

SECTION 6

**HOUSES OF PRAYER
EVERYWHERE**

HOUSES OF PRAYER EVERYWHERE

By Dr. Alvin J. Vander Griend

YOU CAN MAKE YOUR HOME A POWER HOUSE!

A small power house stands a short distance away from a comfortable log home in the Sierra Nevada mountains of California. That tiny building houses a generator that supplies all the electricity needed for the home. When the generator is running, there's enough electricity for light, heat, cooking, freezing, radio, television and anything else in that home that needs power. When it's not running X well, that home is a pretty cold, dark and unpleasant place to be.

A small cluster of believers band together to pray for their neighborhood or workplace. They are a spiritual power house. When they're praying, they release God's power and grace into the lives of the people around them. When they are not praying X well, that neighborhood or workplace is a pretty cold, dark and unpleasant place to be.

But power houses don't just *supply* electricity. They also *possess* it. What they have, they give. What they give, they have. Power houses are well lit, well heated and well powered. They have all the electricity they need.

Spiritual power houses X *Houses of Prayer* X are like that. They pray the blessings of Christ upon those who live or work near them. They also receive the blessings of Christ. In other words, God, who gives His grace in response to prayer, doesn't bypass the prayer. The person who prays God's blessing on others is first to receive a blessing.

When we touch God, we touch the source of all good gifts. James says, *AEvery good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change* (1:17).

Prayer connects us with the Father. When that happens, we are blessed, and so are those around us.

I challenge you to make your home a powerhouse. It isn't hard. Just begin by praying five minutes a day, for five households or persons who work near you. You'll discover that prayer is the key to blessing X blessing for you and blessing for the people you pray for. You will discover that prayer can powerfully change your life and your neighborhood.

DOES PRAYER REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

In Charlotte, North Carolina, the prayers of believers are making such a difference that neighbors are saying, "This is the nicest neighborhood we have ever lived in." Those who drive in are saying, "There's something different about this neighborhood."

After a church started a *House of Prayer* in Bakersfield, California, apartment complex crime was reduced and the quality of life was so dramatically improved that the police requested the church to plant prayer cells in other complexes where they were dealing with similar problems.

In Brooklyn, New York, leaders of a *House of Prayer* ministry have reported that prayers are reclaiming housing projects for Christ. Where crime has been rampant, intercessors are going head-to-head with forces of darkness and winning. Radical changes are occurring.

Recently a church decided to test the effect of serious prayer on an evangelistic endeavor. Church members selected 80 names from the telephone directory and prayed for those people. Another 80 names were chosen, and that group of people received no prayer. After three months church members called everyone in the two test groups.

Out of the 80 who had received no prayer only one responded favorably. But among the group that had been prayed for, 69 responded positively, inviting church members to come. Forty-five of them even invited the church prayer teams in for coffee and refreshments and an extended time of prayer. Prayer clearly made the difference.

It's clear from Scripture that prayer makes a difference. When Moses stood on a hillside and prayed for Joshua and the armies of Israel, prayer made the difference between victory and defeat (Exodus 17:8-16). When Elijah prayed on Mount Carmel, prayer made the difference between drought and rain (1 Kings 18:41-45; James 5:17-18). Prayer is the means by which believers are able to accomplish great works for God (John 14:12-14). Prayer is the means by which God's power is released in this world (James 5:16). Yes! Prayer makes a difference.

Prayer is a key factor in building the church. The first disciples *all joined together constantly in prayer* (Acts 1:14) as the foundations of the church were laid. Paul later instructed believers, *Devote yourselves to prayer* (Colossians 4:2). And in the face of the devil's schemes he pleaded that they *pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests* (Ephesians 6:18).

Prayer is the foundational factor in bringing blessing to our world and bringing people to Christ. *Urge, then, first of all,* commands Paul, *that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be*

made for everyone (1 Timothy 2:1). This is so that *Awe may live peaceful and quiet lives* and because God *Awants all [persons] to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth* (2:2, 4). Why isn't prayer making a greater difference in North America today? Simply because few Christians really understand the importance of prayer. They do not see prayer as the key factor in building the church or changing the world. We are so self-confident and Asufficient in ourselves that we neglect prayer and attempt to do things for God in our own way and in our own strength. Of course, we=d like God to bless our efforts, so we add a little prayer, seeking His support. But that isn't God=s way. His way involves earnest, constant, devoted, striving, powerful prayer. That=s what makes a real difference in the world around us.

SO WHAT IS A HOUSE OF PRAYER?

What is a *House of Prayer*? **It=s a cluster of two or more believers who are banded together to pray for, care about and share the blessings of Christ with their neighbors.** Let=s unpack that definition phrase by phrase.

It=s a **cluster of two or more believers.** The cluster may simply be the members of a single household who live under the same roof. Or it may be two or more Christians who pray regularly for those who live or work near them, and yet these Christians do not actually meet for prayer. A third type is a multiple-household cell made up of believers from several households, possibly even from different churches, who meet together regularly to pray. Each of these types can be effective in its own way.

The cluster of believers is **banded together.** They have decided to share a load of praying, caring and sharing. They agree to focus their prayers of a specific neighborhood or workplace. Their commitment to each other helps to keep them faithful.

Believers in *Houses of Prayer* **pray for, care about and share Christ=s blessings with their neighbors.** By means of prayer God=s power and grace are released into neighbor=s lives. Through acts of kindness neighbors are loved and lifted. Through sharing the gospel the lives of neighbors are transformed.

The prayer focus in *Houses of Prayer* is on neighbors, those who live or work nearby. The nearness of neighbors makes this a natural way to pray.

Jesus, in his parable of the friend who came at midnight, gives us a word picture of how intercession works (Luke 11:5-8). In His story there are three friends: the friend who comes at midnight is a friend-in-need. The friend to whom the concerned host goes to receive help is a friend-with-bread, and the host is the friend-in-the-middle.

The friend-in-the-middle is a type of intercessor. Concerned to place something before his friend-in-need, he goes to his friend-with-bread to ask for three loaves. The friend-with-bread initially declines but then relents and gives him the bread because of his persistence in asking. The host, in turn, brings the bread back to his friend-in-need.

Jesus is teaching us here that our neighbors are like the man who came at midnight. They have needs X needs that we cannot meet with our own resources. God, like the friend-with-bread, has infinite resources to meet the needs of those around us. We, like the friend-in-the-middle, go to God and ask Him to supply the needs of our neighbors. And God, in response to our asking, gives what is needed.

I don't know of any form of ministry that is simpler than this. It doesn't require a lot of planning. It doesn't demand new structures or lots of material. It doesn't even cost anything. It just takes a believer who is willing to take a few minutes a day to talk to the Father in heaven about his or her neighbor and who is willing to reach out to share Christ's blessings.

W. Stanley Mooneyham admonished, "Let us stop complaining that we don't have enough people, enough money, enough tools. That is simply not true. There is no shortage of anything we need X except vision, prayer and will. Prayer is the one resource immediately available to each of us.≡"

Believers who are banded together and praying in *Houses of Prayer* discover how prayer can powerfully change their own lives and the lives of those who live or work near them.

ACTUALLY CHANGING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

A member of a *House of Prayer* in Grand Rapids, Michigan, recently told me that, as a result of prayer,

- ! neighbors were more friendly to each other
 - ! people on the block had gotten out of drugs
 - ! two unemployed women had found jobs
 - ! a father had stopped drinking
 - ! a Bible study had started
 - ! a father was healed after a heart attack
 - ! a woman was miraculously healed from an illness
 - ! a person was delivered from an evil spirit
 - ! five persons came to know Christ
-

All these things took place within the first year! Imagine the impact on a community if that kind of prayer effect were multiplied a hundred or a thousand times over.

Intercessory prayer actually changes neighborhoods. As *Houses of Prayer* have prayed over their neighborhoods, prostitutes have moved away, crack houses have closed, crime had decreased, spiritual darkness has lifted and God has touched lives by His Holy Spirit. Satan is defeated and the kingdom of God is established where the hand of God moves in response to the prayers of His people.

Why do neighborhoods change when *Houses of Prayer* are planted there? Here are several reasons.

- 1. Prayer releases God=s grace and power into a neighborhood.** Think of God as having an infinite reservoir of blessings. A pipeline connects every house in your neighborhood with that reservoir. There=s a faucet on that pipeline to your neighbors, and that faucet is opened only by prayer. Each time you pray for a neighbor, you open the faucet and allow the blessings of God=s grace to flow. Before long, your neighborhood can be like a well-watered garden.

Prayer gains access where people cannot go. Neighbors can isolate themselves, closing their doors and their hearts. But God can reach beyond these barriers X and He does so in response to the prayers of His people.

One church in a small New York town decided to canvass its community by means of prayer. There were no brochures, newsletters or tracts. No one pressed a doorbell. All that the church members did was pray that God would touch the lives of the people who lived on each of the town=s forty streets.

What happened? People started visiting the church Aout of the blue.≡ One week, four families came on the Sunday after the church had prayed for the people on their street. Prayer reached into their hearts and homes.

- 2. God gets people=s attention when He answers prayers.** When things happen in answer to prayer in people=s lives X things that cannot be explained by the natural laws of cause and effect X people take notice. They begin to make room in their view of the world for a God who is living, active and powerful. When blessings come in answer to prayer, people begin to be aware of the God who cares. God has gotten their attention.

Pat=s neighbors on a cul-de-sac in Salida, California, seemed unaware of God. But when her *House of Prayer* began praying for them X and God began to answer X they took notice. God took opportunity, in response to prayer, to demonstrate God=s power and

love to them. Before long they were not only bringing prayer requests to Pat's house but were also eager to learn how to pray themselves.

When God gets people's attention in this way, the stage is set for them to come to know Him and to have a relationship with Him. They're open and ready to hear the gospel.

- 3. *Houses of Prayer* establish a long-term presence in a community.** In contrast to short-term outreach efforts, *House of Prayer* intercessors are there for the long haul. Their prayers continue to make a difference week after week, year after year. They're there to see families change and children grow up. They're there when crisis strikes and neighbors need a helping hand. They're there to celebrate good times, and they're there when a neighbor makes a commitment to Christ and needs help to grow spiritually. *House of Prayer* intercessors have the opportunity to see the gentle, patient, gradual work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives.
- 4. *Houses of Prayer* target whole households.** They don't focus only on husbands, wives or children. They pray for whole families as well as for the individual members of families. They're concerned for family relationships, family activities and family well-being.

Ministering to households follows a biblical pattern. When Paul and Silas had opportunity to minister to the Philippian jailer, they chose to deal with his whole household (Acts 16:32). After the Lord opened Lydia's heart to the gospel, Paul went on to minister to her whole household (Acts 16:15).

- 5. *House of Prayer* members demonstrate God's love in practical ways as they relate to their neighbors.** They look for and do little deeds of kindness for their neighbors: loaning a tool, caring for a pet, watering plants for neighbors on vacation, transporting a child, shoveling snow, bringing a food gift, sending a greeting card, and so on. When neighbors engage in selfless acts of kindness, people are touched and become increasingly open to a relationship with them.

Houses of Prayer may also plan events that bring people together. For example, they have block parties, backyard barbecues, Christmas-carol sings, open houses, super bowl parties and so on. Almost everyone wants to live in a friendly neighborhood where people are open and helpful. Caring opens doors, and that leads to sharing. As someone has said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."≡

Want to change your neighborhood? Start by praying for five of your immediate neighbors. Consider, for example, praying for the household on your left, the household on your right and the three households across the street. Or pray for any combination of neighbors or work associates whom the Lord leads you to pray for. Even five minutes a day, for starters, will make a tremendous difference.

A SIMPLE, EASY WAY TO START

If you are excited by the potential of this ministry, you may be asking questions like *Where do we go from here?* *What's the next step?* *How do we get started?* Here are some suggestions.

Simple Guidelines for an Individual or Small Group

If you are an individual or a small group with an interest in starting a *House of Prayer*, I suggest you start with a five-times-five prayer challenge:

- ! Identify five neighbors, work associates or unsaved persons whom the Lord is leading you to pray for.
- ! Commit to pray for them five minutes a day, five days a week, for a five-week period.
- ! Pray the following five BLESSings for yourself and your neighbors:
 - ≡ Body - health, protection, food, energy
 - ≡ Labor - employment, job satisfaction, adequate income, good work environment
 - ≡ Emotional - inner peace, joy, wisdom, insight, patience
 - ≡ Social - healthy relationships between spouses, parents, children, friends; reconciliation; love
 - ≡ Spiritual - repentance, salvation, obedience, gratitude, spiritual growth, enlightenment
- ! Use the devotional guide *How Do I Pray for My Neighbors?* (available from HOPE Ministries) to fortify your commitment.

After the first five weeks you will have enough experience to decide if you want to continue. You could choose to move on to the *Acare* phase. You could extend the list of the persons you pray for. You could join with others in a multiple-household prayer cell. Or you may wish to find a different ministry to give expression to your gifts and interests.

Five Easy Steps for a Church or Group of Churches to Start *Houses of Prayer*

1. Preview the resources available from HOPE Ministries. The ministry resources made available by HOPE Ministries are designed and written for *Houses of Prayer* ministries. They will help individual believers, prayer cells or churches to start and develop *Houses of Prayer*.
2. Explain this new ministry opportunity to the congregation. Sermons on prayer are important at this point. Use the preview video, the reproducible tri-fold titled *A Your Church Needs HOPE* (located in Appendix A of the *Houses of Prayer Ministry Manual*), and other helpful resources.
3. Launch the ministry by challenging the members of your congregation to begin praying for five neighbors using the *Five Blessings* tri-fold brochure. Provide them with the devotional guide *How Do I Pray for My Neighbors?*
4. Affirm and encourage weekly those who praying for their neighbors. Make sure answers to prayer are regularly shared with the whole congregation. Prepare for a celebration service at the end of the five weeks.
5. Get ready for the next phase. View the training videos with key leaders. Choose a *House of Prayer* coordinator for your church or group of churches. The video training kit is designed to help your church develop a long-term, sustainable *House of Prayer* ministry.

Houses of Prayer are contributing powerfully to the national prayer movement that God is now raising up. They are among the most hopeful signs appearing on the horizon. God is leading many pastors and church leaders throughout the land to initiate *Houses of Prayer*, and He is giving them the understanding that this is the way He is choosing to work today.

Real spiritual awakening X and an accompanying transformation of life on our streets and in our cities X will happen only if God=s people are faithful and earnest in prayer and obedient to His command that *Arequests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone* (1 Timothy 2:1). Please join the ranks of faithful pray-ers who are helping to make this happen.

Our world can only be changed one neighborhood, one workplace, one town, one city, one nation at a time. That=s why it=s necessary for you to make a prayer difference right where you are.

Dr. Alvin J. Vander Griend has served as a pastor, denominational leader and catalyst for spiritual renewal. He has served as a facilitator in the Pastors= Prayer Summit Movement. He currently heads the Houses of Prayer Everywhere (HOPE) organization in the United States. This movement owns as its goal the identification of an intercessor in every neighborhood in America until every man, woman and child who is not saved is being prayed for by name until they come to Christ or Christ returns.

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