

Awakening to a "Power Greater"

By Jerry Page, Past President of Central California Conference

Bob and I were sharing a room with two double beds at a minister's meeting in Colorado. In the middle of the night, I somehow dreamed that my wife, Janet, was in the other bed. Still sleeping, I got up and walked across the room to the other bed and stood looking down at Bob.

Sensing my presence, he awoke - and at the same moment so did I. With his sense of humor in full swing he said with a smirk, "Jerry, I won't tell a soul." I'm going to tell all the pastors tomorrow at breakfast about my sleepwalking episode so you don't distort it I shot back with a laugh!

Looking back over life I realize how often I have thought I was awake when really I was sound asleep! And Janet and I have discovered that when we start "spiritual sleepwalking" our Lord plans spiritual awakenings for each of us along the journey. With Jesus' return so near, we believe that one of the greatest awakenings our Lord has brought into our lives is also one of the most important needs of His last-day remnant movement.

It is true the Lord is doing amazing things around the globe as God's people cooperate with Him. But the haunting reality is that as we search our own hearts and talk with other leaders and members of this movement, Janet and I believe we are only scratching the surface of what our God longs to do. How can we unleash His vision and power to turn our world - North America - upside down as in the days of Acts? What is God waiting for to bring the great revival that ushers in His coming?

"A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing. A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer." (1 Selected Messages, p.121, emphasis supplied)

Through prayer it is the baptism and infilling of the Holy Spirit that will lead to unleashing His power for these last days. As we study the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy, we find that it is not only more personal and private prayer that is needed. What is needed is much more united prayer. The focus of this article is on that specific need in the current remnant movement.

Call to United Prayer

Jesus promised in Matthew 18: 19 and 20: "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

About this passage, Ellen White commented: "The promise is made on condition that the united prayers of the church are offered, and in answer to these prayers there may be expected a power greater than that which comes from private prayer. The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love of God and for one another," (Letter 32, 1903, p.5 to Brother and Sister Farnsworth, January 28, 1903, White Estate, Washington D.C., October 22, 1979, 9MR 303.3, MR No. 748, The Power of United Prayer, emphasis supplied)

The role of individual prayer is essential for every believer. Following the model of Jesus, we need to spend much more time with our Father if we would see the same results as Jesus and other greats of Scripture.

Throughout the Book of Acts and the New Testament, we read about the united prayer of the early church believers, and then we see amazing movings of God. One hundred twenty gathered in the upper room and that unity led to Pentecost! (Acts 1:13-2:1) When Peter and John were threatened, the believers cried out together for boldness, and the place where they were was shaken. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke His word with boldness. (Acts 4:24-37) After Herod killed James and was about to execute Peter, the believers gathered and prayed. An angel came, Peter's chains fell off, jail doors swung open, and he went to the praying church in victory! (Acts. 12:3-19) These are only a few examples of their constant habit of seeking the Lord together in prayer to understand his heart, will, and power to help. (See also Acts 1:24; 2:42-47; 6:6; 13:1-3; 14:16:13,25; 20:36; 21:5.)

Janet and I believe one need our Lord has is for us to make a commitment to spend time together and call on His name. Let us share a few examples from our experience with you.

From \$100,000 to \$3,300,000

"It is in the order of God that those who bear responsibilities should often meet together to counsel with one another and pray earnestly for that wisdom which He alone can impart. Unitedly make known your troubles to God. Talk less: much precious time is lost in talk that brings no light. Let brethren unite in fasting and prayer for the wisdom that God has promised to supply liberally." (Testimonies to the Church, vol. 1, 624, emphasis supplied)

One of the amazing "waymarkers" in Janet and my spiritual journey has been the miraculous growth of the annual Camp Meeting Evangelism Offering in the Central California Conference. This offering has grown from under \$100,000 in 1996 to more than \$3.3 million for the past two years. People all over the world ask us, "What are you doing to raise that amount of money for evangelism in ten days?" We say it is a miracle of God through so many members praying together. Often the reply is, "No, really, what are you doing? Of course you pray, but what are the practical methods you are using to accomplish this?" Yes, we work hard all year managing, reporting, planning. But the real story is God's leading through His people who come together and pray, seeking His heart, His vision.

When Janet and I arrived in Central California in 1995, the Soquel campground was for sale and camp meeting was ending. Many members were concerned about losing this life-changing ministry. We both love camp meeting. It was agreed to hold one more camp meeting in Central.

We wanted camp meeting to be a deeply spiritual event bathed in prayer for the Lord's presence and power. We called for members around the conference to pray, asking God to show us His will for the future. At camp meeting, Janet led a volunteer prayer team to pray with campers as they arrived and throughout the 10-day event. Amazing answers to united prayer happened. Camp meeting was so Spirit-filled that a commitment to return to the annual 10-day event was voted and a year-round prayer ministry began in earnest.

Conference Office Prayer Meetings

"Our Savior follows His lessons of instruction with a promise that if two or three should be united in asking anything of God it should be given them. Christ here shows that there must be union with others, even in our desires for a given object. Great importance is attached to the united prayer, the union of purpose. God hears the prayers of individuals, but on this occasion Jesus was giving special and important lessons that were to have a special bearing upon His newly organized church on the earth. There must be an agreement in the things which they desire and for which they pray. It was not merely the thoughts and exercises of one mind, liable to deception; but the petition was to be the earnest desire of several minds centered on the same point. (Testimonies to the Church, vol. 3, p. 429, emphasis supplied)

Janet invited volunteers to join her for three hours each week at the conference office to pray. We were praying for the needs of the conference in such areas as mission, personnel, finances, and local church needs. Requests were written down and dated, as were the answers. This small dedicated group began to experience God's power, to see specific answers. They began to learn so much about the Lord. Longing for all the members to realize the power of praying unitedly, they began to ask God to give them a "token" that would show what He could do when His people pray together. One by one several prayer partners were impressed to pray for the evangelism offering.

When the prayer team met at camp meeting in 1997, they again asked God to give His people a token of what He wanted to do through united prayer. The impression that came was to pray for the evangelism offering. Surprised, but in one accord, they began to pray for evangelism funds, agreeing that God somehow wanted to use this offering as a token of the power of united prayer. The campers were also asked to pray for the offering, asking God how much He wanted them to give. Soon hundreds, then thousands, joined in united prayer.

The goal that year for evangelism funds was \$100,000. That year the offering total came to \$138,000! Thus began the year-to-year faith and trust journey. The prayer team would ask God how He wanted them to pray. As He led them to agreement, they began to pray earnestly for the God-given goal.

The prayer partners prayed for more than \$500,000 and it happened! Next, they felt led to pray for \$1,000,000, and after a couple of years that happened as well.

During our annual prayer-walk before camp meeting the next year, I was praying with Janet and a couple of other prayer partners. Janet started praying and thanking God for what He had done. Then she shocked me by praying for \$2 million. We respected what the prayer team was praying for, but honestly, I was a little scared. But Janet and the other prayer team members felt God had said the evangelism offering would reach \$2 million this year.

On the last night of camp meeting, a developer came up to me as I was getting my microphone on for the final sermon in the main auditorium. He asked how the offering was going this year. I responded that it was going well because it already is at \$900,000 and looked like it would be over a million again this year. But I also added that a couple of our prayer partners have felt the Lord was impressing them it would be \$2 million this year. He was shocked! He said, "Really? I can't believe that! My brother and I sat down after lunch today and said let's do what our leaders have been asking us and sit down and pray and ask God what He wants us to do this year."

These brothers had not previously given to the evangelism offering, but he went on to say that as they talked and prayed they felt the Lord was impressing them to pledge to put \$1,000,000 on top of what the rest of the camp meeting family did. I was shocked too and told Janet to go pray with this man. He said they didn't have that kind of money but with hands shaking he wrote out the pledge card for a million dollars. The congregation was so excited as I told them and they just praised the Lord together.

But here is the rest of the story. Six months later that developer called my wife Janet on her cell phone and was so excited! He said, "Janet, tell the prayer partners thank you! God worked an amazing miracle today."

The developer had been trying to get the US government to pay for a contract they had backed out of after having them build a hospital. They had done appeal after appeal and

lost every case. The prayer partners had been praying for about the case, but the developer had given up on ever getting any money back.

“Today a US federal judge did some thing that just doesn’t happen,” he explained. “He found the US government in ‘bad faith’ and ordered them to pay me 17 million dollars!!!”

A Prayer and Stewardship Journey

The prayer team led the way all through this journey, as together they listened to what God impressed them He was planning to do (See Christ's Object Lessons, p.147). God led us all on an amazing personal stewardship growth journey as we asked Him how much we should pledge. Many, many members began to ask God what or how God wanted them involved and the offering increased dramatically. Often what He led to was more than we could see meeting in any normal financial ways. But over and over God helped individuals reach their pledged amount in amazing ways leading to thrilling testimonies and faith building.

God led us to pray together about how to use the extra money each year (about \$100,000 a year more than we had budgeted) which led to our outreach ministries expanding dramatically. Our youth and young adult ministries, student LE ministries, 60 lay-training Bible workers, two full-time youth evangelism teams, secular campus and young adult ministries, children’s outreaches, and health programs, evangelistic meetings and a myriad of other local church projects to reach new people groups and unreached geographical areas. Baptisms increased dramatically as the Holy Spirit worked.

These miracles led to other conference administrators and leaders all around the world calling me asking, “What did you do to get such a large offering at the ten day camp meeting each year?” We told them it was not some development methods but about the prayer miracles and the power of God’s people all going to Him individually and unitedly. It was a result of how the Lord can do exceedingly abundantly above anything we can ever ask think!!

The Lord’s vision was so much bigger than our human one. He is amazing and finances are not our problem. He has said that “Prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heaven's storehouse, where are treasured the boundless resources of Omnipotence” (Steps to Christ, p. 94, 95).

God's Prayer Priorities for Central

"We must be much in prayer if we would make progress in the divine life. When the message of truth was first proclaimed, how much we prayed. How often was the voice of intercession heard in the chamber, in the barn, in the orchard, or the grove. Frequently we spent hours in earnest prayer, two or three together claiming the promise; often the sound of weeping was heard and then the voice of thanksgiving and

the song of praise. Now the day of God is nearer than when we first believed, and we should be more earnest, more zealous and fervent than in those early days. Our perils are greater now than then. Souls are more hardened. We need now to be imbued with the Spirit of Christ, and we should not rest until we receive it." (Testimonies to the Church, vol. 5, pp. 161, 162)

In the late 90s as a team, conference leaders and prayer team members, we felt led to involve the entire membership in united prayer. Eleven conference prayer requests were agreed on as God's priorities for the Conference. A Prayer Priorities bookmark was mailed to every home and we asked members to include them in their individual prayer times. We had no idea of how God would resource His priorities for Central. It is now clear it is through the evangelism offering!

A few women of a Bay Area congregation were praying over the Conference Prayer Priorities bookmark. One day they began asking God what they could do for their spiritually languishing church. God led them to make a bookmark of prayer needs for their church.

They give it out to the members and others started praying. Their weekly small prayer group grew as others joined. Answers to the God-directed prayer priorities on the bookmark began to happen. Members started reading their Bibles and inspired writings. The men began leading out. Members began to burn with the desire to share Jesus with others. Evangelistic outreaches have now begun!

Experiencing United Prayer

One day a wife threw her essential belongings into her car, crying out to God to speak to her as she drove down the highway. Just then a billboard came into view that said Turn Back Next Exit. She did and called Janet. She was sure her marriage was beyond repair. Janet offered to pray with her once a week for an hour. "We are only going to pray, praise God, claim His promises. No negative talking or bad-mouthing your husband. And you must begin spending personal time with the Lord each morning," Janet told her.

The result was miraculous! The wife fell in love with Jesus and was smiling and joyous. Her husband began paying attention, spending time with her. They fell in love again - just like when they had first met. The husband told Janet, "If you'd never prayed with my wife, we'd have never made it."

When Janet shared this experience in one California meeting, a woman stomped out. Later she told Janet that she'd been praying for her husband for years to no avail. Janet asked if she'd been praying with two or more. She hadn't. Janet gathered several women together each week to pray with this discouraged wife. Within two years her husband, a very rough, hard-living man, was converted and baptized. A male church

member called him every morning to pray and befriend this new member. Several years later, he is still in the church and calls to pray with us for all of our ministry needs!

Grass Root Experiences

"Why do not believers feel a deeper, more earnest concern for those who are out of Christ? Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another?" (Testimonies to the Church, vol. 7, p.21)

Through sharing how God is working through united prayer in small groups, modeling prayer ministries at camp meeting and the Wednesday intercessory prayer times, united prayer in small groups and churches has grown dramatically.

After camp meeting one year, a man went home determined to be re-connected with Jesus. He'd attended a seminar on prayer and was desperate for God's power in his personal life. He called an Adventist acquaintance and those two men met on the phone at 5:00 a.m. everyday to pray. They prayed for each other, their families, friends, pastors, churches, jobs, and the physically and spiritually sick. During the next 18 months, they witnessed amazing, miraculous answers. And God manifested His presence to each of them, changing them from the inside out and turning their worlds upside down!

A local elder of a small dying country church was dragged by his wife to a training seminar on united prayer. He was cynical and went begrudgingly. When he listened to a pastor describe how dramatically his church was changed when the elders began to meet regularly and pray, he got excited. He went home and joined his wife in calling his church to pray together. They turned their weekly prayer meeting into a gathering that really did pray.

They prayed over the empty desks in the small Adventist school whose survival depended on a growing enrollment. It wasn't long before new students, unknown to the church members, began to enroll. The school grew from one teacher to two and today is financially sound. Next, they began to pray over the empty church pews. The experience was the same. People began "walking in off the street" and the membership began to grow, is still growing today.

The list of examples of "a power greater" being unleashed when we pray together could go on and on! But what we've learned is that when we do what Jesus and the inspired writings call us to do, we can expect powerful life and church changing results!

Urgent Times

"Satan cannot endure to have his powerful rival appealed to, for he fears and trembles before his strength and majesty. At the sound of fervent prayer Satan's whole host trembles." (Testimonies, vol. 1, p. 346)

Are there dangers and counterfeits to be avoided by God's last-day people in individual and united prayer? Of course there are. When the Lord has a crucial truth that causes Satan and his host to tremble and to fear, the devil always seeks to pervert, distort and undermine that truth by counterfeits.

The study and interpretation of the Bible, evangelistic outreaches to share this last message, church doctrines, policies, and worship have all been distorted through the generations, as has prayer. But the truth is only validated by the attacks and counterfeits of Satan.

We must not ignore the "power greater" of praying together that can help unleash God's last great revival because of counterfeits of prayer or false revivals. We must test all our beliefs and actions by Scripture and the inspired writings, but never throw out the baby with the bathwater.

God has a bigger mission than we could ever dream or imagine. We are so privileged to live in these closing days of the great controversy. We believe that this generation will experience the fullness of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, just like we read about in Acts.

As Jesus says in Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." The presence of Jesus always changes everything and brings a "power greater." Amen and Amen!