

## Why a Movement of Prayer?

Why a movement of prayer? Notice I did not ask why pray? The question is, why is it a hopeful sign when Christians pray together and pray together in public? Why is it a good thing to call the Christian community to assemble publicly from city to city – from Provincetown, Massachusetts - to Shabbona, Illinois - to Butte, Montana - to Hilo, Hawaii? Why summon God's people to assemble with humility of spirit, with earnestness, if not with tears? In other words, why is it proper to assemble at times in a spirit of lamentation rather than celebration, and all together beseech God to shed his grace on us in visible and transformational ways? Why a movement of prayer?

One answer comes straight from the Bible:

*“Thus says the Lord of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going.’ Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord.” -Zechariah 8:20-22*

At Heartbeat International, we take heart when we see people being prompted by the Spirit of God and we have a profound desire to see him glorified in life.

40 Days for Life is one way this is happening today. It started as a simple call to prayer by a handful of people in Texas. God was pleased to make it known abroad, so that today hundreds of cities are calling Christians together to pray for the triumph of the Gospel of life over the evil and tragedy of abortion. David Bereit and Shawn Carney, of 40 Days for Life, are simply helping us cry out to each other, calling out to each other: “Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going.”

So, why a movement of prayer? About twenty years ago John Piper and I co-wrote a pamphlet together on this same question. John's one word answer was “War.” My one word answer was “Victory.” John's perspective is gloriously global, not provincial. But global also includes your neighborhood and mine. John graciously gave me permission to update our pamphlet (now answer 1 and 2 below). I have added answer 3. It is a brief explanation as to why I think a movement of prayer for the end of abortion is particularly in keeping with Scripture and even necessary if all our other petitions are to be heard.

John Ensor, Heartbeat International

## Why a Movement of Prayer?

### Answer: War

John Piper, Pastor of Preaching & Vision, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN

Tuesdays and Thursdays I get up, put on my running shoes, and jog to the Metrodome five blocks from our house. I have Navigator memory cards in my right hand and a tract called “Comfort from the Bible” in my left pocket. My aim is to pray for revival and to tell someone about the greatness of Christ.

As I jog around the Metrodome on the red brick walkways, I pray for the city -- “that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left” (Jonah 4:11).

“Oh Lord, God, by your great power you made the heavens and the earth! Nothing is too hard for you. Have mercy, O God, upon this city! Breathe your Spirit across these blue and beige and burgundy sky-scrappers! Let there be an awesome stirring among the 1000 churches that stand within 30 minutes of this Dome.”

And I pray for prayer—a movement of prayer. Some of us aim to work for an annual concert of prayer for the next seven years- until the Metrodome will not suffice.

And O, that the Lord would deepen the channels between our churches and the swelling tide of global prayer! Hundreds of our people -- from San Diego to Boston -- are already riding the waves. I pray we will not be passed over by the “Spirit of supplication” that God is pouring out on the world!

A movement of prayer will not begin in a bouncy atmosphere of positive thinking. It will begin in a broken atmosphere of profound, God-centered hope. But there will be no God-centered brokenness and hope until we feel a desperate need of divine power and taste the promised triumph of Christ.

The crying need of the hour is to put the churches on a war-time footing. The need of the hour is a global war-time mentality. I say “war-time” because life is war (1 Tm. 6:12; Eph. 6:10ff.; 2 Cor. 10:3-5). I say “global” because “the field is the world”! (Mt. 13:38). And because thousands of unreached peoples are scattered around the globe.

“Peoples,” not just people. The command to the church is not to win every person before the Lord comes, but to win some from every people. This is the great unfinished task!

“To him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (Gen. 49:10). “Let the peoples praise thee, O God, let all the peoples praise thee” (Ps. 67:3). “Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples” (Is. 55:4).

How will we come to feel the extraordinary Satanic devastation being wreaked among the remaining unreached peoples of the world? How can our people come to see the irrationality of a bouncy, peacetime, Disneyland mentality when the days are evil (Eph. 5:16), and the god of this world is blinding billions (2 Cor. 4:4), and Satan is filled with rage because his time is short (Rev. 12:12), and the stakes are infinitely higher than any conceivable nuclear World War III (Lk. 12:4-5)?

How can a sense of urgency and vigilance and passion and zeal become part of our church ethos? How can the sweaty, bruised, thrilling courage of war-time camaraderie become as deeply ingrained in our churches mindset as the dominant image of a warm and comfortable family?

In the time that it has taken me to write this article, I have received a call from a man in our church weeping because his wife is divorcing him, taking the children and most of his income. I have met him and prayed. I have called her and made an appointment. Now I am back trying to write this article. Just hours later a woman called to say that her father was dying. I left the article again and drove thirty minutes to his bedside and prayed. Two hours later he died.

Again I am back at the keyboard trying to grasp the need of the world. Trying to feel the Satanic devastation not only of my own sin-sick church and city, but also of the cities where there aren't 1,000 churches!

Divorce, death, disagreement. Many say this is the real battle. But I don't believe it. O yes, it's real. And, yes, it's a battle. But it's not the real battle. Is the field hospital the real reason for having the troops on the field? What's the real reason sergeants are in the trenches? To settle soldiers' disputes? And chaplains come along just to bury the dead? Or is there a war to be won?

There is. And the victory is near. But it will not be easy or cheap. The awesome mission is clear: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mt. 24:14). Christ has his elect from every people, tribe, tongue and nation (Rev. 5:9). They are held captive by the Enemy (2 Tim. 2:26). And so the mine fields must be crossed; the barbed wire cut; the snipers evaded; and the gospel antidote for Satan's mind-altering drugs administered against immense opposition (Lk. 21:12-19).

So again I ask, how will we ever come to think this way? How will we be brought to war-time readiness and put on military alert? How can the massive mentality of American prosperity, and peace with the world, and family comfort, ever be overcome?

We believe the answer, beneath and behind the renewed empowering of the Word of God, is a wide movement of persevering, believing, expectant prayer. Because it is prayer that opens our heart to the surpassing worth of God (Eph. 1:17f.), and makes us feel the height and depth of Christ's love (Eph. 3:18). It is prayer that makes us love lost people (1 Thes. 3:12) and have a passion for the righteousness (Phil. 1:11). It's prayer that opens doors for the gospel (Col. 4:3) and brings in the recruits (Mt. 9:38), and makes them bold (Eph. 6:19). It's prayer that protects from the Enemy (Rm. 15:31; Mt 6:13) and makes the Word of God run and be glorified (2 Thes. 3:1).

And only when the people of God "cry to him day and night" will God come forth with power and vindicate his cause in the world (Lk. 18:7f.) and bring in the Kingdom (Mt 6:10). In this great hope we pray for a movement of prayer.

A hundred years ago, A.T. Pierson said, "Every new Pentecost has had its preparatory period of supplication...God had compelled his saints to seek Him at he throne of grace, so that every new advance might be so plainly due to His power that even the unbeliever might be constrained to confess: "Surely this the finger of God!" (The New Acts of Apostles, New York: 1894, pp. 352ff.).

## Why a Movement of Prayer?

**Answer: VICTORY!**

John Ensor, Vice President, Heartbeat International

At the start, Christ's universal church fit into a single room. There, they "all joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14). Why were they praying? Because Christ rose from the dead in victory and said that this is just the opening salvo. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Why did they need this power? They had no buildings, no organization, no money, no welcome mats. Jewish leaders, like Saul, would soon be hunting them down. Homes would be confiscated. Rome would soon put them to the torch. But I've gotten ahead of myself. They prayed for power to be faithful witnesses. And the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, came upon them as flaming tongues of fire and emboldened their hearts.

The result? They went forth as faithful witnesses of the Gospel starting in Jerusalem and expanding past Judea, past Samaria, to the edges of their known world. The power received was not such that they could brush away obstacles, but power in the form of courage, sacrifice, long-suffering, endurance, and a passion to see the triumph of the Gospel in the transformation of people and cultures.

In various measures, and in spite of long seasons of decay, Christians in successive generations have prayed for similar power. The number of souls redeemed is incalculable. How their changed lives transformed culture is more evident.

The status and dignity of women was elevated. The sanctity of human life affirmed. Abortion and infanticide suppressed. Care for the sick and elderly led to the development of hospitals. Love for widows and orphans prompted Christians to start tens of thousands of charity ministries to serve at the poor and the weak. We proclaimed, "God created the heavens and the earth." And we took the mandate to subdue the earth seriously. As a result, astronomy conquered astrology. Witch doctors gave way to pharmacology and surgery. Sciences flourished. Universities were created. Though it took centuries, we abolished slavery and developed democracy. Generations before us have proven that when we love God we change the neighborhood!

Why a movement of prayer? John Piper answers, because there is a war to be waged. I add, because there is a victory to be won.

The 19th century witnessed several movements of prayer across Europe and America. Like any movement of prayer we shall experience today, it grew out of anguish and desperation. It was, according to Thomas Paine, "the Age of Reason." God may exist, but he doesn't interfere. Clergy began to preach that all are saved. Contrary to their expectation, people left their churches and denominations. Marx and Lennon cut to the chase—drawing up plans to wean the masses off the "opium" of religion.

In the 1850's Charles Darwin was working on, "On the Origin of the Species by means of Natural Selection Or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life." Darwin's "favored races" suppositions, that some races had evolved farther than others, provided the scientific cover needed to defend racism and to call for eugenics programs.

In 1857, New York was in the midst of a stock market crash that like today, led to massive bank failure. Businesses closed and tens of thousands were unemployed just in the city. In the swirl of these religious, political, and economic forces, Jeremiah Lanphier, a businessman, appointed as a city missionary in Manhattan, distributed a handbill inviting people to a weekly noon-time prayer meeting. At 12:30 Jeremiah Lanphier sat alone in prayer. Then one man walked in, then another, and another, till six gathered. A week later 40 attended. A week after that, they began to meet daily at noon. By the spring of 1858, it was estimated that 10,000 laypeople were in a concert of daily prayer in New York City. Then it went national.

Within two years, one million converts to the Christian faith entered American churches, both Catholic and Protestant. The following 60 years, 1858-1914, this generation of believers achieved tremendous missionary expansion and social reform.

Church historian, Kenneth Latorette, titles this period of time "The Exceeding Greatness of the Power: Where Sin Abounded and Grace Much More Abounded." Christianity was, he writes:

...the stimulus and the sustaining impulse in the successful struggle for prison reform, better care of the insane, legislation for shortened hours of labor, safeguards for health of laborers, protection of women and children in mines and industry, and obtaining improved housing. Moved by their faith, Christians devised new methods and programs for educating the masses. They brought into being hundreds of new colleges and universities and hospitals.

There is a proper victory to be hoped for and expected when we pray. Paul encouraged us to expect this when he said "Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession..." (2 Cor 2:14). I do not know what progress we will see on our watch. I do know that suffering and sacrifice attend the victories of the Gospel; it is a cross-bearing work. Therefore, "Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord and to seek the Lord of hosts; I myself am going" (Zechariah 8:21).

## Why a Movement of Prayer for the Abolition of Abortion?

### Answer: Blood-guilt

John Ensor, Vice President, Heartbeat International

Why do I believe a movement of prayer for the abolition of abortion is particularly appropriate? Ought we not keep things more general? Ought we not pray the big picture and for its multiple parts: for peace in our land, for spiritual renewal, unity among the churches, for missions, for our leaders, etc.?

Certainly. But I cannot get away from Deuteronomy 21:1-7. Here God gives specific and detailed instructions to his people on how they are to respond to one particular sin: the shedding of innocent blood. Not all ills are equal. This one, the shedding of innocent blood, God says, demands a specific corporate response. We read:

<sup>1</sup> If in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess someone is found slain, lying in the open country, and it is not known who killed him, <sup>2</sup> then your elders and your judges shall come out, and they shall measure the distance to the surrounding cities. <sup>3</sup> And the elders of the city that is nearest to the slain man shall take a heifer that has never been worked and that has not pulled in a yoke. <sup>4</sup> And the elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with running water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley. <sup>5</sup> Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come forward, for the Lord your God has chosen them to minister to him and to bless in the name of the Lord, and by their word every dispute and every assault shall be settled. <sup>6</sup> And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley, <sup>7</sup> and they shall testify, "Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it shed. <sup>8</sup> Accept atonement, O Lord, for your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, and do not set the guilt of innocent blood in the midst of your people Israel, <sup>9</sup> so that their blood guilt be atoned for." So you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from your midst, when you do what is right in the sight of the Lord.

Four observations lead me to support a movement of prayer specifically for the end of abortion.

1. Spiritual leaders are required to help people grasp the preeminent evil of the shedding innocent blood (v. 2). Our default response to the killing of some unnamed, unknown person is to shrug it off. It's terrible, yes, but it doesn't affect me. It falls to our spiritual leaders to show us that this is false!

We are affected. How we respond to the murder of innocents affects us even further. We might say, "We didn't have anything to do with it." Nonetheless, we are all still stained with blood-guilt (v. 8-9). Why is that? Why is that important? What must be done to purge it?

Spiritual leaders need to help here. They were instructed to lead the people through a time-consuming, expensive ritual (v. 3-6) designed to re-sensitize their hearts to the preciousness of human life, lest they become de-sensitized. This is the duty of clergy.

After 50 million abortions, there is not a town or even a family among us that has not been stained with blood-guilt. To ignore this is an affront to God. To seek his favor, while ignoring this, adds to the offense. When the avoidance becomes intentional, then even our praises and offerings are foul. We cannot rub God like a lucky charm. It reduces prayer to bartering and God does not barter.

When you spread out your hands,  
I will hide my eyes from you;  
even though you make many prayers,  
I will not listen;  
your hands are full of blood. (Isaiah 1:15)

2. God's people are specifically called out to pray, to pray together, to pray publicly and to pray with lamentation concerning the shedding innocent blood (v. 7-8). 40 Days for Life is an expression of this very thing today. If there is a boot camp for prolife work, let it be 40 days of prayer and fasting outside our nation's abortion businesses.

3. God's people are called to suffer financial or economic loss over this single issue, like no other. We cannot naturally grieve the murder of people unknown to us. The same is true of the people lost by abortion. So God gives us a substitute way to feel the pain he feels. In verse 4, the people are instructed to set aside a piece of prime commercial property, and sacrifice a prime piece of livestock.

Each day in the US, those who traffic in shedding innocent blood will be paid to kill 3,000 preborn babies. How will it affect you? In no perceptible way whatsoever, unless you make yourself feel the loss. In the last 40 years, in response to legalized child-killing, over 2,300 buildings have been taken out of commercial circulation and turned into pregnancy help centers and maternity homes. They have been paid for by Christians who have determined not to make peace with death. It is entirely appropriate that we do this.

Woe to us if we do not. How else will we avoid being seduced into making peace with death? Abortion is wrapped in euphemisms. It is carried out behind closed doors. It is locked away in shame and never spoken of afterwards. It is as common as rain. How are we to escape the pressure to accept this as the way things are except by practical and specific works that signal that, on this matter, we fear God more than we crave public approval.

4. Assembled prayer to acknowledge blood-guilt was the setting used to remind all of our two-fold obligation toward one another. We are not to murder our fellow man (no matter his or her size), nor passively accept it by others. Gathered together, the elders

were instructed to testify, “Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it shed” (v. 7). So today, especially since child-killing is legal, we must publicly and repeatedly re-magnetize the needle of moral compass. Or we will follow the legal, easy, broad way which leads to death.

In about 53% of all abortions, women self-identified as Catholics or Protestants. We have the power to collapse the abortion business at any time. If abortions were instead church burnings, we would initiate a movement of prayer to end the burning of churches. Our pastors would see to it that they were well attended. It would be a priority.

Our priority is just what Jesus addresses in the parable (Lk 10:30-37) that mirrors Deuteronomy 21. Presented with a man beaten and left to die, what does love require? What does love empower? The Priest and the Levite, like so many spiritual leaders today, see what is happening. They may not like it. They may even say, “I am against that.” But they can just as well live with it. They have higher priorities than the death of the unknown innocent.

No, the question isn't: Are you intellectually pro-life or against abortion? The question is: What demands on your time, resources and reputation, if any, are you giving to stop it.

Neighborly love makes a preeminent demand on us when faced with the death of the innocent. In Psalms 82:4 this demand says, “Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.” In Deuteronomy, we are called out to pray and testify with a full-throated affirmation that the shedding of innocent blood will not go unchallenged among us. Jesus said it this way: “Go and do likewise.”

I am going to pray for the wisdom and courage to do just this. I am praying that you will join me.

For more information:

Heartbeat International  
665 E. Dublin-Granville Road  
Suite 440  
Columbus OH 43229

888-550-7577 - Toll Free  
614-885-8746 - Fax

Website: [www.HeartbeatInternational.org](http://www.HeartbeatInternational.org)