

Audacious Praying and Sacrificial Worship

By R. Maurice Smith

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“Thy Kingdom Come” And Audacious Praying

Do you know how to pray ? Jesus’ disciples didn’t, and there in lies a story. The phrase “Thy Kingdom Come” is part of perhaps the most famous prayer in all of history, known to us as “The Lord’s Prayer.” When terrorists bombed the London subway system in mid-2005, survivors told stories of hearing other survivors reciting The Lord’s Prayer in the midst of the horror. In perhaps the greatest crisis of their adult lives they remembered and recited a prayer which they probably learned in their childhood. What we refer to as The Lord’s Prayer was Jesus’ response to a simple request on the part of His disciples, “And it came about that while He was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’” (Luke 11:1) As good Jews, the disciples knew about prayer. They had grown up with prayer in their homes and in the synagogue all their lives. But when they saw and heard Jesus pray, they knew something was different. What Jesus modeled in prayer was very different from what they were accustomed to in their own experience, and so they asked Him to teach them how to pray .

There is much talk today about prayer. It is even “fashionable” to call oneself an “intercessor.” You can take video classes on prayer. You can subscribe to magazines dedicated to prayer. You can join internet-based prayer organizations, or attend workshops about turning your house into a “lighthouse of prayer.” But if we are to see heaven moved and our neighborhoods transformed, prayer must be more than a book, class, workshop, magazine, conference or program. Prayer (along with fasting) must become a personal priority, a discipline in our personal lives and the life breath of our house churches. Our house churches must become houses of prayer

I believe that the greatest work of the Church on earth is intercession. And the true measure of any church (house church or otherwise), like that of a man (or woman), is the measure of the time spent in prayer and intercession before the Throne of Grace. Intercessory prayer is the life-breath of the Church. It precedes evangelism, missions, works of kindness and all other worthwhile activities. It is the God-appointed means of calling down His power and His blessings upon the Church and the world, and has been the necessary forerunner of every great revival, renewal and awakening in the history of the Church. A Christian or a Church that does not pray and intercede is like a body that does not breathe. Sooner or later its life will be in doubt.

Every believer prays, but not all believers persevere and prevail in prayer the way the disciples saw Jesus pray . So, when Jesus taught them to pray in Luke 11:1ff we shouldn’t be surprised that he taught them to pray “audaciously,” “I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs” (Luke 11:8). The Greek word translated “persistence” in this verse (*anaideia*) carries the sense of “recklessness” or “shamelessness”, hence, “audacity”. Then, in Luke 18:1 Jesus reminded them of the importance of persevering in prayer, “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart.” As a result, the early church learned and applied that lesson. Meeting in the upper room in Acts 1:14 they “were continually devoting (i.e., persevering) themselves to prayer.”

All of this begs a question: What persistent, audacious prayers are you praying for God’s moving in your house church network, in your neighborhood or in your city? Not the “platform prayers” intended to impress those we pray with, but the closet prayers of broken-hearted desperation. People who pray “God give me this city” in public aren’t usually praying such prayers in private. How do I know this? Because those who have approached the Throne of Grace and touched the golden scepter with audacious, heaven-shattering prayers in private know better than to make a public show. So, allow me to ask again. What audacious prayers are you praying? If your house church network has ten fellowships in it are you asking God for 100? If it has 100 are you praying for 1,000? What irreconcilably broken marriages are you praying for God to redeem (my list is long and growing); what seemingly unbreakable drug addiction or other bondage are you asking God to shatter (if you don’t know of any, I’ll be glad to send you my list). What seemingly impossible and hopeless medical condition are you imploring Jehovah-ropha (the Lord our Healer) to touch and heal.

Reliable studies regarding the devotional habits of pastors indicate that the average traditional church pastor spends an average of 22 minutes per day in prayer. And I don't think that 22 minutes a day really qualifies as either persistent or audacious. I went through four years of Seminary training, even serving on the adjunct faculty of the Seminary, without ever taking a single course, workshop or seminar on the importance of fasting and prayer for successful ministry. So, it should therefore come as no surprise that most contemporary church ministry looks and acts like little more than the sum total of its human parts (or as a visitor to an American church recently observed, "It's amazing what you people can accomplish without the Holy Spirit!"). If our house church ministries are to prosper and to grow long-term, then they must represent more than the sum of men's best efforts. We must learn to fast and to pray and to intercede, or we will fail.

In Chapter 2 (*"The New Engines of Change"*) of his book ***Mega Shift***, Jim Rutz identifies several "engines of change" in the worldwide move of God through house churches. These "engines of change" which God is using around the world to build His Kingdom include Intercessory Prayer (#1), On-Site Prayer (#7) and Fasting (#8). But all of these expressions of prayer and intercession which he describes (prayer journeys, prayer battles, covering-prayer stations, prayer walks), and which we need to practice in our house church ministries, have one thing in common. They all assume that individual Christians are spending significant time (more than 22 minutes per day!) alone in prayer, fasting and intercession with God. Do you really want to go into strategic level spiritual warfare and prayer battle for your neighborhood or community without already having spent significant time alone with God in prayer and fasting and personal repentance?

If we want our house churches to be vessels and channels for the River of God's Spirit as it begins to flow in our day; if we want our house churches to be places where the Kingdom Presence and Power of God dwell, and where all of the gifts of His Spirit operate with the result that believers are built up in their faith, unbelievers are redeemed, and the Kingdom of God grows in peace, righteousness and miraculous power, then we must become a people who devote themselves to prayer, fasting and intercession.

So, let me ask once again. Do you know how to pray? Better yet, are you praying audacious prayers for the coming move of God's Spirit in your city through house churches? Are you marking off the boundaries of your neighborhood with prayer and fasting? Do the late night or early morning hours find you alone with God in the prayerful pleading of audacious prayers, imploring the God of heaven to send the River of His Spirit to flow in fresh power to redeem, renew and transform your house church, your neighborhood and your community?

Fasting and Sacrificial Worship

Those close to our ministry know my heart for fasting and prayer. It represents a calling given to me 10 years ago (this month), to fast and pray for the coming move of God's Spirit in spiritual awakening and renewal. I have written and spoken on it frequently, yet after all this time the Holy Spirit still challenges me with new things which make me slap my forehead and say, "Of Course! Why didn't I see that before?" During a recent fasting season I found myself asking God the perennial "Why" question, "Lord, why are you calling me to do this? What's it all about?" The answer was swift in coming and powerful in its impact (at least, on me), "You are engaging in a sacrificial act of worship before me." I could write the rest of this newsletter (plus a couple more) on the ripple effects of that one simple word from God. If your paradigm of fasting up til now has been one of "fasting-to-get-something-from-God" (i.e., answers to prayer for difficult situations, etc.) then this word could turn your fasting experience upside down. Think about it for a moment. At a surface level we fast because we want something. We want God to hear and answer our prayers (FYI - that's a legitimate purpose for fasting!). But at a more profound level, fasting means to offer up to God a sacrificial act of worship. And there in lies a lesson.

Most of us (notice, I said "us") spend our Christian lives engaging in "cheap worship." The worship band fires up and we sing our favorite hymns or contemporary worship songs (personally, I've been blessed recently by Michael W. Smith's "Worship") and we talk about "wonderful worship" and experiencing God's Presence. But at the end of the day, it has been "cheap worship" because it hasn't cost us anything, except our time and the cost of over-priced CDs. Now, does God love the "sacrifice of praise"? Of course He does. But do you know what He loves more? Sacrificial praise, and sacrificial worship. Worship that costs us something, like genuine fasting offered up as a sacrificial act of worship. Occasionally we need to ask ourselves what type

of worship we are practicing and modeling, in our lives and in our house churches. Personally, I look forward with anticipation to the day when fasting and other forms of sacrificial worship are part of the prayer and worship DNA of our house churches.

When Something of God Touches Something of Man

I was recently challenged by a statement from Wolfgang Simson , that whenever something of God touches something of man (a man-made institution or structure) there is a conflict. I realize that this is probably “old stuff” for most of you, but it was an “aha!” moment for me. As I processed what I had heard and began to pray over it and apply it to revival and to house church it dawned on me that our day is not the first time that the new thing of God has touched the old thing of man, resulting in such conflict. In fact, the same thing happened in the ministry of Jesus. We can see this happening Matthew 21:14-15: *“And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple and He healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David,’ they became indignant.”*

Do you get indignant when God does a new and unexpected thing that challenges your old, accepted and comfortable thing? Well, you aren’t alone. It happened to the Jewish religious establishment of Jesus day. It was a new season of God’s gracious dealings in the lives of His chosen people. His eternal Son now lived among them and was doing “wonderful things” (the Greek word is *thaumasios* meaning “something marvelous to gaze at in wonder and amazement”) such as healing the sick, making the lame walk, the blind see and the dead rise. And the religious leadership saw the wonderful things that He had done, and yet their response wasn’t to rejoice that God was moving in their midst! Instead, they became indignant. Now our friend Mr. Webster defines “indignant” as “to consider something as unworthy or improper, to be displeased at, feeling or expressing anger or scorn.” In other words the religious leaders of Jesus day saw the wonderful, miraculous things Jesus was doing in their midst and their response was to regard it all as somehow “improper.” They were displeased with Jesus. They responded to Him with anger and scorn. You see the new thing of God had touched the old thing of man, and the old thing of man, the old religious system, was unable to accept it. God was moving in great power, but the old wineskin was unable to receive the new wine.

Well, after seeing this lesson in Scripture you would think that Christians today would know better than to respond the way the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day responded, with indignation and anger at the new thing God is doing in our midst, but some old responses die hard. When this coming new move of God unfolds in our midst we will see this conflict repeated as the new thing of God touches and challenges the old thing of man. We saw this happen during the Toronto Blessing season (not to mention during every great revival of the past 250 years) How are you responding to the new things God is doing through house churches and other new expressions of “*ekklesia*”? If you haven’t passed through the “indignant” stage yet, it probably just means that the new thing of God simply hasn’t yet touched one of your own “old things of man”. When that happens, how will you respond?