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“The Great Awakening” in America in 1734

When a colony was founded in Northampton, Massachusetts, USA most of the people were Christian. But many of the next generation were not. Initially, there was a widespread tendency in the strict Reformed Church to cut off unbelievers from the church, but there was a reaction against this. So unconverted people were welcomed to the church. However, they became increasingly influential, and that undermined the church’s spirituality.

Pastor Jonathan Edwards had difficulties with this and believed that only those who were converted should be allowed to be churchmembers. Then, in 1734, he heard claims that a woman of dubious moral background had been converted. Her conversion led to the conversion of many others. Edwards wrote “This work of God, as it was carried on and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town. So that in the spring and summer following, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God. It never was so full of love, nor joy, and yet so full of distress, as it was then.” People were converted in every home in Northampton.

Some people wept in great distress about their sins. Others greatly rejoiced in receiving salvation. Still others agonised in prayer for people to be converted. There was a deep sense of the presence of God in the town. Edwards called Christians to unite in prayer for revival.

He wrote about “an extraordinary sense of the awful majesty, greatness and holiness of God, so as sometimes to overwhelm soul and body, a sense of the piercing, all seeing eye of God so as to sometimes take away bodily strength.” He saw people collapse physically under conviction of sin. They were deeply aware of “the wrath of God.” They longed “to be more perfect in humility and adoration.” They “felt a great delight in singing praises to God and Jesus Christ, and longing that this present life may be, as it were, one continued song of praise to God.”

Edwards described what happened as the “surprising work of God in Northampton,” It soon spread to other communities throughout New England. The movement became known as “the Great Awakening.”

Preparing for a church which is radically biblical in the power of the Spirit 6: A church running on prayer

Jesus found it necessary to spend nights in prayer even when he was extremely busy. He prayed extensively before important decisions and major transitions in His life and work. No one could read the Gospels without concluding he was a man of prayer. Modern Christians - even those who have experienced Renewal - don't always seem to be good disciples of Christ in this area. It is presumptuous to think we can run God's church without fully and continuously consulting him in prayer. He knows how to run his church, and can teach us how to play our part. We can have committees but they should be based and run on prayer – not a quick prayer at the beginning.

Parish Day of Prayer

On one occasion, in our Essex church, we became concerned that there was not enough corporate prayer backing for our evangelistic visiting programme in our church. So, we came together to pray about what we should do to rectify this. To our surprise we sensed the Lord guiding us to begin a weekly parish Day of Prayer. We began it on Thursday each week. The first prayer time was at 6.30 am for an hour and catered mainly for those in full time employment. Then two groups met at 9.15 am and one at 12.30 pm. Every Sunday we published a prayer news sheet which included thanksgiving topics for the way in which God had answered our prayers. This reporting back of answers to prayer is often forgotten, but it is vital for ensuring the Lord is thanked and for encouraging faith.

Eventually, we added another hour of prayer at 7 pm each Thursday. We began to learn how to prepare ourselves properly for intercession; how to "hear" God, especially as to the prayer topics He wished us to concentrate on, and how to pray in a disciplined way. After that there were many experiences of God revealing knowledge which could not naturally have been known about subjects we were praying about. Intercession can be exciting!

Prayer cells

Two years later, as a result of an evening of prayer, we decided to change the pattern of corporate prayer. Instead of the weekly Day of Prayer we began a system of prayer cells led by those who had gained experience in intercession. Initially there were five cells meeting in the morning and one in the early evening. By the end of the year the number of cells had grown to 12.

(I have written previously of the Ministry Groups we ran). We appointed an intercessor in each Ministry Group and asked the group to devote one evening a month to prayer. Later we asked the groups to devote two evenings a month to intercession, one for the local church and its outreach, the other for the nation and the wider mission of the church. This was quite distinct from the system of prayer cells within the parish. By this time there were 18 weekly prayer cells, and most of the church members were involved in these, so the Ministry Groups went back to having one evening per month for intercession. In one way or another the whole membership began to experience intercession and to see its importance. In the end. There were 25 weekly prayer cells.

Running the church on prayer.

Each prayer cell prayerfully discerned the topic or topics it should concentrate upon e.g. local evangelism, the wider church, the nation, Israel, the persecuted church etc. We ensured that lines of communication between the cells and the church leadership were kept open. The leadership sometimes gave relevant information to the cells for them to pray about. The cells, having learnt to listen to the Lord, then reported back to the leaders what they believed he was saying. It is, of course, the leaders' responsibility to weigh these contributions, but nearly always we found them most helpful. We therefore sought to run the church on intercession and "hearing" the Lord. The members, even the newer ones, had the opportunity to contribute what they believed the Lord was saying - sometimes on their own initiative, at other times at the specific request of the leaders. After weighing these contributions, the leaders initiated action through the relevant channels in the church, including the PCC in the case of any important matter.

It is essential that a church moving in Renewal should learn to intercede and to "hear" God for themselves. I would not have imagined God could do the amazing things he did because he got us to pray: an ordinary local church growing remarkably, functioning biblically and developing a national and international ministry. This was achieved by God through prayer. He can do remarkable things in other churches through a deep commitment to prayer.

For further information, see [A Church that Runs on Prayer – Christian Teaching Resources](#).
See also [How to Hear God – Christian Teaching Resources](#)

God bless you,

Tony

In Network for Revival God has called us to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." This includes:

- Encouraging people to seek holiness and true biblical discipleship.
- Encouraging people to major on prayer for Revival.
- Encouraging churches to be radically biblical in the power of the Spirit (see [Church Development](#) for information and resources).
- Encouraging people to "Watch!" for the return of Jesus (Mk 13:32-37 – see [Eschatology](#)).