late."

I can't tell you exactly how long that time of weeping lasted, but I could hear people sobbing in other parts of the room. I knew I did not make this happen. God was in it. And His Spirit was orchestrating the prayers that He needed to hear.

We can't force moments like this. But I believe that at this critical time in our nation's history we must release the tears and the travail of the Lord if we expect to see His miraculous answer.

The prophet Joel told wayward Israel: "Let the priests, the Lord's ministers, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, 'Spare Your people, O Lord, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations.'" (Joel 2:17a, NASB). And the Lord spoke through Jeremiah and said: "Consider and call for the mourning women, that they may come; And send for the wailing women, that they may come! Let them make haste and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may shed tears and our eyelids flow with water.'" (Jer. 9:17-18).

Tears have always preceded the outpouring of the Spirit. The

fallow ground must be broken before the harvest can come. The alabaster box must be broken before the fragrance of Christ can be released. We must know true brokenness! We must allow the Holy Spirit to pray through us, even if that means He will intercede “with groanings too deep for words” (see Rom. 8:26).

This is the time to cry out. I encourage prayer groups around the nation to dispense with your normal routine and shift into extraordinary prayer. We must weep for our national sins and for the church’s faithlessness. Please cry out until He sends a tsunami of His power to save us.

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