

With 60 Percent of Churches Dying, We Need a Move of God

Gospel advancement cannot be divorced from the power of prayer. Nor should prayer be divorced from the need for gospel advancement regionally, nationally, and internationally.

Let History Teach Us Now

In 1806, there were five college students who began to pray twice a week for a mighty move of God to occur. The second Great Awakening had affected at least one of these five students. College student Samuel Mills' father had served as pastor of a church that had been touched powerfully by this awakening.

These five students of the Williams College in Williamstown, Massachusetts, had come together on a hot Saturday afternoon in August for their prayer meeting. They were going to discuss William Carey's missionary manifesto, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*.

On their way to their prayer meeting, a major rainstorm began, filled with wind, lightning and thunder. They noticed a large haystack, which would provide an opportunity to seek shelter underneath from the wind, rain, and lightning. It was in that setting, after discussing Carey's missionary manifesto, they went before God in prayer.

Samuel Mills proposed they would go on mission to India. While three of the five agreed with Mills to focus on reaching Asia, it was Harvey Loomis who believed deeply they must focus on reaching America first.

Dial in closely with me: Beginning with what is now known as the "Haystack Prayer Meeting," two years later, in 1808, a

group who became known as “The Brethren” was formulated. These five young men and others focused on prayer and missions. In 1810, after they graduated, they requested that a group send them to India as missionaries. The General Association of Massachusetts formed the first official missions organization in the United States in June of 1810. It was called The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

By the way, Adoniram Judson and his wife, as well as Luther Rice, were some of the first missionaries commissioned and sent across the ocean by this new mission board. It was Judson who became known as the father of Baptist foreign missions. Just think: It all began in a prayer meeting under a haystack.

After praying under the haystack that afternoon, these five young men sang a hymn together. It was then Samuel Mills said loudly over the rain and the wind, *“We can do this, if we will!”* That moment changed those men forever. Many historians would tell you that all mission organizations trace their history back to the “Haystack Prayer Meeting” in some way.

Yes, these men turned the world upside down. And it all began in a prayer meeting under a haystack. At the place where this meeting occurred, a monument stands today, commemorating this historic God moment. At the top of the monument is the phrase, “THE FIELD IS THE WORLD.” Underneath those words, it says, “The birthplace of American foreign missions. 1806.” This great gospel advancement all occurred because five college students cried out to God in prayer.

Prayer, Movements, the Power of God and Great Gospel Advancement

The proper place of prayer is minimized. A spiritual movement is seen as mystical. The power of God is ignored. Then, we wonder why great gospel advancement is not occurring.

Integrating these things is imperative. In fact, it is biblical. Think of this familiar verse found in Acts 4:31. It

says, "When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness."

- Prayer prioritized?
- Spiritual movement occurring?
- Power of God evident?
- Gospel advancement occurring?

With the condition of things today, we need to return to the biblical and historical model now.

6 in 10 Protestant Churches Are Plateaued or Declining

On March 6, 2019, LifeWay Research released a new study from Exponential. It revealed "Six in 10 Protestant churches are plateaued or declining in attendance." It further said that *more than half saw fewer than 10 people become new Christians in the past 12 months.*

While growth is happening in some churches across America, it is more than evident that churches and the denominations many of them are connected to are not healthy and growing.

Unquestionably, we need to learn what we can from other churches, but more importantly, it is time that we get ourselves under the nearest haystack, study gospel advancement and cry out to God over the challenges we are facing today.

Then we can leave this unique place declaring what Samuel Mills declared over 200 years ago, "*We can do this, if we will.*"

We need to see what Samuel Mills saw.

The field is the world. {eo}

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