

THE

MINISTRY

MATTERS

SERIES

DAVE EARLEY

THE

*House of*  
**PRAYER:**

*Building a  
Culture of prayer  
in your Church*

*Dave Earley*

# **HOUSE OF PRAYER: Building the Prayer Culture of Your Church**

**By Dave Earley**

## Chapter One

### The Spectacle in the Temple



Cathy and I love to walk together. One day, we happened to be walking around the campus of a small, used-to-be religious, private college. We stopped in the chapel for a few minutes to get out of the sun. At the front of the chapel sanctuary was a mural of a man walking through a field of flowers. He was wearing a silky white robe, and had beautiful, long, flowing light brown hair, flawless olive skin and a sweet smile.

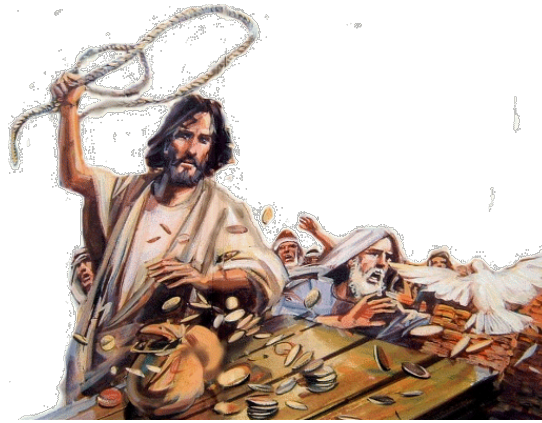
"That has got to be the most effeminate looking picture of Jesus I have ever seen," I exclaimed.

"It is creepy," Cathy said.

Feeling awkward and uncomfortable, we left and went back to our walk.

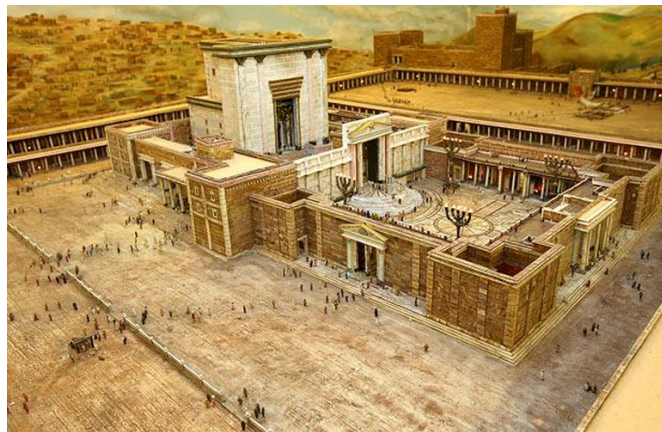
The sad thing is, someone actually thought Jesus was like that. I guess they never read Mark chapter eleven.

*They came to Jerusalem, and He went into the temple complex and **began to throw out those buying and selling in the temple. He overturned the money changers ' tables and the chairs of those selling doves,***<sup>16</sup> *and would not permit anyone to carry goods through the temple complex.*<sup>17</sup> *Then He began to teach them: "Is it not written, **My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of thieves!"** Mark 11:15-17*



I cannot wait to get to heaven and see the video of this event! Imagine **Jesus bursting into the temple, and, like a bar bouncer, grabbing men by the scuff of the neck and tossing them out the door.** Picture Him **turning over their tables** and gold coins rolling everywhere. See Him **pulling chairs out from under the money changers.** Imagine him standing with his arms outraised, refusing to permit anyone from even walking through the temple area that was not there on spiritual matters. He refused to allow anyone to use it for a travel or transportation short-cut.

Now **picture Jesus doing all of this with a whip in his hands** (see John 2:15)!  
**Sounds more like “Rambo Jesus” than “wimpy Jesus.”**  
Something must have really ticked Him off.



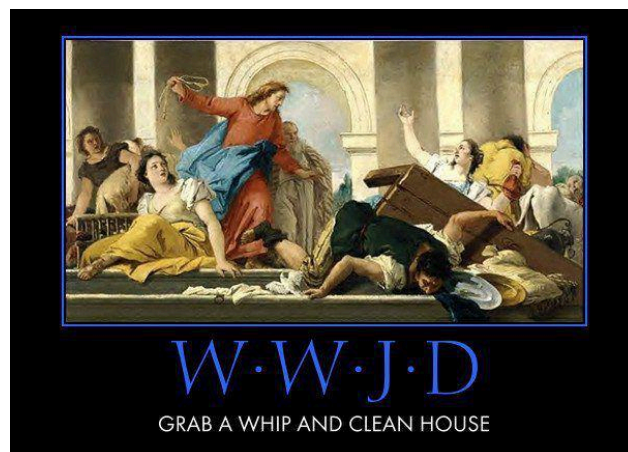
Let me give you a bit of context. **The temple complex** was divided into four primary sections. In the rear and elevated above the others was the Court of the Priests, containing the Holy of Holies. Next to it was the Israel’s Court, where Jewish men were permitted. Then the Women’s Court, which was as far as Jewish women were allowed. Below these, and larger than all of them combined, was **the vast Court of the Gentiles.** The Jews had lost respect for what this court was intended to be – **a place where Gentiles from all nations could come and meet with God.**

**Jesus was incredibly passionate about the things of God** (Jn. 2:17). The Jews behind the money tables, on the other hand, were passionate about making money. They were extorting the spiritual pilgrims by exchanging their currency into “special temple coins.” They were selling overpriced, “approved” oxen, sheep, and birds for sacrifices. Jesus said that they had made God’s house into a den of thieves. In doing this, **they had lost the purpose for which the temple existed – to be a place where people from all nations could come and meet with God.**

Understanding this makes it obvious why Jesus was so upset. **When the temple was being used for something less than a house of prayer, it so infuriated Jesus that He drove the defilers out.** Then He predicted that the physical temple would soon be destroyed. Seeing such a display of His authority, plus losing their source of extra income, so angered the priests that they plotted to have Jesus killed (Mark 11:18).

This was an extremely important incident in the life of Jesus that is often overlooked. **Jesus was willing to make a spectacle in the temple and face death in order to remind people that God’s house must be a place of prayer,** and not be something less than that.

**If Jesus took the prayer ministry of His people that seriously,  
how much more should you and I! <sup>1</sup>**



### **What Would Jesus Do?**

**If Jesus was angered by the fact that the Temple was failing to be a house of prayer, would He also be angered by the level of prayer in your life?**

**Would He be angered by the level of prayer in your ministry?**

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1 Most of the above section is taken from my book *Pastoral Leadership Is... How to Lead God’s People with Passion and Confidence*, B&H Books 2012.

## Chapter Two

### The First Church, a House of Prayer



**The first church in history** was launched in Jerusalem by the first disciples of Jesus. It was wildly successful, with **3,000 baptized the first day after the first sermon!** (Acts 2:41). Plus they had **people saved everyday** (Acts 2:47).

What was the secret of their success?

In part, the answer is that **they were a powerful house of prayer.** *If we want what they had, we need to do what they did.* So what made them a dynamic house of prayer?

### Four Lessons from the Prayer Culture of the First Church



## 1. They Prioritized Prayer Before Doing Anything Else

Acts 1 came before Acts 2. For seven days **the disciples focused everything entirely on prayer *before* doing anything else** (Acts 1:12-14). They spent a week in intense prayer awaiting the empowering of the Holy Spirit. They prayed *before* attempting to preach the gospel and plant a church.

And it was worth it.

Those seven days of intense prayer led to the coming of the Holy Spirit as flames of fire over the heads of the apostles and the explosive birth of the church as 3,000 were baptized! (Acts 2:41). If we want what they had, we need to do what they did.

**For them prayer was the first priority. For us, too often prayer is the last resort.**

## 2. They Prayed Together

*All these were continually united...* Acts 1:14

When we read the book of Acts we see that **the primary pattern of prayer they established was corporate prayer**. United prayer birthed the church (1:14; 2:1). Corporate prayer was their method of dealing with problems, pressure, and persecution (4:24-31). Praying together was modeled by the apostolic leadership team (6:4). Earnest united prayer by the church miraculously freed Peter from prison and execution (12:5-12). United prayer was the means by which leaders received divine instruction and ministry direction (13:1-2).

**In the U.S. we are so individualistic that the focus is on solitary quiet time instead of corporate prayer times. We need both.**



## 3. The Prayer Ministry of the Church was led by the top leaders of the Church

*When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James.*<sup>14</sup> **All these were continually united in prayer...** Acts 1:13-14

Note those in active attendance at the first prayer meeting of the first church. It is a **who's who of first century Christian leaders** – Peter, James, John, and Andrew.

**Any pastor who hopes to experience the blessings of God will not delegate the leadership of the prayer ministry to others.**

#### **4. They Devoted Themselves to Prayer**

*And **they devoted themselves** to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to **prayers**.* Acts 2:42 bolding added

**The first church was a church on fire because it was a church on its knees.**

Prayer was built into the DNA of the first church. It was a priority, a practice, a lifestyle, a habit, and a passion.

It is impossible to read the book of Acts without repeatedly running into prayer, as prayer is mentioned thirteen times in the first fourteen chapters (see Acts 1:14-15; 2:42; 3:1; 4:25-31; 6:4,6; 9:40; 10:2,4,31; 11:5; 13:2-3; 14:23).

They lived lives devoted to the prayers. As Jewish converts, they practiced the three times a day of corporate prayer the Jews modelled.

For them prayer was not a side issue, a peripheral program – no. Prayer was the core of their DNA.



***If we want that they had we need to do what they did.***



## Chapter Three

### A Historic House of Prayer



Many Christian leaders consider Charles Haddon Spurgeon to be the greatest pastor in history. A prolific writer, his commentary on the Psalms, *The Treasurer of David*, is still considered to be a classic.

He grew one of the first modern-day mega-churches with 10,000 in weekly attendance in London in the nineteenth century. His church was a pioneer in ministry to the homeless, poor, and widows. It set the pace in church planting and missions. It birthed a Bible college to train pastors and missionaries.



Though commonly known as the "Prince of Preachers," it was not preaching that made Spurgeon great. It was his strong commitment to prayer and in leading a praying church that explains his massive impact.

Regarding prayer, he said:

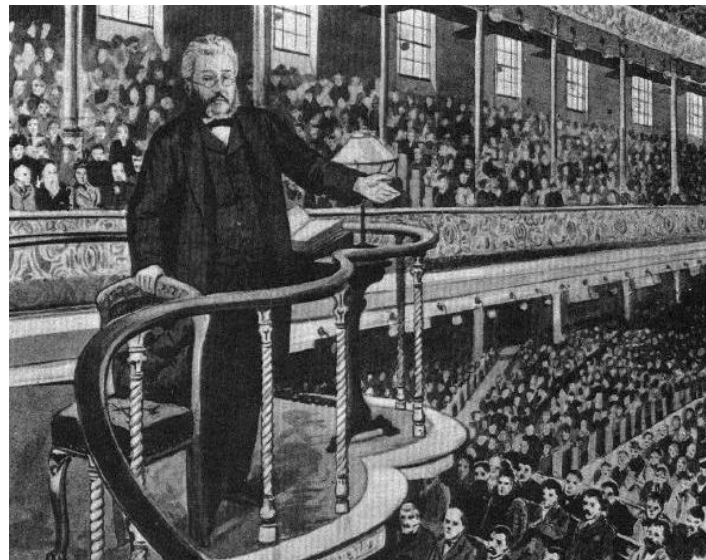
***To pray is to enter the treasure-house of God and to gather riches out of an inexhaustible storehouse.***

***To pray is to grasp heaven in one's arms, to embrace the Deity within one's soul, and to feel one's body made a temple of the Holy Spirit***

***No man can progress in grace if he forsakes prayer.***

***He who knows how to overcome with God in prayer has heaven and earth at his disposal.***

Spurgeon frequently commented that his success was the direct result of his congregation's faithful prayers. When visitors would come to Spurgeon's church he would take them to the basement prayer-room where people were always on their knees interceding. Then Spurgeon would declare, **"Here is the powerhouse of this church."**<sup>8</sup>



Even though he had 5,000 in attendance on Sunday mornings, another 5,000 Sunday evening for an evangelistic service, he regarded his church's Monday night prayer meeting as the most important meeting of the week. Every Monday night, a large portion of Spurgeon's huge sanctuary was filled with up to 1,200 earnest and fervent intercessors. His biographers noted, **"In Spurgeon's eyes the prayer-meeting was the most important meeting of the week."**<sup>9</sup>

Regarding church prayer meetings, Spurgeon stated,

***Prayer meetings are the throbbing machinery of the church.***

***The condition of the church may be very accurately gauged by its prayer meetings. So is the prayer meeting a grace-ometer, and from it we may gauge the amount of divine working among a people. If God be near a church, it must pray. And if he be not there, one of the first tokens of his absence will be slothfulness in prayer.***<sup>10</sup>

In his autobiography, Spurgeon described his gratefulness for being blessed with such a praying church. "I always give all the glory to God, but I do not forget that **He gave me the privilege of ministering from the first to a praying people. We had prayer meetings that moved our very souls**, each one appeared determined to storm the Celestial City by the might of intercession."

In his book, *Only a Prayer Meeting*, Spurgeon offered several reasons for the success of his church's weekly prayer meeting and suggestions for making prayer meetings effective. These include:

1. The pastor must make the prayer meeting his priority. His obvious love for prayer will "foster a corresponding love for the prayer-meeting" among his people.
2. Work on having concise prayers. "Length is the deathblow to earnestness, and brevity is the assistant to zeal."
3. Persuade all to pray aloud. "It gives a reality and life to the whole matter, to hear those trembling lips utter thanks for new life just received, and to hear that choking voice confessing the sin from which it has just escaped."
4. Encourage the attendants to send in special requests for prayer as often as they feel constrained to do so. "These little scraps of paper, in themselves most truly prayers, may be used as kindling to the fire in the whole assembly."
5. "Do not allow [anything else] to take the place of prayer. Remember that we meet for prayer; and let it be prayer."

I believe that **the greatest houses of prayer have yet to be built.**

**Let's learn from the past in order to change the future!**

## Chapter Four

### A Small-Town House of Prayer



Jefferson, Oregon has a population of 2,200 people. Several years ago, it also had a very discouraged pastor. Dee Duker had given up his first love - farming, to take over the role of pastor for the struggling Jefferson Baptist Church.

(<http://www.jeffersonbaptistchurch.org>) After 12 years, he was burnt-out and bitter, and planning on resigning.



But during a four-day conference, that all changed. At the **pastors' prayer summit**, Pastor Duker realized that he had tried **everything but prayer**. Convicted of spiritual arrogance, prayerlessness, an independent spirit, and the belief that he could accomplish anything by hard work, he resolved to change. He returned to his church, confessed his prayerlessness to his congregation, and **dedicated himself to prayer**,

**and to leading his church to become a house of prayer.** In doing so, he made seven specific goals:

**Seven goals:**

1. Spend **one uninterrupted hour per day** praying by himself.
2. Spend **one hour per day praying with a partner.**
3. **Pray for everyone in the church by name** weekly.
4. Pray at least **once a month with other pastors.**
5. **Preach on prayer** for three months.
6. Plan at least **four major church prayer events each year** (always to precede a major evangelistic thrust).
7. Identify the church's "farm" (twenty miles in every direction from the church), claim it, and **target prayer for it.**



Prayer changed everything. Dukes says, **“The more we prayed, the more God put it on our hearts to reach the lost.** We experienced a growing sense of urgency to reach our neighbors and the world. We grew in creative ways to reach out to the lost. Almost everyone in the church began praying for lost friends, work associates, family members, mission efforts, and countries around the world.”<sup>2</sup>

Since Dukes got serious about prayer, **the church has grown to an average Sunday morning attendance of 1,400 people in a town of 2,200.** Real prayer always leads to real outreach. In the last few years Jefferson Baptist church has **planted four churches** in their valley and over **30 churches** in West Africa.

Real **prayer produces more prayer**. The church now averages **two corporate prayer meetings daily**. On Sundays, there are teams praying during every worship service. They also **pray around the clock for lost people** the ten days before Easter and 24 hours of fasting and prayer the day before Easter. They pray for every single person within twenty miles of their church by name. Every morning, their high school students “prayer walk” around the school track, praying for their fellow students.

Dukes strongly believes that in order for a church to become a house of prayer the pastor must understand the difference between believing that prayer is important and that it is essential. **“Those who believe that prayer is essential – not just important – will have passion and fervency that will persuade others to join them.”**<sup>3</sup>

A real commitment to prayer changed a small-town church into an evangelistic dynamo.  
**What would happen if your church became a house of prayer?**

**Notes:**

1. Dee Dukes, quoted in Daniel Henderson and Elmer Towns, (*Churches That Pray Together*, Colorado Springs, NavPress, 2009), 18
2. Dukes, 19
3. 21

# Chapter Five

## A Brooklyn House of Prayer

By Dave Earley



In 1972, twenty-nine year old **Jim Cymbala** became pastor of the struggling, broken down, nearly bankrupt **Brooklyn Tabernacle**. Only two dozen people made up the church and on his first Sunday as pastor the offering was \$85.00. Jim had only a secular university education and felt incapable of leading such an unhealthy church in such a tough neighborhood. Humbled, broken, and realizing that the church was doomed without a break-through by God, he began to cry out to God in prayer.

During a vacation trip to Florida, Jim sensed God speaking to him deep within his spirit.

*If you and your wife will **lead my people to pray** and call upon my name, you will never lack for something fresh to preach. I will supply all the money that's needed, both for the church and for your family, and you will never have a building large enough to contain the crowds I will send in response.<sup>1</sup>*

Jim went back to his people with renewed hope. Standing in front of them he told them of his new resolution.

*From this day on, **the prayer meeting will be the barometer of our church.** What happens on Tuesday night will be the gauge by which we judge success or failure because that will be the measure by which God blesses us.<sup>2</sup>*

**They began to take prayer seriously.** Sometimes it was crying out to the Lord as a group, all praying aloud in a concert of prayer, or holding hands in a large prayer circle, or people would speak up with special burdens. The methods varied, but the focus was the single—prayer.

**God responded. In the next few weeks answers became noticeable.**

The lives of his congregation were powerfully changed. Excited about what God was doing, they began to bring friends, neighbors and family members. Hopeless, hurting, broken people began to come and found radical deliverance and transformation.

God began to send in junkies, prostitutes, homosexuals, lawyers, business men, and bus drivers. There were Latinos, African Americans, Caribbean Americans, whites and more. People began to stream in from Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, and Long Island. **Within a few years, they had outgrown the church building and were meeting in a local high school. A few years later, the high school had become too small.**

**So they prayed.**



**God responded, giving them a 1,400 seat theatre on the main street coming into Brooklyn.** In spite of sending out teams to start new churches around the city, they had to hold four Sunday worship services to get everyone in who wanted to come.





The ragtag band with no trained musicians and choir that could not read music began each practice with a lively 30 minute prayer meeting. The music ministry began to improve and expand. The power in their worship was so thick that often Jim would skip his sermon and go straight to the invitation.

Maybe you know the rest of the story. **The choir eventually became world famous, turning out Grammy Award winning albums.** Jim's story of the church, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, became a bestselling book.

### **What was the secret?**

As Cymbala writes, **“God had formed a core group of people who wanted to pray, who believed that nothing was too big for him to handle.”**<sup>3</sup>

**If God did that in Brooklyn, what can He do where you live?**

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**For More Information on this subject check out**

- ***Prayer: Timeless Secret of High-Impact Leaders***
- ***Pastoral Leadership Is....***

This chapter was adapted from *Pastoral Leadership Is...* Dave Earley, B&H 2012

Notes:

1. Jim Cymbala and Dean Merrill, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, (Grand Rapids, MI: 1997), 25
2. Cymbala, 27
3. 38