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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A YOUTH
PRAYER FELLOWSHIP IN MADRAS

by

Swamidass Johnson

Adviser: Jon L. Dybdahl

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A YOUTH PRAYER
FELLOWSHIP IN MADRAS

Name of Researcher: Swamidass Johnson

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Jon Dybdahl, Ph.D.

Date completed: August 1999

Problem

Many youth in the Adventist Church in Madras do not participate regularly in church activities. Additionally they suffer from the effects of poverty, unemployment, and family tensions.

Task

The task of this dissertation was to develop a youth prayer fellowship that would address the problems of youth in the Madras Adventist Church.

Method

The biblical concept of prayer groups was studied to establish a basis for the prayer fellowship. In addition, the organization and effects of five Indian prayer fellowships were studied: Friends Missionary Prayer Band, Indian Evangelical Mission Prayer Fellowship, Christian Missionary Society Prayer Band, New Assembly Prayer Fellowship and Inter-college Student Prayer Fellowship.

On the basis of the theory and examples a prayer fellowship plan was made. After fasting and prayer, the program was launched in the Madras SDA Church. Eight volunteers responded, were trained, and formed fellowship groups.

Results

Less than one year after the groups were launched, there are now sixteen fellowship groups attended by some 150 people. A majority of those who have attended the meetings have improved their church attendance, have become more active in church-related activities, and express their satisfaction with the program.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A YOUTH
PRAYER FELLOWSHIP IN MADRAS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Swamidass Johnson

August 1999

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OF A YOUTH PRAYER FELLOWSHIP IN MADRAS

A dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ever since I became a minister, my relationship with young people has convinced me of the need to use their hidden talents for God's work. Youth are like tender plants in a garden. The church must water, nourish, and guard them until they grow into strong trees.

Young people, who are the future pillars of the church, need to be trained in order to accomplish the task of the church. Ellen White wrote: "We have an army of youth today who can do much, if they are properly directed and encouraged."¹

Due to social, psychological, economical, and political problems, young people today are not fully interested in church activities. Lack of attention to the young people in this situation can lead them away from God and into unchristian behavior. If proper care is taken, these young

¹Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1923), 32.

people might become earnest workers for God. I believe this task can be accomplished by prayer.

In the history of Tamil Nadu, small prayer fellowship groups have been effective in ministry. They have brought misled youth into the fellowship of Jesus. These prayer cells identify and reach the youth on their own level. The youth are nourished with God's Word during weekly prayer cell meetings. At yearly campmeetings they commit themselves to be trained as disciples, leaders, and full-time missionaries to carry on effective outreach work.

In recent conversations with senior pastors, church leaders, pioneers, and church elders at Chennai, I have become convinced of the urgent need for revival among Adventist young people. This would bring out their hidden talents for use in effective outreach.

It is not possible to accomplish great things for God through human power. Prayer cells, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can accomplish the task.

Statement of the Task

The task of this project was to develop among the young people of the Chennai Seventh-day Adventist Church a strong prayer fellowship leading to an evangelistic youth ministry.

Description of Madras

Madras is one of the four major metropolitan cities of India and the capital of Tamil Nadu. It is a coastal city with a major port. The population is about ten million people. It is a city abundant in natural resources.¹

Tradition has it that Christianity came to Madras in the first century. Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus, came to Kerala and from there moved to Madras. This has influenced the growth of Christianity in the city.²

Though metropolitan, Madras inhabitants give value to old thinking and teachings. Elders are respected and joint families are a common feature. Arranged marriages are yet in practice. Though modern lifestyle has eroded some of the values of this society, the fabric of care and help within the family is very strong and has withstood the encouragement to a Western lifestyle.³

People Groups

Madras is a metropolitan society, with people from all twenty-four Indian states. People groups from all walks of

¹Ramanathan, Social Sciences (Madras: Holy Faith Publications, 1997), 15.

²Nelson Amirtharaj, City of Madras (Madras: Madurai Diocian Press, 1975), 22.

³Ibid., 15.

groups are found in Madras. A majority of these people have adopted the local culture and language.¹

Religious Groups

Hindus are the dominant people group in Madras. Fifty percent of the population is Hindu by religion.

As in many places in the world Islam is a fast-growing religion in Madras. Muslims make up about 6 percent of the total population, but they influence all other sections of society. Though they are few in number they make their presence felt at all times.

Madras has more Christians than any other city in India. Of these, the majority are Protestants, but Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Orthodox, and Marthoma also are an integral part of the Christian community.²

The Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are growing in Madras like many areas in the world. The Apostolic Christian Assembly (ACA) has doubled its number of churches during the last five years.³ Highly motivated leadership, well-mobilized lay people, enthusiasm to set goals, and the ability to achieve goals are a few of the many factors

¹Ibid., 16.

²S. Subramaniam Pillai, Strategy to Reach Greater Madras (Madras: Subramaniam Pillai Trust, 1996), 20.

³Ibid., 21.

contributing to the recent appreciable growth in these two groups. The Church of God has more than doubled its number of churches. The other churches which have grown significantly during this period are the Indian Pentecostal Church of God--Kerala, Madras Pentecostal Assembly, Church of Christ, and Maranatha Full Gospel Association. Among the two well-known Brethren Churches the Jehovah Shammah added six congregations during the last five years, but the Laymen Evangelical Fellowship did not add any new congregations during this period.¹

Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA)

Adventist work was started in Madras around 1910.² Adventists first established schools and through them developed contacts, using the opportunity to introduce Christ to the people. Many pioneers sacrificed their lives to establish the true church of God amidst great Hindu opposition.³

In Madras there are fifteen organized churches, ten companies, and eight cottage gatherings, as well as many

¹Ibid., 19.

²Enock Manikam, "History of Adventism in India," South India Union Adventist Diary, January 1999, 3.

³Anbalagan, "History of Adventism in India-1998," Tamil Messenger, December 1998, 12.

small groups. At the end of March 1999, the Adventist membership in Madras was 2,800.¹ Compared with other churches, this is a small number, but when compared to the Adventist church in other large cities, the Adventist Church in Madras has the largest membership, and the highest tithes and offerings.²

The Adventist Church has rich and poor in its membership. Though many are from middle-class society, more are poor. These people face poverty due to unemployment and some have become destitute. Because of the Adventist message they have left parents and families. Young people who had good jobs had to leave them after becoming Christians because of the hostility of their employers.

The members are faithful in their relation with the church and its doctrines. But due to the psychological, political, and physical problems they deviate from the truth.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 reviews general literature on prayer fellowship in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen G.

¹Dorairaj, Adventist Region Director, interview by author, March 1999, Madras, India.

²Anbalagan, "Tithe and Offering Report-1998," Tamil Messenger, December 1998, 42.

White. Chapter 3 presents several prayer fellowships that have functioned successfully in India. In chapter 4 the needs of young Adventists in Madras are described. Chapter 5 narrates the development and evaluation of a youth prayer fellowship at Chennai Seventh-day Adventist Church. The dissertation closes in chapter 6 with a summary, conclusion, and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

PRAYER FELLOWSHIP: CONCEPT AND EXAMPLES

This chapter deals with prayer fellowship concepts and examples. It is divided into three major sections: (1) a general study of prayer, (2) biblical instructions and examples of prayer fellowship, and (3) E. G. White's comments on prayer fellowship.

Prayer: An Overview

Prayer is a powerful weapon for Christian living. Through prayer we come to the knowledge of Jesus and receive grace to witness for Him.¹ Through prayer we feel the presence of God. Prayer is the occasion making it possible to become acquainted with our heavenly Father.² Prayer is a means to know God intimately. Prayer brings us in close relationship with God, and this helps us in our intellect

¹Donald E. Demary, How Are You Praying? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 28.

²Sam Jebadurai, Prayer Guide (Madras: Jebadurai Trust Publishers, 1992), 14.

being broadened and strengthened.¹ Prayer is a way to understand God's plan. By prayer we are made to understand God's plan for our life.² Jebadurai writes that

prayer reminds us of our constant need for God and reassures us of His presence with us. Prayer is a part of God's plan for our growth and for his programme in the world. In prayer we do not tell God what to do; we find what He wants us to do.³

Our prayer helps God to know our needs. By praying we make our needs known to Jesus Christ. By dealing with our needs that are made known to Him, His name is glorified. To pray is nothing more involved than to open the door, giving Jesus access to our needs and permitting Him to exercise His own power in dealing with us.⁴

Christopher writes that

prayer along with the study of God's word promotes our holistic thinking. Anyone who devotes his time in prayer will gradually grow in to the likeness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Prayer and sincere study of the word of God always go hand in hand to glorify him.⁵

¹Ebnezer Sunderaj, "What Is Prayer?" Prayer Bulletin, February 1994, 13.

²Ibid., 18.

³Sam Jebadurai, "Prayer," Jesus Redeems, July 1997, 28.

⁴Andrew Knowles, Discovering Prayer (Sydney: A Lion Manual, 1985), 112.

⁵Christopher, A Guide to Prayer (Madras: Zion Church Publishers, 1992), 210.

Prayer is the key that unlocks the storehouse of God's grace. All that God is, is placed at the disposal of one who prays. "Prayer can do anything that God can do, and as God can do anything, prayer is omnipotent."¹ The whole of heaven is placed in the hands of the one who puts his soul on his knees.

When we pray, we tell God everything about us, even though He knows all. Prayer is an expression of our faithfulness to Him. Through prayer we search for His promised treasures. It is a way of communicating our inner self to Him.²

Our prayer life indicates our obedience and submission and willingness to listen to His voice more than speaking to Him. "Prayer is listening to God and obeying God. It is hearing God. It is listening to the voice of Christ who dwells in us."³ A Christian receives his hope, courage, and all other spiritual blessings because of prayer, which works as a link between him and God.⁴

¹Ibid.

²Sam Jebadurai, Power of Prayer (Madras: Sam Jebadurai Trust Publishers, 1982), 106.

³K. V. Pillai, The Fundamentals of Prayer (Bombay: Gospel Literature Service, 1974), 18.

⁴Ibid., 22.

Prayer is a means by which a believer can have direct communion with God. E. G. White confirms: "Family prayer and public prayer have their place; but it is secret communion with God that sustains the soul-life."¹ Prayer usually consists of praise, thanksgiving, and requests for help. Horn says, "Prayer is any outgoing of the soul toward God expressing love and appreciation, the desire for divine guidance, the confession of sin or particular request."² The apostle Paul clearly says that prayer presupposes faith that God is, that He cares, that He hears, and that He is a "rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb 11:6). Prayer is a spiritual exercise, a channel for imploring God to impart earthly and spiritual blessing. E. G. White asserts that "we must exercise greater faith in calling upon God for all needed blessings."³ Prayer is an art requiring constant cultivation. In his book No Easy Road, Dick Eastman mentions the words of the great preacher Spurgeon: "Prayer itself is an art which only the Holy Ghost can teach

¹E. G. White, Gospel Workers (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1948), 254.

²Siegfried H. Horn, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (SDABD), rev. ed. (1979), s.v. "Prayer."

³E. G. White, Testimonies for the Church (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Assn., 1948), 9:17.

us. He is the giver of all prayer. Pray for prayer--Pray till you can pray."¹

We must learn the art of praying. The only place to learn prayer is bent and broken on our knees. When we kneel and lift up our soul, it gives God an opportunity to do His will in us and with us. Prayer is putting ourselves at God's disposal. As the old saying goes, "Prayer is the moment when heaven and earth kiss each other."²

Prayer builds confidence in oneself and moves the person to come boldly into the presence of God. Prayer is a vital element of the true Christian life. In S. D. Gordon's view, "the greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is pray. Great people of the earth today are the people who pray."³

E. G. White indicates that "prayer is the breath of the soul."⁴ It is a secret of spiritual power. Prayer strengthens the spiritual experience. At times of temptation, Christ knows that He must strengthen us, but He expects us to ask Him. And it is vital for pastors and

¹Charles Spurgeon, quoted in Dick Eastman, No Easy Road (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 13.

²Emerson Harry Fosdick, The Meaning of Prayer (New York: Association Press, 1914), 16.

³Eastman, 18.

⁴White, Gospel Workers, 253.

church leaders to pray because they are God's representatives on earth. God does not deny the prayers of those who are faithful and earnest.

Ellen White emphasizes that "prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend."¹ When we commune with God in our hearts, we talk in companionship with Christ. Prayer, therefore, is an indication that God is stirring within us concerning some special need.

The Power of Prayer

Regarding the power of prayer, Olive Wyon states, "Prayer brings power."² This can be supported with many examples from the Bible: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (Jas 5:16); Elijah prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and no rain fell for three and a half years. Again he prayed and there was rain (Jas 5:17-18).

The power of prayer is really the power of God released through prayer. The omnipotent power of God is released to the one who prays. "The power of prayer is no more or no less than the mighty power of God released through the life

¹Ibid., 257.

²Olive Wyon, The School of Prayer (London: Student Christian Movements Press, 1943), 20.

of a man who stops being an obstacle of God. The power is God's alone."¹

The power of prayer includes everything. A person can reach beyond the heights when he is able to understand and develop prayer. All of God's unlimited prayer and spiritual gifts are given to a praying Christian. Prayer becomes the highest point of spirituality and power.²

The power of prayer can be used in many ways. Since the power of prayer is without limit, we can also use it in limitless ways. For sharing the Word of God we need the power of prayer. There are external pressures to keep Christians from sharing God's Word with others, but a prayerful person can use heaven's authority and boldly preach the Word of God. "Church history proves that the ministry of prayer makes the ministry a powerful thing."³

In order to bring a lasting revival we need the power of prayer. The temptation of the glammers of this world is very strong and many Christians fall prey to it; but with the power of prayer we can have victory over these

¹J. Oswald Sanders, Prayer Power Unlimited (Minneapolis, MN: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1977), 28.

²W. B. Walker, The Power of Prayer (N.p.: The Higley Press, n.d.), 140.

³Kingsly Arunothayakumar, "Prayer Bulletin," Friends Focus, December 1998, 17.

temptations. "There have been revivals without much preaching but there has never been a mighty revival without mighty praying."¹

The power of prayer can help bring salvation to others. Souls are the property of heaven and we need power from heaven to gather them. No man can help a soul to submit to heaven's call without the power of prayer.²

Prayer gives power to solve insurmountable problems. Lazarus affirms that

prayer power is not only the most direct, but also the most effective force that can be brought to bear upon the many difficulties that exist in the Lord's work. He who waits upon God moves on in quiet confidence and needs neither the blare of trumpets nor press-agent methods to announce his success, but in Godly fear, leaves until the day of Christ's return the record of achievement.³

Prayer is tightening the connection with the "divine dynamo" so that power may flow freely without loss. "Power will come from God to man in answer to the prayer of faith,"⁴ wrote Mrs. White.

God gives this power for people to use in reaching others. A fully sanctified and empowered Christian, and no

¹Knowles, 48.

²Ibid.

³Mohan C. Lazarus, "Power of Prayer," Jesus Redeems, September 1995, 18.

⁴White, Testimonies, 4:208.

other, is fully prepared to do God's work to be a powerful witness for Christ. "Prayer is necessary in our labor for the salvation of souls. God alone can give the increase of the seed we sow."¹

A Christian who wants to win souls for Christ needs power, but "no power can deliver the ensnared soul but the power of God in answer to the earnest prayers of his faithful followers."² "What you ask in Jesus' name, He is willing to answer. There is no force, might, authority on earth that can prevent prayer's answer."³

Those who learn to kneel in humility will soon experience God's supernatural power. When we pray to God, we acquire strength which prepares us for our daily duties. Daily temptations make prayer a necessity in order for us to be protected by the power of God. Our desires should be continually ascending in silent prayer.

White points out that "these silent petitions rise like incense before the throne of Christ. And the enemy is

¹Ibid., 402.

²Ibid., 9:291.

³Wyon, 20.

baffled. The Christian whose heart is thus stayed upon God cannot be overcome. No evil arts can destroy his peace."¹

We are so fortunate that mortals like us possess the power of offering our requests to God. Mankind can desire no higher power than this, to be linked with the infinite God.

The Objective of Prayer

In the study of prayer, it is important to examine the objective of prayer. The object of prayer is very simple, very deep, and very far-reaching. But to understand this, it takes a whole lifetime, sometimes until the last minute of our life. The whole object of prayer is to do God's will. But to understand God's will, a lifetime is spent. Therefore we need to pray as never before that this objective may be achieved in and through and by us. "God comes first. He is the supreme object, His name, His character, His glory, His kingdom, His will for these we have to pray."²

¹E. G. White, Messages to Young People (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1948), 249.

²Wyon, 20.

Proper prayer achieves many objectives. Prayer strengthens us spiritually,¹ unites us with God,² reveals to us the knowledge of God's secret things,³ safeguards us against evil thoughts,⁴ and helps us to ask for the right things from God.⁵

Charles Usher believes that "the glory of God should ever be the objective of the praying soul."⁶ Most of the time we use prayer simply to get what we want. But this should not be our motive. The true object of prayer is to glorify God. Any lower motive hinders the Holy Spirit's cooperation.

Usher suggests that "praying just to get what we want is a selfish motive."⁷ There is danger of becoming rooted in self-effort and self-will, rather than depending on God. The danger is that a praying person may become a self-righteous person and desire God to reward all his prayers.

¹Hush Redwoon, Prayer: Its Deeper Dimensions (London: Marshall Morgan Scott, 1963), 31.

²Ibid., 31.

³Ibid., 15.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 28.

⁶Charles Usher, The Prayer Life (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1967), 5.

⁷Ibid., 6.

"Of course prayer does have rewards, but rewards must not be our motivation for praying. Reward comes as gifts."¹

Prayer also leads us to the true knowledge of the Holy Spirit. In prayer we see the working of His power. "This is the true purpose of prayer--to enable us to set the supernatural powers of God at work in overcoming the natural problems and situations of life."²

When we pray for temporal blessings, we must remember that the Lord may see that it is not for our good or for His glory to give just what we desire. But He will answer our prayer, giving just what is best for us (John 14:12-14).

Submit all your requests to the Lord. He accepts every sincere seeker with a contrite heart. Not one earnest prayer is left without His response. God listens to the cries of every weak human being. E. G. White believes that "it is God to whom we are speaking, and our prayer is heard. You who feel the most unworthy, fear not to commit your case to God."³

Workers of God can never attain their greatest height until they realize the secret of strength. They must give

¹Pillai, 12.

²Knowles, 128.

³E. G. White, In Heavenly Places (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1967), 82.

themselves adequate time to ponder, to pray, to wait at His feet for a renewal of their physical, mental, and spiritual powers.

Jesus lived in dependance upon God and communion with Him. To the secret place of the Most High under the shadow of the Almighty, men now and then repair; they abide for a season and the result is manifest in noble deeds; then their faith fails, the communion is interrupted, and the lifework marred. But the life of Jesus was a life of constant trust, sustained by continual communion; and His service for heaven and earth was without failure or faltering.¹

While people pray, their souls should be searched and self must be lost. Most people make little growth in their prayer life because of an "I" problem, which brings about a spiritual downfall, and thus the true essence of prayer is lost.

Prayer Fellowships in the Bible

The Bible speaks much about prayer. At times it mentions corporate or group prayer. In this section, special attention is paid to the prayer of Daniel and his three friends, the example and teaching of Jesus, and prayer groups in the book of Acts.

¹Ibid., 83.

Daniel and His Friends

A good example of what people may become when united with the God of wisdom by their prayer fellowship is that of Daniel and his friends.

At the time of the Babylonian captivity, four young Hebrew men were taken captive to Babylon (Dan 1:3,4). Because of their "superior talents,"¹ King Nebuchadnezzar trained them in his palace school so that they would become leaders in his kingdom.

In acquiring the wisdom of the Babylonians, Daniel and his companions were far more successful than their fellow students; but their learning did not come by chance. And "God gave these four men wisdom and the ability to learn. They learned many kinds of things people had written and studied. Daniel could also understand all kinds of visions and dreams" (Dan 1:17 New Century Version).² E. G. White mentions that "in faith they prayed for wisdom and they lived their prayers."³

¹E. G. White, The Sanctified Life (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1937), 18.

²All Bible texts used in this paper are from The New American Standard Version, unless specified otherwise.

³E. G. White, Prophets and Kings (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing House, 1936), 486.

The Bible gives us a clear and good example of community prayer in the story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. When the king had a dream but could not remember it, he sought the help of magicians and others to tell him the dream and its interpretation. The wise men of Babylon failed at this point. Then Daniel was called and given the responsibility of recalling and interpreting the dream. "Daniel asked his friends to pray to the God of heaven. Daniel asked them to pray that God would show them mercy and help them understand this secret. Then Daniel and his friends would not be put to death with the other wise men of Babylon" (Dan 2:18 NCV). Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to his friends. "Together they sought for wisdom from the source of light and knowledge."¹ As a result, his prayer fellowship produced a great chapter in prophetic history.

The Hebrew youth did not trust their own strength and wisdom. Prayer was their necessity, especially because of the atmosphere of evil that constantly surrounded them.² They made God their strength and the fear of God was

¹Ibid., 493.

²"Desire Mercies" [Dan 2:18], Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC), rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1953-1957), 4:769.

continually before them in all the transactions of their life.

The Teaching and Example of Jesus

When Jesus was laying the foundation of His kingdom on this earth He handpicked twelve men, thoroughly trained them, and shared the best of Himself and His time with them. "He kept no secrets and demonstrated the need of prayer, service, and suffering for the sake of the gospel."¹

Jesus introduced the idea of prayer fellowship to his followers. He taught His disciples. Jesus made a profound promise about praying together. "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by my father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst" (Matt 18:19,20). The emphasis is on the fellowship. Jesus promised that where two or three are gathered together in his name He would be with them. Writer Sunderraj believes something happens in group prayer that does not happen in private. In the group

¹Robert E. Coleman, Introducing the Prayer Cell, 6th rev. ed. (Huntington Valley, PA: Christian Outreach, 1960), 8.

each person is made aware of the needs of the others.

Prayers are made accordingly.¹ Lazarus says,

In finding a prayer partner, one or two, ask God for like-minded people. One of the signs of a spirit-filled person is that he talks freely about the things of God. This is the kind of a person with whom to pray on a regular basis.²

Ellen White supports this by saying, "There is great need of secret prayer, but there is also need that several Christians meet together and unite with earnestness their petitions to God."³

Every believer should seek every opportunity to go where prayer is needed to be made. "Those who are really seeking for communion with God will be seen in the prayer meeting."⁴

Jesus demonstrated this principle in His own ministry by the close relationship which He sustained with His disciples. For example, on the night He was betrayed, Jesus asked His disciples to pray with Him (Matt 16:36-42).

In this way Christ could be strengthened to face the malignity of sin which seemed so dark. He urged them to

¹Ebnezer Sunderaj, "Group Prayer," Prayer Bulletin, November 1996, 33.

²Lazarus, 14.

³White, In Heavenly Places, 91.

⁴Ibid.

pray so that He might be comforted by their steadfast faith. And He told them to pray to show that watchfulness and earnest prayer is indispensable to withstand temptation. "He longed to know that they were praying for Him and for themselves."¹

Jesus insisted that His disciples, that is, His prayer fellowship members, must leave self behind (Mark 8:34), repent, be willing to obey (Matt 18:3), agree with one another (Matt 18:19), reconcile with Christian brothers (Matt 18:15), be willing to forgive seventy times seven (Matt 18:21,22), love one another as He loved them (John 13:34), bear fruit (John 15:8), be fishers of men (Luke 5:10), abide in the vine (John 15:3,4), be witnesses (John 15:27), obey His commission (Matt 28:18-20), and use His power (Matt 10:1).

Examples from the Book of Acts

In the book of Acts, prayer appears some thirty times. In many cases, reference is made to private prayer; as in the case of Peter's and Cornelius' prayers (Acts 10). However, prayer fellowship is given an important place in the book. It appears as a way of life, as a means of receiving divine guidance in relation to the outpouring of

¹E. G. White, The Desire of Ages (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1967), 470.

the Holy Spirit, for deliverance, and finally in preparation for the commissioning of persons to mission or ministry.

Prayer Fellowship for Guidance

After the ascension of Jesus, the disciples came to the city of Jerusalem. They deeply felt their weakness and earnestly prayed for the Lord to guide them. The eleven apostles met in the upper room so that they could devote themselves without disturbance. They needed to choose another apostle to take the place of Judas. Therefore with one accord, they continued together and diligently prepared, with prayer and supplication, with all those who believed on Jesus.¹ According to Acts 1:14, "these all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." "The brothers of Jesus had formerly been against him, but now they unquestionably believed on him."²

"The above text contains an excellent formula for effective prayer: (1) The petition--they prayed; (2) The

¹"They Went Up into an Upper Room" [Acts 1:14], Langes Commentary of the Holy Scriptures (LCHS), ed. John Peter Lange (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), 9:19.

²"Prayer" [Acts 1:14], The New Century Bible Commentary (NCBC), ed. William Neil (London: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), 69.

perseverance--they continued in prayer; (3) The unanimity--they prayed with one accord."¹

Peter proposed two names: Joseph and Matthias (Acts 1:23). Then the group prayed for guidance in choosing an apostle in the place of Judas, "to restore the apostolate to the original number that Jesus had appointed."²

What a prayer this must have been, springing fresh from a simple insistent faith. In every great moment of the infant church prayer was spontaneously resorted to. This was not from mere habit, though the habit was good; nor as a ritual, for this had not yet come to formalize the worship of the church, but because it seemed to the apostles as natural to talk through prayer, to their Lord in heaven as it had been to talk face to face with Jesus on earth. So should it have ever been in the church's experience, and so should it now be.³

Then they drew lots to choose between the two and Mathias was added to the eleven apostles. This reveals that they prayed together for guidance.

Prayer Fellowship for the Holy Spirit

The disciples prayed that greater strength might be imparted to them in the work of the ministry, for they saw

¹"Continued with One Accord" [Acts 1:14], SDABC, 5:127.

²"Replacement of Judas Iscariot" [Acts 1:15-26], NCBC, 68.

³Ibid., 5:131.

that they would meet the same determined opposition that Christ had encountered when upon the earth.

"Praying together brings boldness,"¹ writer Rajan believes. "When they finished praying the place where they were meeting was shaken. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim God's message with boldness" (Acts 4:31). Mrs. White added that "while their united prayers were ascending in faith to heaven, the answer came. The place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were endowed anew with the Holy Spirit."²

This earthquake was an evidence of the presence of God, and a most direct answer to their prayer, as that prayer concerned themselves. The earthquake proclaimed the stretched out arm of God and showed them that resistance against his counsels and determination must come to naught.³

In view of further remarkable manifestations of the powerful presence of the spirit of God, it may be concluded that this shaking was not an earthquake, but a supernatural experience.⁴

The Lord readily answers earnest and right prayers. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was an answer to the continued, devoted and united prayer of the apostles.

¹A. C. Rajan, "Prayer Fellowship," Madras Echo, July 1995, 2.

²E. G. White, Acts of the Apostles (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1956), 68.

³"The Place Was Shaken" [Acts 4:31], LCHS, 9:713.

⁴"They Had Prayed" [Acts 4:31], SDABC, 5:172.

God has always wanted His children to work together in harmony. This was God's purpose. When the members of the apostolic church formed a group as God's servants, the purpose of God was achieved. And because they had become Christians they were able to witness for God with "boldness." E. G. White says that "with their hearts filled with courage, they again went forth to proclaim the word of God in Jerusalem."¹ It was done by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit which brought forth boldness in them, which resulted in signs and wonders by the very name Jesus Christ.

Prayer Fellowship for Unity

A. C. Rajan has written that "prayer fellowship brought unity."² The early church stands to show that God's work is achieved in heartfelt prayer and "continued with one accord" in supplication. They prayed to God for three things: (1) for the blessings of God's grace; (2) to establish themselves in the truth; (3) and that the Lord may extend His kingdom for the salvation of all men.³

¹White, Acts of the Apostles, 68.

²Rajan, 10.

³"Continued with One Accord" [Acts 2:42], The Expositor's Bible Commentary (EBC), ed. Frank E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 9:700.

The Day of Pentecost gives a clear picture of unity. When the disciples waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they were not waiting in idleness; they were fasting and praying. Only then "the spirit came upon the waiting, praying disciples with a fullness that reached every heart."¹

Before the Day of Pentecost the disciples "met together" and prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship.² This is the prerequisite for being in one accord.

This one accord was not merely for their own blessing. They were weighed down with the burden for the salvation of souls. They experienced the rain of power and the result was conversion. This one accord cannot be achieved all of a sudden but by praying together.

They remained with one accord together, for in union there is strength. Still they did not vainly imagine that they possessed any strength of their own; on the contrary, they deeply felt their weakness and poverty

¹White, Acts of the Apostles, 38.

²Ibid., 40.

and earnestly prayed for the power of the Holy Ghost which had been promised.¹

The first converts "were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). The SDABC gives four reasons for the successes of the new converts:

1. The newly baptized Christians grew in knowledge of truth through the teachings of the apostles.
2. They were conscious of fellowship with Christ and with one another in acts of common worship, mutual kindness and benevolence.
3. They participated in the breaking of the bread.
4. They engaged in prayer, both private and corporate.²

Prayer Fellowship for Deliverance

In the sixteenth chapter of Acts there is evidence that prayer fellowship brought "deliverance." "About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises of God. The other prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). "At midnight since sleep was out of the question, Paul and Silas passed the night in devotional exercise."³ Paul and Silas

¹"They Went up into an Upper Room" [Acts 1:14], LCHS, 9:19.

²"Continued Steadfastly" [Acts 2:42], SDABC, 5:148.

³"At Midnight" [Acts 16:25], SDABC, 5:333.

were praying as well as witnessing and God's glory descended upon that place.

Faithful Christians can convert the most degrading place into a sanctuary by their prayers and hymns. The place does not sanctify the person, but the person sanctifies the place.¹ Only disciples such as Paul and Silas could sing and praise God in a prison, because they were endowed with the grace of Jesus.

Well-established devotional habits surmounted the most discouraging circumstances. Even when in a dungeon, and fettered so that they could not kneel in prayer, they continued to praise the Lord.²

God performed a miracle as an answer to their hymns of praise. "The prayers of the saints move heaven and earth."³ They were suffering for His sake and, in Christian prayer fellowship, genuinely praising His holy name. The Lord may do greater miracles of deliverance, if we are faithful to Him and pray sincerely.

Every deliverance that is granted at any time to the servant of God, bears a certain resemblance to the final deliverance, when, at the sound of the last trumpet, even the prisons of the graves will be opened and the bands of corruption be loosed, and when the

¹"And at Midnight, Paul and Silas Prayed" [Acts 16:25], LCHS, 9:312.

²"At Midnight" [Acts 16:25], SDABC, 5:333.

³"And Suddenly There Was a Great Earthquake" [Acts 16:26], LCH, 9:312.

souls of men, motionless as it were, will anxiously wait the things that shall come to pass.¹

Francis D. Nichol wrote, "In turn God gave them His comfort and strength in a manner incomprehensible to those who do not serve Him."²

Acts 12 tells the story of Peter's imprisonment as he was waiting for his day of execution by the sword of Herod's men. Peter was at peace. There were two things happening at that time: (1) The Jewish priests and elders were pressuring the king to execute Peter as soon as possible without any public inquiry; (2) and the church was praying together in one accord for the deliverance of Peter. So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. "And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying" (Acts 12:12).

"At the time Peter was being delivered from prison the group were earnestly praying for his deliverance, for they realized that the church was in an hour of crisis."³ On the night before the dawn of execution the apostle was brought

¹Ibid.

²"At Midnight," SDABC, 5:333.

³"Gathered Together Praying" [Acts 12:11,12], SDABC, 5:271.

out of the prison by a mighty angel, something not possible by any human power. The strong security system collapsed by the sincere prayers of the believers.

Prayer Fellowship for Setting Apart
for Mission/Ministry

The disciples of Jesus were caught up in a dilemma in their ministry. As the apostles worked unitedly under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the work experienced marvelous progress. The church of God began to overflow and the authorities soon became a problem. There was necessity for a further distribution of the responsibility.

Sometime later as the number of disciples kept growing there was a quarrel between the Greek-speaking Jews and the native Jews. The apostles called the whole group of believers together and talked about the problem of neglecting to preach God's word in order to handle the finances of the group. They recommended that seven men be chosen to deal with the financial aspect of the work. The whole group was pleased with the apostles' proposal, and chose Stephen and six other people, "and these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6).

The men that had been chosen by the church were now presented to the apostles, who conferred the office upon them, and solemnly installed them with prayer and imposition of hands. They first offered prayer, in

conjunction with the church, in behalf of the men, entreating that the grace and the gifts of God in Christ, might be imparted to the latter; for the call to serve the disciples and especially the poor, was in truth a call to serve God.¹

In the church at Antioch there were some prophets and teachers working for the Lord. While they were fasting and praying, the Holy Spirit spoke to them to set apart Barnabas and Paul because they had a specific task to perform. They were dedicated by prayer, fasting, and laying on of hands. This incident shows that God works through His praying people in choosing workers for a definite cause. E. G. White wrote: "The circumstances connected with the separation of Paul and Barnabas by the Holy Spirit to a definite line of service shows clearly that the Lord works through appointed agencies in His organized church."²

They were successful because they were united in spirit, and had prayed together. The result was victory in proclaiming the Good News of God to the world.

Prayer Fellowship in the Writings of Ellen G. White

Although Ellen G. White does not use the terminology "prayer fellowship," she widely supported the concept of prayer fellowships. Her views on the topic have been

¹"Whom They Sent" [Acts 6:6], LCHS, 9:105.

²White, Acts of the Apostles, 162.

divided into two sections: the need for prayer in groups, and benefits of prayer in groups.

Need for Prayer in Groups

"We must come together to edify one another by an interchange of thoughts and feelings, to gather strength, and light and courage by becoming acquainted with one another's hopes and aspiration."¹ Prayer groups are needed to maintain Christians.

Let little small companies assemble together to study the Scriptures. You will lose nothing by this, but will gain much. Angels of God will be in your gathering, and as you feed upon the bread of life, you will receive spiritual sinew and muscles. You will be feeding, as it were, upon the leaves of the tree of life. By this means only can you maintain your integrity.²

Taking part in a prayer fellowship should be considered a privilege and not a burden: "The prayer meeting should be a season of special help and encouragement. Let everyone who hears the name of Christ have something to say in the meeting."³

Ellen G. White pointed out that to do justice, to walk humbly, to love mercy should go hand in hand with prayer to

¹White, In Heavenly Places, 93.

²E. G. White, This Day with God (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1979), 11.

³White, Gospel Workers, 171.

provide a "greater blessing." Forgiveness for wrongs should also be asked, to fulfill the law of Christ.¹ Prayer fellowships are needed to maintain unity.

Those who are of the household of faith should never neglect the assembling of themselves together, because this is one means of God's children uniting. This helps them to grow in strength, helping others, encouraging one another. When we confess our sin in a prayer meeting, every heart is filled with true love for his brethren.²

To receive the Holy Spirit, God's people are to constantly pray to him. The early disciples spent ten days in supplication and confession of sins; their differences disappeared in deep heart-searching. The Holy Spirit came upon them, and the promise of Christ was fulfilled.³

Our young men's prayer groups should be a warfare against every habit that has the least danger of leading the soul from duty and devotion. Never neglect them if it can possibly be avoided. When they go out to battle with their habits indulged as before they professed fellowship with Christ, they will soon fall as easy prey to Satan's devices. But when the Word of God is with them they will overcome it.⁴

¹White, Testimonies, 7:262.

²E. G. White, Bible Training School, February 1, 1910, n.p., Sources from E. G. White CD-ROM.

³E. G. White, Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald, March 11, 1909, n.p., Sources from E. G. White CD-ROM.

⁴E. G. White, "Prayer Groups," The Youth Instructor, August 3, 1987, n.p., Sources from E. G. White CD-ROM.

Church members must represent Christ in their lives. The Holy Spirit must change their lives. They should pray for their fellow men who are not in Christian fellowship, so that they will be drawn close to one another. Then the barriers separating believer from believer will be broken down.

Benefits of Prayer in Groups

For the Holy Spirit to descend upon us, praying together is very important. When there is more praying and believing, there is more receiving. Ellen G. White recommends that "small companies assemble in the evening, at noon [or] in the early morning to study the Bible. Let them have a season of prayer, that they may be strengthened, enlightened and sanctified by the Holy Spirit."¹

When this prayer meeting takes place in the midst of believers, the light of revival shines upon the hearts of people. Also, the earnest prayers offered together in unity are a weapon against Satan. Ellen G. White urges that "a chain of earnest praying believers should encircle the world."²

¹White, In Heavenly Places, 92.

²Ibid., 23.

"Praying together will bind hearts to God in bonds that will endure. Confessing Christ openly and bravely exhibiting in our character, His meekness, humility, and love will charm others with the beauty of holiness."¹

Those who have been united in Christian fellowship offer prayer to God and pledge themselves to deal justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. If they have wronged others, they continue the work of repentance, confession, and restitution; and the disease is healed. They are fully set to do good to one another.²

Christian fellowship is one means by which character is formed and thus its followers might be one as Christ is one with the Father.

Christian meetings benefit many of our brothers and sisters. As they take a noble stand for God because of the testimony that they hear and the power of truth, our prayer for them must be that they will grow in grace, knowledge, in truth, and in full stature of men and women in Christ.³

Conclusion

This second chapter discusses what prayer is all about, especially its power and objectives. What Jesus says about

¹Ibid., 50.

²E. G. White, Upward Look (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1980), 106.

³E. G. White, "Fellowship," Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, July 19, 1970, n.p., Sources from E. G. White CD-ROM.

it in the context of His disciples and the example of Daniel was also looked into. The Prayer fellowships in the book of Acts was examined as was E. G. White's concept of prayer. This makes clear the value and importance of prayer and prayer fellowships. The next chapter examines prayer fellowships in India in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER III

PRAYER FELLOWSHIPS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In a chapter on prayer fellowships in the twentieth century, it is necessary to speak both of theory and of practice. The first section of this chapter describes the workings of a prayer fellowship. The second looks at examples of prayer fellowships in India.

The Working of Prayer Fellowships

This section describes prayer fellowships and considers the need for them. It also notes the functions and benefits of a prayer fellowship.

What Is a Prayer Fellowship?

Robert E. Coleman says that "a prayer fellowship is any small group united in the Spirit of Christ to pray and to seek together the highest in God's purpose."¹ It is a voluntary association or small group that cannot be organized on an assembly-line basis. It is something which

¹Coleman, 6.

must grow out of the personal desire of individuals seeking a more effective prayer life.

The Greek word for fellowship is koinonia. "This word fellowship means that we are co-partners in the heritage of the gospel of Christ."¹ We are joined with Christ not only in the life to come, but also in the ministry of Christ in the present world. Koinonia means to share a common life, to share a common understanding. According to Titus,

the understanding of fellowship is the participation in the same cause. This understanding of intimate fellowship and participation in study, witness, sharing of burdens, testimony, proclamation of the good news and sharing others in love and compassion can be realized only in small groups of commitment and women who constantly practice the same.²

Prayer fellowships are made up of individuals who recognize the Lordship of Jesus Christ at every level of life and who practice discipleship. It is a family where there is mutual sharing of experience, where problems, concerns, and burdens are shared with each other in sincerity.

A Koinonia is a spiritual power hour, a place of earnest prayer and intercession; a place where "two or three

¹Titus, Koinonia Groups (Lucknow, India: Lucknow Publishing Company, 1971), 1.

²Ibid.

have gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst" (Matt 18:20).

At a fellowship every person, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, weak or strong, finds whole-hearted acceptance in the group. Titus observes that a fellowship group is a place where no barriers exist and people drop their masks.¹

In such a fellowship group Christian disciples are trained for action and mission in the world. From here members launch out weekly for their daily ministries in the world.

Coleman speaks of two kinds of prayer cells, the first being a "Bible study cell, which concentrates on the Scriptures. Each member desires to know what the Bible teaches. Prayer centers around the application of the lesson to the life and work of the members."² The second is a "witness cell, which involves intensive personal requirements for witnessing for the group. Meetings are given to sharing experiences and techniques in the field."³ Whatever the kind of cell, prayer is still the vital element. Each member joins the others in genuine fellowship of concern expressed through prayer and mutual helpfulness.

¹Ibid., 3.

²Coleman, 7.

³Ibid., 8.

A. C. Rajan suggests the following covenant for a prayer fellowship: "We covenant to pray for one another daily, to meet together for prayer, study and sharing of experiences and we desire to know and to do more fully the will of God."¹

To see, to pray, to grow, to share, to serve, to witness, and to apply--such are the verbs used in Christian fellowship groups. In such groups participants pass faith to one another. There proper decisions can be made by individuals concerning their personal life, home, business, and social involvements.

Need of a Prayer Fellowship

Rajan stresses that "the church and society needs prayer fellowship to unify the church, to receive power from the Holy Spirit, to be involved in outreach and revivals."²

A prayer fellowship is God's plan for every Christian. God created the first group in Eden, saying, "It is not good for man to live alone" (Gen 2:18). Titus writes, "Group life creates the atmosphere whereby the spirit of God can flow into us with greater freedom and power."³ A prayer

¹Rajan, 9.

²Ibid., 9.

³Titus, 4.

fellowship protects us from our own bias and brings our prayers more in line with God's will for mankind. There is a special value when two or three are agreed together about something on earth. "In small groups the will of man is surrendered both to God and to one another. When such an atmosphere is created He is in their midst."¹

The word "cell" has often been used to describe the fellowship group. It is appropriate since a "cell is an organism within an organic living body."² Christian cells will help meet many of the spiritual needs of our day.

In every assembly people meet with Christ, the master of assemblies, and that is how a person can really get to know Him. Encourage people to know one another; for it is not enough simply to know men. "We must know men in Christ Jesus."³

The Koinonia embraces men and women of many nationalities and denominations, who sense that together they can best find the relevance of Christian faith in their everyday lives. Though they are ordinary men and women, they are finding extraordinary powers for living. Through

¹Ibid., 7.

²Ibid.

³E. G. White, Our High Calling (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1961), 166.

small groups, where they practice honesty and acceptance through meetings and team efforts, they seek to enlarge their mission of witness and service in the world.¹

Members of the fellowship or cell usually agree upon a certain time each week when they will meet. In the intimacy of a home, office, or church, they come together to share their joys, problems, defeats, and victories. In a spirit of oneness and humility they seek to discover the will of God for their lives. In some mysterious way our Lord gives to His disciples, who are gathered together in order to listen and talk with Him, His revelations for their growth, maturity, and service.²

Functions of a Prayer Fellowship

Titus encourages "prayer cells to be weekly meetings. The weekly meeting may be divided into three half-hour periods--the first for Bible study, the second for sharing of experiences, and the third for prayer and intercession."³ Every cell member is important; therefore, at weekly meetings the time should not be monopolized by one person. Let everyone be involved.

¹Titus, 10.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., 7.

While there should not be a formal routine, regularly there should be some joyous singing. Let newcomers be introduced and those who are absent should be inquired about.

A. C. Rajan stresses that Bible study at the meeting should aim at making an application of the Word of God to various situations of life: in the family, in the church, business, society, institutions, and politics.¹ A variety of methods used during the prayer time is also helpful. Pray voluntarily by rotation, have silent prayer, sometimes if people feel comfortable all can pray together. At times particular items may be allotted to different members who volunteer to pray. "It would be nice to keep a record of prayers which have been answered. It would be amazing to know them and be thankful."²

Kingsly Arunothayakumar suggests the following guidelines for praying:

1. Affirm the presence of God. Claim the promises of Matt 18:20.
2. Look at God. Praise, thank and adore Him.
3. Confess and unload your burden. Look at yourself honestly and be specific in naming your sin, defeat, worry, or fear. Anything that concerns you concerns God.

¹Rajan, "Prayer Fellowship," 2.

²Titus, 15.

4. Receive forgiveness. Affirm the great promise of I John 1:9. Listen for God's reassurance in your heart.

5. Pray for self. Pray in words like "Make me . . . , show me . . . , use me . . . , etc." When desires are shared aloud with others in prayer, they are answered more quickly.

6. Pray for others. Mention the situation, without exposing other people unless necessary.

7. Meditate and end in dedication.¹

Participants should share their temptations, fears, doubts, worries, and experiences with one another in the group. They can share their testimony by telling something that has happened during the past week, relating how God has answered prayers. Seating for the group should be in a circle or at least a semicircle, permitting everyone to see everyone else.

Kingsly Arunothayakumar recommends that in leading a group it is good to ask some questions or keep them in mind:

1. Who are to be introduced?
2. Who are sick or absent?
3. Where have individuals found the Christian faith most difficult or most helpful?
4. Whose birthday comes next week?
5. What follow up was done during the last week?
6. What visitation should be done this week?

¹Kingsly Arunothayakumar, "Prayer Guide," Friends Focus, January 1995, 15.

7. When is the next gospel literature distribution?

8. What openings exist for social and spiritual outreach?¹

Coleman declares, "There must be some outreach program every week."² The group must have some goals, because the prayer cell is a service group. Members can be sent out two by two on house visitations to do outreach.

Benefits of a Prayer Fellowship

Titus talks about the benefits of prayer fellowship by saying, "Prayer fellowship brings vitality and power into the church. Men and women are brought out of their loneliness into a warm fellowship; out of apartness into belonging; out of selfishness into sharing."³

Throughout history the prayer cell has come to the forefront in times of spiritual awakening. Prominent in the eighteenth century was the Methodist Society headed by John Wesley.

This began as a prayer fellowship group, and later became a strong church movement. Their church is a symbolic representation of a prayer group, with members having a burden for evangelistic work at their local

¹Ibid., 20.

²Coleman, 8.

³Titus, 21.

church premises. This was the life pattern of the forefathers of this movement.¹

The great revival in America in 1857 and 1858 was another example of this principle at work. Empowered and nurtured in prayer meetings led largely by lay people, this last national awakening affected every church in the land and brought a million souls to the Savior.²

Hundreds of people, whose wasted, discouraged, and unhappy lives drove them to despair, found an entirely new life once they began to practice the principles of prayer groups.³

A prayer fellowship stimulates essential virtues of the Christian life. Prayer fellowship helps individuals grow inwardly in the sense of closer fellowship with the Holy Spirit and outwardly in the form of service.⁴

Prayer Fellowships in India

Christian growth in India has been accompanied or perhaps spurred on by the development of prayer fellowship groups.

¹Coleman, 13.

²Ibid., 15.

³Titus, 10.

⁴Ibid.

There are some twenty prayer fellowship organizations in Tamil Nadu. All these organizations aim at achieving one goal: preaching Christ. These prayer fellowship organizations follow the same pattern of ministry methods in their evangelization. Though they all work under different names, yet there is one thought, one aim, and one goal within them.¹

These prayer fellowships develop as one or two faithful persons meet at first and pray; then each person brings one more. They then organize prayer meetings. When the group reaches eight people, it splits into two groups which organize separate meetings.

The main aim of the prayer fellowship is to train the youth and send them as missionaries to reach the unreached with the gospel message, to help them become disciples of Christ. Once people become disciples they are trained so that they in turn become missionaries and thus keep the cycle moving.² Their purpose is to bring all people into the fold of Christ, for which He came to this world. A second purpose is to train the church members and bring them to the realization of their responsibilities to become

¹Daniel, Student prayer group leader, interview by author, April 1997, FMPB, Madras, India.

²Theodore Srinivasagam, "Mission Story," I. E. M. Outreach, July 1992, 10.

workers for God and to spread the gospel message. All believers are priests of God and therefore must become mediators to draw men closer to God and bridge the gap.¹

All these groups work within the same framework: "By Indians and for Indians." Indians within India or outside India support these prayer groups by their contributions and prayers. Many independent prayer fellowships operate with individual contributions.

Christian Missionary Society Prayer Band

In 1902 Azariah and his friend Eddie went from India to Sri Lanka to conduct Christian meetings. There, they saw people praying for gospel workers to be sent to unreached people. Those prayers influenced Azariah and Eddie, who wanted to achieve something for God.

The two friends returned to India and with a heavy burden continued to pray for God's direction. Azariah gathered some young people and started praying with them. He introduced Christ to them and gradually instilled in them the thought that they should become missionaries. He trained them in the gospel and finally decided to send them as missionaries to unreached people.

¹Ibid., 15.

After much prayer and deliberation, Azariah himself went as a missionary to an unentered place. There he continued training many young people and sending them as missionaries to other places. By the work of these young men many accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour.

The main concern of Azariah was to train young people to introduce Christ to other young people who would then be trained to do the same. This missionary-oriented movement was finally called the Christian Missionary Society Prayer Band.¹

Friends Missionary Prayer Band

Kovilpatti, a town known for its textile industries, lies in the south of Tamil Nadu. The people of Kovilpatti are predominantly Hindus. In 1955, in a college dominated by Hindus, two Christian friends joined to study. They wanted to do something for their Hindu colleagues.

They were concerned for the students, some of whom were addicted to narcotics and liquor, some without proper direction and purpose in life. The two Christians were also concerned for them because they were without the knowledge of Christ. Along with this, the burden that the Christians

¹Devasagayam Ponraj, Pioneers of the Gospel (Bihar, India: Indian Institute of Multi-Cultural Studies, 1993), 83.

were not doing anything for their friends who did not know Christ was heavy on them. So they decided to lead their friends to Christ so that the plan of God might be fulfilled in them, too.

The two knelt before God and pleaded with Him to do something for these Hindu young men. They then decided to invite one student each for their prayer session. After many weeks of praying together they invited more and requested the first friends to invite their friends for the prayer session. In this way they expanded the group.

This was the beginning of the movement called Friends Missionary Prayer Band. This movement has reached the corners of India, making inroads in places and people groups where others dare not enter. Many thousands have reached the feet of Jesus through the tireless efforts of this organization. The good work is still continuing.¹

Indian Evangelical Missionary Prayer Fellowship

Theodore Williams, who studied in Kovilpatti, Tamil Nadu, was part of a group called Friends Missionary Prayer Band which started on February 25, 1965. Abruptly he stopped his studies and went to Uttar Pradesh, North India.

¹Kingsly Arunothayakumar, "History of Friends Missionary Prayer Band," Friends Focus, December 1997, 5.

There he found the people living in poverty and misery, with no knowledge of Jesus Christ. He was urged by an unknown force to tell them about Christ.

He took up a job in a college and started preaching Christ to the people. He gathered many young men and talked to them about Christ. He emphasized that Christ was the answer to all their problems and urged them to try Him. He conducted many prayer fellowship meetings at different places for the young people.

He emphasized small prayer groups and concentrated mostly on young people. He trained them to reach out and become part of the missionary movement. He realized the potential in the young people as soldiers for Christ. He believed that they could achieve great things for God. The efforts of Theodore Williams were blessed and his ministry and dedicated service bore much fruit.¹

New Assembly Prayer Fellowship

Pastor D. Mohan was very faithful in witnessing to people in the Saidapet area, Madras. By his hard work he established a small gathering of believers as a church. They gathered in a small building near the Coovam River and conducted the services. In 1980, an unprecedented flood

¹Srinivasagam, 10.

washed away their church building, and everything came to a standstill.

Pastor Mohan, though discouraged, went to God on his knees. After many hours and days of prayer, with new zeal, he went to the members and encouraged them to come together. The church members gathered and built a new church building. They felt it was time to reach out and bring in new members.

Pastor Mohan gathered the members and talked with them about starting prayer fellowship meetings. Many members became enthusiastic and requested the pastor to conduct the meetings in their homes. Each member invited others to join in for the prayer fellowship. During the meetings the members were urged to invite their non-Christian friends and neighbors, and they did so. Later, the new visitors were invited to attend the prayers in the church. The membership of the church grew.

Later the youth of the church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, went out to share the good news with their friends and colleagues. People came in multitudes and the Lord convinced and convicted them; many accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Thus because of the prayer fellowship program the church saw a great growth in a short

time. By 1990 about ten thousand members had been added to this church.¹

Inter-College Student Prayer Fellowship

Xavier is the professor at Madras Loyola College who founded the Inter-College Student Prayer Fellowship in 1980. One day he felt that he should do something for Christ. He decided to spend at least one hour every day in the slums telling people about Jesus.

One day as he was preaching about Jesus in the slums, an angry young man came to him and said: "You Christians are doing this just for money." Xavier was upset with this. For a while he stopped going to the slum area. However, he was not able to put it out of his mind. He decided to counsel students and soon began to counsel those with problems. He prayed with them. Slowly many came to him and asked to join his prayer group.

Xavier encouraged the students to go and pray with others. Within a span of five years these small groups of college students had started two hundred prayer groups.

¹Mohan, Head Pastor, New Assembly of God, interview by author, June 1998, Saidapet, Madras, India.

This prayer fellowship has now become a missionary movement. Missionaries committed to youth are sent to different parts of India.¹

Conclusion

This chapter makes it clear that prayer fellowships are still valuable today and in India have been used by God in powerful ways. Chapter 4 discusses in brief the Adventist youth in Madras and the problems faced by them.

¹Daniel, Student Group Leader, Loyola College, interview by author, July 1998, Madras, India.

CHAPTER IV

ADVENTIST YOUTH IN MADRAS

Problems Youth Face

This chapter deals with the problems faced by youth and reports on the results of a survey conducted among SDA youth in Madras.

Unemployment

Statistics from the Corporation of Madras 1995 set the population at 9,485,600.¹ The Indian Express pointed out that, in 1997, 150,000 persons had no permanent work, being underemployed.² This number should be added to the number of those who are totally unemployed, 1,400,000.³ The causes and effects of this situation need to be considered.

¹Jonathan, Corporation Counselor, interview by author, November 1998, Ward No. 58, Madras, India.

²K. Manoharan, "Un-Employment," Indian Express, 28 May 1998, 6.

³Ibid.

Causes for Unemployment

The causes for unemployment and underemployment are many. First is the enormous and growing population of the city. This population is fed by a high birthrate of 15 percent annually,¹ and the migration of rural people to the city, which brings approximately 20,000 people to the city every year.² There are simply more people for any given work than are needed.³

Mechanization of common tasks has also contributed. One machine may do the work of one hundred men, who then become jobless.⁴ At the same time, economic stagnation has not fostered the establishment of new industries.⁵

Illiteracy and lack of training are other factors contributing to the high rate of unemployment. Uneducated persons, often from rural backgrounds, can find only menial jobs and those are insufficient for the large population.⁶

¹K. M. Mathew, "Tamil Nadu," in Manorama Year Book 1999 (Kottayam: Malayalam Manorama, 1999), 662.

²Ibid.

³K. Subramanian, "Population," Indian Express, Madras edition, November 16, 1998, 12.

⁴Mahalingam, Railway Labour Union leader, interview by author, November 1998, Madras.

⁵S. K. Ray, Indian Economy (New Delhi: Prentice Hall of India, 1986), 457.

⁶Ibid.

While well-trained persons are always in demand, without proper training finding work is difficult.¹

Finally, the political situation does not help. Politicians and labor leaders, while pretending to champion the cause of the poor, only add to the difficulties.²

For Seventh-day Adventists, refusal to work on the Sabbath has been a significant cause of unemployment. At conversion, many who had jobs have lost them. Furthermore, because of hostility toward Christians, some Hindu employers do not wish to employ Adventists.³

Effects of Unemployment

Unemployment and the poverty to which it contributes lead to depression, hopelessness, and feelings of worthlessness.⁴ People without jobs, at times hunted down by creditors, often commit suicide as an easy way out.⁵

The Indian tradition is for members of an extended family to pool their income in order to meet expenses. The

¹R. V. Varghese, Indian Economy (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1993), 167-168.

²Ray, 457.

³Shankar Paul, Kodambakam Adventist Church, interview by Swamidass Johnson, 24 January 1999, Madras.

⁴Varghese, 168.

⁵A.C. Rajan, Madras Echo, September 1996, 5.

unemployment of one or more members of the family causes resentment and may lead to family disruption.¹

Medical care is unavailable to the unemployed, causing serious health problems.² The government is unable to face the cost of medical care for those who have no resources.³

Further, social costs of unemployment are seen in the antisocial behavior of many, especially the youth. Many become drug addicts and steal to satisfy their addiction. Thus law and order problems are created.⁴ In addition, children of those who have no jobs often do not attend school; instead they pick up health-destroying habits and prepare for their own life of unemployment. The cycle is completed when no money is injected into the economy, and the unemployment rate becomes worse, leading to economic disruptions.⁵

¹Ramamoorthy, "Unemployment," Indian Express, 18 September 1997, 10.

²Manoharan, "Unemployment," Daily Thanthi, 28 June 1996, 10.

³Ray, 458.

⁴Kasinath, Inspector of Police, interview by author, 25 September 1998, R5 Police Station, Madras.

⁵Ray, 457.

Poverty

A world bank project conducted by the group called Vision 2000 says that Madras city has 40 percent of its people below the poverty-line and some are extremely poor.¹

John Stott writes, "Poverty means different things to different people. Poverty is measured by the purchasing capacity of a person. The rich may look for expensive material, the poor many look for less expensive material in terms of basic necessities made available for a comfortable livelihood."² Therefore, poverty is measured by the absence of basic needs such as housing, food, and clothing. The causes and effects of this situation need to be considered.³

Causes of Poverty

The causes for poverty are many. The first is due to the joint (extended) family, where the family is large but the working members are few, leading to a state of want.⁴ Illiteracy also has a major role in poverty because it leads

¹Vision 2000 Director, interview by Swamidass Johnson, December 1998, Madras.

²John Stott, Issues Facing Christians Today (Bombay: Gospel Literature Service, 1984), 217.

³Ibid., 214.

⁴R. H. Cassen, Poverty in India (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1992), 137.

to unemployment, which pushes the family below the normal standard of living.¹

Unstable government policies permit politicians the use of revenues for their elections and other bureaucratic activities. Quite often this money could be used to upgrade many poor in various projects. In addition, the Indian population is enormous, so that available government funds for development of the poor are inadequate.²

People are unemployed in India due to few job openings. This is one of the major current reasons for poverty.³

In the caste system, certain groups are born to do certain work. For example, the coolies work on farms and must continue on until they die. Their children will follow the parents. They can never become landowners due to caste barriers.⁴ On the other hand, slavery exercised by the landlords on the lower caste group, from generation to generation, makes the poor even poorer.⁵

¹Stott, 215.

²Rajaram, "Poverty," Indian Express, 17 October 1992, 8.

³Cassen, 152.

⁴Daniel Dashan, "Poverty," Daily Thanthi, 28 May 1981, 12.

⁵Job, "Indian Condition," in Torture for Christ (Madras: Indian Every Home Crusade, 1999), 18.

Effects of Poverty

Poverty affects the Adventist Church and its members. The effects of poverty touch them at the very core of life by destroying their health.¹ Health is affected due to malnutrition; food becomes the agent and poverty stands as a root cause.²

Housing becomes a problem for the poor since they do not have adequate funds to be able to build a house or rent one. This leads them to stay on the pavements, under bridges and wherever they find a place. Poverty even affects one of the basic human rights, education. Though the government has opened some free schools for poor people, still, people in the deadly clutches of poverty are forced to work from an early age and cannot attend school.³ Poverty in India is the primary cause for crime, theft, murder, and other immoral acts.⁴

As a famous saying goes, money begets money. Poverty also begets poverty; it is so drastic that it pushes people down more and more. The poor can live a normal life only in

¹U. Sharma, The Nature of Poverty (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1985), 323.

²Ibid., 352.

³Rajan, "Poverty," Madras Echo, March 1994, 5.

⁴Kasinathan, Inspector of Police, interview by author, September 1998, Madras.

dreams because the way out is very difficult. Some of them are born in this class without their consent; most of them try to develop themselves out of it, but only one out of a hundred attains success.¹

Since most of the Adventist Church is made up of people in poverty, they find barriers to becoming self-supporting.²

Family

Family plays an important role in a person's development. The family is expected to provide stability. Bitter experiences such as the generation gap, problems in marriages, conversion (from another religion), and the constant rejection of youth by their family can make them seek love and sympathy elsewhere and rebel against everything in life.

Family problems seem to differ from place to place, country to country. The problems faced in South India are different from those in North India.

The first basic problem is the generation gap. This is unavoidable, but it brings a rupture between parents and youth. This gap creates frustration among youth in general.

¹Charan Singh, Inian Poverty and Its Solution (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1983), 342.

²Anbazagan, Secretary, North Tamil Conference of SDA, interview by author, March 1999, Trichirapalli.

It drives away peace at home, and the youth feel that in today's world parents may not be able to predict the world they or their children must face tomorrow.¹

Marriage is also a problem. Marrying a person of a different caste group raises a lot of conflict among the youth and their parents. The parents feel that marrying a girl or a boy from outside their caste or creed will bring dishonor to their family and joint family, life will be endangered. This simple thing can cause a joint family to split. So they obstruct and stand against marriages they feel are inappropriate.²

Casteism holds the family together. According to the caste cultural belief, elders believe that losing one's caste position will cause friction among the relatives and local people. Though most of the youth hardly give a second thought in this modern developing world to casteism and religion, family pressure stops them from accepting the real truth though it is rational and appealing.

Srinivasagam writes that "casteism creates lots of barriers

¹Richard H. Coop, Adolescents Behavior and Development (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), 228.

²Sam Jebadurai, Daily Bread (Madras: Sam Jebadurai Publishing, 1992), 15.

in a youth seeking a life partner for himself or herself. This leads to a conflict in the family and peace is lost."¹

Spiritual Issues

Youth face many spiritual issues in this modern day. Among the most serious ones are those dealing with a lack of interest in attending church and doing evangelism. Around 60 percent of the youth of Madras have actually withdrawn from the church program because of a lack of interest in church activities.² While the reasons are many, the first and foremost is their hostile attitude toward the church. Though there are few who feel positively towards some aspects of religion many feel hostility toward the church.³ Theoder Srinivasagam writes that 60 percent of youth may be described as generally not interested in attending church and doing evangelism.⁴

Jacob reveals that "most of our youth backslide in coming to church due to the dead program of Christian

¹Theoder Srinivasagam, I. E. M. Outreach, November 1996, 42 (Translation mine).

²Dr. James, Kodambakam Adventist Church, interview by author, 25 January 1999, Madras.

³Roger L. Dudley, Why Teenagers Reject Religion (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1986), 21.

⁴Srinivasagam, I. E. M. Outreach, July 1996, 22.

churches."¹ Another aspect is that youth find church services and programs boring. Worship must be dynamic, interactive and attractive. This can be taken as one of the reasons for young adults leaving the church.² Many Adventist youth feel that the church is too strict.³ A possible conclusion is that emotional hostility builds up, causing them to strike out at the church by denying the truth of its teachings.

The third aspect is evangelism. Four reasons are cited by young people for not witnessing: (1) fear of what other youth would think; (2) lack of know-how; (3) lack of relationships with non-Christians; (4) and aloneness; lack of practical evangelistic outreach programs.⁴ Orientation not provided for youth at the proper time leads the youth to shift away from evangelism.

While many Adventist youth show a distinct loyalty towards the church, there is also the disturbing fact that

¹Jacob, "Spiritual Issues," Arunothayam, August 1995, 35.

²Andrew Leonie, "Nurturing Our Next Generation through the Church," Adventist Review, January 3, 1991, 15.

³Dudley, 24.

⁴Roy B. Zuck and Warren S. Benson, Youth Education in the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 94.

Adventist youth do not experience an upward growth in faith.¹

Reports suggest that the majority of young people see their church as a place where they are neither challenged to think nor given the opportunity to think freely for themselves.²

Often youth are not recognized and appreciated for their activities in the church program. The criticism raised by elderly people of the church results in their stepping out from all programs.³

Youth need a sense of purpose: "They not only need a creed to believe but a cause which demands their fullest effort. Youth need a sense of participation: most youth are only spectators forced to observe without opportunity to contribute."⁴ Youth need practice; teens gain proficiency in service training. Youth need praise--a word of commendation from the pastor and others.⁵

¹Leonie, 14.

²Ibid., 15.

³Dr. James, Elder, Kodambakam Church, interview by author, September 1998, Madras.

⁴Zuck and Benson, 334.

⁵Ibid., 335.

Unless the church meets these needs of its young people, it runs the risk of losing them.

Adventist Youth Survey

There was a need to do a survey to find out the attitudes and the understanding of young people regarding the Adventist Church. An opportunity was made available during the "Net 1999" crusade in Madras.

Youth were divided into two age groups for the sake of the survey: the first group was between ages 15 and 18; the second group between 19 and 25.

Young people who participated were members of several churches. Out of the 40 surveys handed out, 25 were completed.

Out of these 25 persons, 16 were unemployed youth, 18 reported living in poverty, 15 said they had family problems, and 20 reported having to deal with spiritual issues.

Work

The 16 who reported unemployment were asked for further details.

Rajesh, one of the youth at the Kodambakkam Church, finished college but is not employed. One reason is the difficulty in getting Sabbaths off. He feels that the

church is not taking any steps to bring about a solution for his problem.

Prabhu has finished his education and is in search of a job. He feels that no one is taking care of him, not even God.

Pandian, the eldest son of the family, is a graduate without a job, and says no one is doing anything about his job situation.

Vetrivel, a young college graduate, is facing the problem of unemployment. Out of frustration he said, "I feel insecure in this world and religion makes no sense to me."

Selvi, once a worker at a large private firm, resigned her job due to Sabbath problems and started her own business as a solution. But the business failed, and she is praying for employment and looking to the church for help.

Daniel comes down heavily on the church, saying that the church should do something about this. Another youth says that preaching is not enough for members; practical living and employment also should be provided. Sam, a good and faithful member, says that the government considers Christians as high caste and curtails their privileges. At the same time, the church neglects the employment needs so

that members are innocent victims. Sherli says, "Without work I am finding it hard to understand religion."

Poverty

Arun says he comes from a poverty-stricken family. He finds his life hard. Andrew says, "I should increase my status according to the developing world and society, I feel like I am an outcast due to my poverty." Jenifer notes, "If you are a poor person even the church looks down on you." Jessy said, "We say the world and all its wealth belong to our true, living God, but almost all of the Christians fall below the poverty line." Another youth says, "Even the church pastor visits only the well-to-do members of his church." Another person pointed out, "The positions of the church offices belong only to the rich minority, not the poor majority." Rajesh wrote: "I can't befriend my college mates, because most of them are rich and wear good dresses; I feel poverty brings this simple barrier." Agnes, a student, complained, "Because of poverty I am unable to buy even my class books and notes." Deva wrote, "Since I come under the banner of poor people, I don't have respect in my church and elsewhere."

Family

Rajan said, "Though I go to church regularly with my family, my parents are always pushing me for doing things. I feel it is due to the generation gap and I feel 'I am caged.'" Andrew, a student, noted, "Though I come from a well-to-do family, I do not get privileges because my parents say 'we struggled in life and came up' so you must follow the same path, which bothers me and drives me crazy." Sam said, "I am losing interest in marriage because my parents have given me a set of unwritten rules about selecting a girl." David tried to be positive when responding, "I thank God for my wonderful parents but one simple thing annoys me the most, 'they are too strict.'"

Another youth was of the opinion that his parents are old-fashioned in thought and lifestyle. Manokaran expressed, "My family is not at peace due to the unemployment of my parents. This stops me from taking part in anything and taking church activities seriously."

Janet had another problem, "I am a Hindu convert, and my family is not Adventist. My parents are insisting that I go for a Hindu boy but I don't like it and it disturbs me a lot." Ashok was even more specific, "Being the only convert from my Hindu family, I am troubled a lot by my family members, I feel like stepping out of my family." Rajeev

also noted isolation because of his conversion from Hinduism.

Spiritual Issues

One of the youth said, "I don't find any program in the church impressive." Inbhaselvi thought that the youth of the church were scattered because of the negligence of the church.

Ganesh, a recent convert, opined, "My old church had more interesting programs for youth like me, than this church does." Another youth spoke out, "Since the church is careless of youth and their activities I do the same." One of the youth said, "The church pastors, elders, and deacons fail to understand and respect the feelings of the youth." Rajesh felt that youth lost interest because they were not allowed to execute their ideas for outreach programs because they are considered as immature.

The survey showed a common thought among the youth: They feel that worship is not contemporary. Raju was very direct when writing that the sermons were boring. Jeyarani felt that since the world is becoming compact, there is no more need to worry about the membership records. One of the youth pointed out that the pattern of the Sabbath program was set up according to former needs, so it was not relevant for the younger generation. Suganthi said, "There is no

hospitality and welcoming spirit in our local churches."

Elizabeth contended, "We preach that the church is a family but when an individual faces problems, he is left alone to suffer and we don't take part in it."

Jackson, a new convert, considered the Christian life too strict with regulations. One youth commented, "Fun is a bad word in the Christian life." About evangelism, Rajasekar, an active youth, said, "I am afraid to involve myself in the outreach program because of the phobia that the elders and my seniors may embarrass me at that point." One youth stated, "I am not skilled adequately in Bible and its doctrine, so I avoid outreach programs. I am a good Christian with a reserved nature so an outreach program seems to me a burden." Another youth says that youth are not given timely and right opportunities in church activities.

Conclusion

This survey makes it clear that Adventist youth in Madras face many problems ranging from financial needs to family conflicts as well as religious problems. The Church needs to find a way to minister to them. Chapter 5, which talks about the development, implementation and evaluation of prayer fellowships, shows one way to help with these problems.

CHAPTER V

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PRAYER FELLOWSHIPS IN MADRAS

This chapter deals with the development, implementation, and evaluation of a prayer fellowship in Madras.

Development

In July 1997, I took a course under Dr. Erik Baumgartner, who gave us a book to read for our assignment. This book was about a simple man of God named Paul Yongi Cho. In that book prayer fellowships were highlighted as a tool for establishing churches in Korea.¹

This was the vision of a small group of people who wanted to see church attendance increase. I began to realize that a small group of dedicated people could do similar wonders. Therefore, I decided that I, too, should start a prayer fellowship group in my church.

My inner feelings began to push me to share this idea of forming a prayer group with my church members. So I

¹Karen Hurston, Growing the World's Largest Church (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1984), 10.

began to fast and pray over this thought. After a few days, on 5 Sept 1997, I met my church elders, told them about this program, and asked for their feedback. As expected, they had their own opinions and suggestions; among them was a timely thought. One asked, "Why don't you speak in a Sabbath service about this?" Again I fasted and prayed and decided to speak upon that topic on a particular Sabbath.

On the first Sabbath of September 1997, I was convicted to read Isaiah 6, which talks about the call to ministry. As the call was given to Isaiah, he refused initially but later on accepted it. Based on that I appealed to my church, calling for volunteers to begin a prayer fellowship. As the last call was pronounced, eight stepped forward in response. As a mark of dedication, the elders, deacons, and church officers were asked to kneel for a special session of prayer. The people who came forward took an oath in the presence of the Lord to start prayer fellowship units at their respective places to pray for the church, others, and to multiply the groups. Of the eight, five were men and three were woman. Of these, seven were under thirty years of age. Three had no education, two had some study, and three were educated.

Immediately after the church service, the chosen eight were called to the vestry where the pastor, elders, and

deacons joined together and discussed how to begin and execute the plan. Before the meeting was over, all the instruction and materials such as song books, a register to maintain names, a Bible to be used at the fellowship, and some tracts for new members were given so they could begin a prayer fellowship that week.

The instructions given were as follows:

1. All the eight were to select a particular place where they felt it would be convenient for everyone to meet.
2. They were to appoint a secretary to maintain records.
3. They should designate a particular day which would be satisfying to all attendees.
4. They should pray according to the present needs.

Implementation

Though the original intention had been to focus on young people, when the call was given young as well as old responded. Thus there are some older people working along with the young.

One week after sending the eight volunteers to prepare for the initiation of the prayer fellowship meetings, they returned to share their experience with the church. They told about how God helped them to find many people who

wanted to attend the prayer fellowship meeting. Some even offered their homes to conduct the meetings.

The following day eight new locations were chosen for conducting prayer fellowship meetings. Now there are sixteen prayer fellowship groups.

Prayer group leaders inquired how to conduct these meetings. After discussion the following program was outlined:

1. Singing for 15 minutes with mostly songs of praise, of the second coming, and deliverance.
2. Keep record of attendance.
3. Ask for prayer requests.
4. Ask one person to pray for the meeting.
5. Have a Bible study for half an hour on a chosen topic.
6. Have group and individual prayers for twenty minutes.
7. Every individual should be given a chance to pray.

Out of these eight volunteers, some had problems. One of the volunteers was a bank employee, two were teachers, and one was a college student. They were not sure how to proceed. Their problems were discussed in detail and solutions were suggested.

They were all told to pray faithfully for guidance. The bank employee was advised to meet fellow workers at lunch break or free time, and with prayer in the heart, introduce Christ as opportunities arose. Day by day he could call them to come and pray together.

The bachelor teacher was asked to invite his friends to his house and have a prayer fellowship.

The college student was prayerfully directed to get a friend as a prayer partner and to gradually establish a prayer fellowship.

Evaluation

This section deals with an evaluation of the prayer fellowship program. It discusses the evaluation survey, church statistics, and personal observations.

On 20 February 1999, all the prayer fellowship leaders and the participants were invited for a fellowship meeting. A survey form was given to each of them to evaluate the prayer fellowship (this survey is in appendix A)

The eight questions asked about the benefits they received personally from the prayer fellowship. It also asked about benefits for the church and the community.

Almost fifty people attended the meeting, but forty took the survey form to fill out. Thirty returned the completed survey. The responses of these thirty are

summarized under the headings: time spent in prayer, people prayed for, effects on personal spiritual life, effects on church life, and desire for improvement.

Time Spent in Prayer

Of the thirty, twenty had increased time spent in prayer. Some had increased their prayer time from nothing to a few minutes. Others were working on developing a prayer habit. Some of the participants' comments deserve quoting.¹

As a normal Christian I used to pray everyday without realizing the importance and value of it, but after attending the prayer group, I began to understand the deep meaning and its value in Christian life.

One of the prayer group leaders for the youth wrote:

This is my personal confession. Being a youth leader I had different experiences with my group and I personally visited most of the youth in our church. I used to attend our church only for appearances sake and prayed for the same reason, but after attending the prayer group the young people began to pray with a burden at home and with their other friends.

A villager who came in search of work and settled in town by getting a job as a watchman said:

I was a Christian by name who never used to take prayer and reading the Bible of much importance but after joining the prayer group I started to enjoy the benefits of prayer in my family.

¹All quotations translated from the Tamil by the author.

A teacher and leader of youth in Kodambakkam school put it this way:

Being an Adventist I did not realize the power of prayer but after becoming a part of the prayer group I began to understand the power of prayer. As a result I am praying three times a day.

A Hindu admitted:

Today I am a Christian because of the effort of the prayer group which converted me by their prayers. Now I am a believer in the true God and I pray thirty minutes to one hour every day and I cherish prayer.

People Prayed For

When asked how many people they had prayed for before joining the prayer fellowship, 25 said they prayed for others only occasionally, but mostly for themselves. The other 5 did not pray for anyone.

After the prayer fellowship, 20 reported that they had begun to pray for others. Their prayers had changed from prayers for themselves to prayer for relatives, friends, people in darkness, for nations, for peace, and for the spreading of the Gospel. Several reported praying for 3 to 5 people daily.

The following are representative comments gathered:

I never used to pray at any point, but after becoming part of the prayer group, I pray every day and the beauty of it is I am wrestling with God for others. Now I pray at least for fifteen to twenty people regularly with a burden for their souls.

A prayer group leader said,

Before I used to pray only for myself and my family, but after joining the group, and now as a leader, I have a list of names of others for whom I pour out my tears at the feet of my Savior.

A worker in a private firm among Hindus stated that,

Now I pray in my free time at the office and at home for others.

A teacher and participant of this prayer group said,

By God's grace I realized my duty as a Christian. I began to set apart time after my school and prayed for students, and others.

A teacher of the government school and regular member of the prayer group said,

After experiencing the value and importance of prayer, in spite of their religion, I called all my fellow workers together at school to join in my prayer fellowship during the lunch break. Now I pray for not fewer than ten people everyday.

A film industry worker wrote:

Being the only Christian at my work place I began to understand the responsibility of prayer for others and I started to pray for the sick people. At present I pray for ten people every day.

A college student said that,

Now I pray regularly for five to eight people every day.

A college student and a youth prayer group participant said:

I pray for at least three to four people a week.

A prayer group leader wrote:

People came to know that I pray for others, and now every day around five to eight people come to my house for prayer.

Effects on Spiritual Life

Of the 30 respondents, 25 admitted to having been nominal Christians. They did not attend church regularly and were not particular about paying tithe and giving offerings.

After the prayer group experience, 25 said they had left their lethargy and were now faithful in church attendance, in paying tithe, and were beginning to participate in evangelistic outreach.

A college student and youth prayer group leader said:

This group has helped me to attend church regularly and had strengthened my spiritual life.

One of the participants of prayer group,

It has brought out a remarkable change in my attendance at church and has convicted me of paying the tithe and offering.

A regular participant affirmed:

This prayer fellowship has helped me to grow in my spiritual life and converted me to support the church in all possible ways.

A prayer fellowship leader said:

Before I used to crave for a post in the church but now I am totally changed and long to establish many new prayer groups for the deliverance of people like me.

A Bible teacher and youth prayer group leader confessed:

Being a Bible teacher I was working only for wages but after becoming a prayer group leader my attitude has changed and, to be frank, people see a difference in me.

A teacher said:

I was irregular in my church and if I attended at all I used to sit and chat in the church. After attending prayer group, I attend church regularly.

At the beginning of this prayer fellowship I thought it was another program to occupy time, but now I am leader of two groups, I believe now you can understand my change and zeal. Now I pray for twenty people regularly and it has been a great blessing to me.

Another prayer fellowship leader adds:

This simple prayer group has brought out a revival in my spiritual life.

One of the youth of this prayer group comments:

It has stopped me from all unwanted activities and made me search for the unconverted souls and bring them to Savior.

Another youth prayer group leader stated:

My participation in prayer fellowship has increased my Bible reading time and prayer.

Effects on Church Life

Twenty of the 30 respondents affirmed that before the prayer groups they had felt that the church lacked unity and revival. They had even asked themselves why they attended. The other 10 did not participate or even attend regularly.

After the prayer fellowship experience, 22 reported feeling that there was now a spark in the church, and that they had a part to play in uplifting spiritual activities. Another 5 were only beginning to catch the spark, while 2 had made no progress.

Some of the comments are presented as they were made.

One of the elders of the church said:

The prayer group has created an extra interest among the youth in outreach programs.

One of the youth in the church reported:

Before I used to come to church as a duty. Now I use the Sabbath afternoon in visiting our members and outreach activities.

Shanthakumar, one of the prayer group participants, stated:

Now whenever I get free time I only feel like doing ministry.

One of the elders of the church wrote:

I can see a gradual development in members attending the church after the establishment of a prayer group.

The church treasurer added:

There is a considerable growth in the tithe and offering collections.

One of the prayer group leaders wrote:

Many people come to my prayer group with many problems, but after attending it they feel a sense of peace and deliverance.

One of the prayer group leaders told me:

One of my neighbors was terribly ill; we took her to our prayer group and prayed earnestly. At the end she was fully cured and is now a strong member of our church.

Desired Improvements

When asked what improvements they desired to see, 26 said that the program was good and should be instituted in many other places. The remaining 4 agreed that the prayer fellowship groups were nice, but that they consumed time.

Some participants made specific recommendations. Two wanted the church to find a larger or more appropriate place where the group could meet. One suggested that the pastor should visit the prayer group regularly. One thought that it was important for the church to supply song books and Bibles for those who could not afford to buy them.

One of the prayer group leaders said that

sometimes people rush in and the place becomes insufficient so it would be nice if the church could arrange for a bigger and better place for the prayer group.

A college student and youth prayer group leader wrote:

Sometime I find difficulty in conducting prayer fellowship at my college due to no free classrooms, separate places, or play grounds. So I feel it would be of great help if the church could conduct some seminars on confronting this type of problem.

One of the prayer group leader feels pastors should visit the prayer group regularly; if not, at least send an elder to encourage them.

Church Statistics

Membership

On 31 December 1997 the total membership of the church was 150. One year later, there were 170 members. In May 1999 the membership stood at 210.

From the above figures it can be seen that there has been a steady growth of membership during the last two and a half years. In 1999 we see a sudden growth due to evangelistic meetings conducted by the Amazing Facts ministry, which resulted in the addition of thirty-five new believers. Another encouraging factor was that absent members were brought to church. From the prayer fellowship, fifteen new persons have been baptized. The new believers were mostly young people.

Participation in Outreach Activities

The outreach program in Madras is a great success. The members who participate in the outreach program are continuously increasing. Before the prayer fellowship, only a handful were interested in outreach. After the prayer fellowship began the average number of members going out each Sabbath for evangelistic outreach is fifteen to twenty.

During the past two years two daughter churches have been established by conducting three evangelistic meetings, all by the efforts of outreach groups. The Porur Church has

twenty members; the second one, Ashoke Nagar Church, has twenty-five members.

My Own Observation

This prayer fellowship program, besides benefiting my own spiritual growth, has benefitted many people. I have observed that the prayer fellowship has brought unity in the church, as well as spiritual revival. Participation in a prayer fellowship initiated a desire to do voluntary evangelism. It has encouraged the youth to become active in the church program and brought back many absent believers. Church attendance has increased from 70 to 150 attending the Sabbath service. Tithes and offerings have grown from Rs. 42,000 to Rs. 92,000 a year. The plan has encouraged all members to do more work for God. The church has become an example for many surrounding churches.

The prayer fellowship program not only brought youth to Christ, but the whole church has been brought together in Christ.

Conclusion

This penultimate chapter deals with the development and implementation of prayer fellowships. It also gives the evaluation and personal observation of the researcher.

Chapter 6 gives the summary, conclusion of the research, and recommendations for the betterment of prayer fellowships.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The concept of prayer has its origin in the Bible. The reward for prayerful people appears in many passages. This emphasis on prayer was exhibited by Jesus in His ministry. When the disciples responded, they were commissioned and sent out with a prayer.

The concept of prayer fellowships appears in the book of Acts, where the apostles were successful in carrying out the gospel commission with the help of prayer fellowships. These prayer fellowships brought good to the participants, such as unity among themselves, guidance for carrying out their mission, and deliverance in time of need. The benefits of prayer fellowships have also been emphasized in the writings of E. G. White.

The function of prayer fellowships is to pray for the sick, to seek God's guidance in doing His work, and to send supplication to God for perishing souls. When these are carried out in a proper manner, the results benefit all believers.

Important prayer fellowships have functioned in India for about one century. Some of the most permanent ones are the Friends Missionary Prayer Band, The Indian Evangelical Prayer Fellowship, The Christian Missionary Society Prayer Fellowship, New Assembly Prayer Fellowship and Inter College Student Prayer Fellowship. These groups have changed many things in India and converted many people, especially youth who are a great asset to God's cause.

Problems in life are quite common for all, but the condition of some of the youth of the Adventist Church in Madras was pathetic. Their main problems were unemployment and poverty. In this situation their spiritual life was affected. As one of my reports revealed, almost 50 percent of Adventist youth are under extreme pressure. They long for something better in life and they look to the church for some way out of their problems.

The Madras Adventist Youth Fellowship is unique in the Adventist Church in India. It started with a spark of thought and grew as I fasted and prayed over it. Then I shared the idea with my church elders and they asked me to preach about it. When I called for volunteers, eight responded and were dedicated in the presence of the Lord. Following instructions, these eight started prayer fellowships at their own places. They are now well settled

in their prayer fellowships, and as a result, many new people have begun to attend prayer fellowships. There are currently sixteen prayer fellowships.

The youth of the church have experienced a new spirit because of starting and attending prayer fellowships. They feel even more prayer fellowship groups should be established in the near future for the benefit of others.

Conclusion

The concept of prayer fellowships in the Adventist churches in Madras has become the talk of neighboring churches. The power of prayer has been manifested in many fellowship cells by conversion and conviction of many new believers. The objective of prayer is being gradually fulfilled in the prayer fellowships.

As Jesus said, "Ask and you will receive" (Matt 7:7). As the prayer fellowship groups ask for more souls and deliverance from the clutches of Satan, the power from heaven is showered upon the petitions. The Holy Spirit not only grants them their requests in Christ but also brings guidance and unity among the group members who are becoming of one accord in purpose for the Lord.

The function of prayer fellowships is to pray for the world, which is looking for peace and hope. The benefits are numerous; as the prayer fellowships unite their

supplications, many new names are being entered in the book of life.

My research has shown that after the establishment of the prayer fellowship, there seems to be new spiritual life for many, young and old. Through prayer fellowships, the members spend much more time on their knees than before. The more they pray, the more power they seem to receive. They receive peace from God and forget their troubles and worries. Many problems of the youth are solved in this way. In prayer fellowships youth pray for each other. They learn to uphold other members in prayer and pray for the sick and needy. Many lives have been changed for the better. Prayer fellowships have taught the youth to encourage others by bearing and sharing their burdens and lending a helping hand to others. The church is more united and the glory of God has become the focus of the church.

The message is reaching the people. I believe that if God can use a simple person like me to create a revival in Madras among the Adventist youth, He can do the same with others. There can be many more revivals when people commit themselves to God by fasting and praying. There can be a great movement. My dream and prayer is that God will open more prayer fellowships to save more souls and hasten His coming. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

Recommendations

1. Pastors should start this kind of prayer fellowships in many new places.
2. The conference should develop a special curriculum guide for prayer fellowships, which can be used in establishing prayer fellowship programs in various places.
3. Continuing study, prayer, and evaluation should be made to improve the prayer fellowship ministry.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Before you attended the prayer fellowship group, how much time on an average day did you spend in prayer?
2. How much time do you spend in prayer on an average day now?
3. Before you attending a prayer fellowship group, how many people in an average month did you pray for?
4. How many people do you pray for now?
5. How has a prayer fellowship helped your personal spiritual life?
6. What benefits have come to your church because of the prayer fellowship?
7. What was the best part of the prayer fellowship?
8. What would you like to see changed in the prayer fellowship meeting?

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR YOUTH

Thanking you for participating in this Questionnaire.

Please give the following information regarding yourself:

Age: _____ Gender: M/F Marital Status: Married/Single

Last Year of School Completed _____

Current Occupation: Student _____ Where: _____

Employee: _____ Where: _____

Other: _____

Current Church Membership: Chennai Church Other/No Church

Current Church Position held: _____

Please mark either YES or NO.

1. I need a good job.
2. Though I am qualified, I did not get a good job.
3. My family is in poverty.
4. Many of my dreams and aims are not fulfilled, because I come from a poor family.
5. I come from a broken family.
7. There is no proper understanding and peace in our family.
8. I'm not really interested in attending church.
9. I come to church because of my parent's compulsion.
10. I don't attend church.
11. I am not interested in sharing the gospel with others.
12. I'm not interested in going for ministry

13. My church shows no interest for youth activity.
14. In my church, importance is not given for youth.
15. I don't have enough training to do God's work.
16. I need training to do evangelism

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