

Half-Night of Prayer with Reflections on Nehemiah

January 24-31, 2010

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” Acts 4:31

Intro: Prayer is the heartbeat of the church. When God’s people pray, God’s power is released in the world. When God’s people neglect prayer, they become weak and lifeless. And though personal prayer is a must, God also calls his people to pray in community. Divine power is unleashed when we unite to pray together.

Purpose: Prayer is absolutely essential to the Life Group. Yet so often prayer can be crowded out of our meetings, or just a mere formality to close or open our meetings. During Half-nights of Prayer, we will make prayer the main agenda. We will focus more on God than on ourselves.

Prayer is tough work. But Christians need to learn how to struggle with God in prayer against the enemy. This will be unfamiliar territory for new believers (and sometimes “old” believers!). But the best way to learn how to pray, is to pray. When we pray together we can expect to meet God and to feel his presence among us.

Scheduling: HNP would normally take place from 7pm till midnight on the same day your Life Group usually meets. It will start with a simple meal together that everyone contributes to, and then follows with the template below. Circumstances may dictate that you adapt the time and schedule to your group, or change your meeting to the weekend to allow the late finish.

Our Unique Context: God has been building a hunger for prayer over the last few weeks at South Abbotsford Church. The Spirit of God has been confirming this in many ways. These include David Manuel’s challenge for prayer warriors; Dan Nicholson’s messages in January on Nehemiah; the financial “crisis” that has spawned a corporate waiting on God for direction, and the momentum to corporate monthly prayer times that will next meet next on Sunday night January 24th.

As a Life Group Lead Team we sensed that a hunger for prayer as a community should be rooted in our Life Groups as a complement to our personal and corporate prayer foci. **We felt this was the best time to introduce HNP and to encourage your first HNP to begin in the week of January 24-31.** The template below has been crafted for our current context.

A SUGGESTED HNP SCHEDULE

1. Supper (7:00-7:45)
2. The Lord’s Supper (7:45-8:15) See separate sheet for guidelines if this is a new concept for your group. Keep in mind that Scriptures never sets a prescribed

pattern of liturgy for communion; it is simply designed as a time to remember together Jesus great sacrifice given for us!

3. Worship: (8:15-8:30) Worship is prayer! It is enjoying the presence of God together. It is an unselfish act, ministering to God and bringing him pleasure in our praise! Optional approaches include:
 - Assign someone to play guitar/piano and lead in singing
 - Assign someone to carefully select a CD or IPOD of select songs that you can sing along to, or worship along with in spirit silently
 - Carefully select psalms or Scripture passages to read together in worship (without comments)
 - Worship conversationally in prayer around themes. For example the facilitator could speak out themes that guide the worship.
4. Scripture Meditation: (8:30-9:00) Have someone to read a passage and then silently meditate for a few minutes, listening to what the Spirit is saying to the group in this text. This should be 30 minutes max- designed simply to prepare our hearts and minds to pray. Possible texts: Nehemiah 1:1-11, Luke 18:1-8, Acts 4:23-31, Acts 5:5-12, Philippians 4:4-7, Col 1:9-12 or James 5:13-16.
5. Pray for each other: (9:00-10:30)
 - Allow each LG member to share briefly how she/he needs God to intervene in their lives. The requests can be spiritual, physical, emotional or interpersonal. The degree to which you have developed trust and transparency in your group will determine how deep and honest will be your sharing and praying for each other. Keep the sharing brief. Then place each person/couple in the center of the room, lay hands on them and have several people pray for them. If you notice the same few people praying all the time, ask others to prepare to pray for the individual before she shares her requests. This can be a powerful time of ministry to each other, that can include repentance, tears, laughter and an outpouring of Spirit-led love for each other.
6. Worship: (10:30-10:45) Return to a time of worship together.

NOTE: Take a break whenever needed. Be sure to have coffee or some form of CAFFIENE around to keep people alert. (Chocolate is always a good idea in our Life Group)

7. Pray for South Abbotsford Church: (10:45-11:30)
 - The leader can introduce themes that are then prayed for conversationally in the group. Conversational prayer means people pray short spontaneous prayers around ONE IDEA much like a normal conversation. This often spawns other prayers around the room and it just continues like a conversation. (Avoid long comprehensive prayers around the circle).
 - When one theme is exhausted- introduce the next. They could include:

- a) Themes that came out of the corporate prayer time Jan. 24th
- b) Repentance (identify with the sins of our church family)
- c) Dissatisfaction with the status quo- courage for change
- d) Pleading for renewal
- e) The pastors and church council
- f) Worship services-
- g) Life Groups
- h) Outreach to our city

8. Visionary Prayer: (11:30-12:00)

- Close the evening by praying together about your vision for not only your Life Group, but South Abbotsford as a whole.
- As you consider how to respond in prayer to the vision- consider how Dan completed his message on Nehemiah 3:1-32 on Sunday, Jan. 24th. You may want to read to the LG the following conclusion as a springboard into prayer.

So I am asking you to take a block from out of this rubble and take it home...pray over it...ask God what part of the wall at South Abbotsford you have a natural affinity for, an internal connection with. Ask God to show you a need He wants you to be a part in filling.

Lewis Smedes says:

Yes, somewhere people still make and keep promises. They choose not to quit when the going gets rough because they promised once to see it through. They stick to lost causes. They hold on to a love grown cold. They stay with people who have become pains in the neck. They still dare to make promises and care enough to keep the promises they make. I want to say to you that if you have a ship you will not desert, if you have a people you will not forsake, if you have causes you will not abandon, then you are like God!

What a marvelous thing a promise is! When a person makes a promise, they reach out into an unpredictable future and makes one thing predictable: they will be there even when being there costs her more than they want to pay. When a person makes a promise, they stretches themselves out into circumstances that no one can control and controls at least one thing: they will be there no matter what the circumstances turn out to be. With one simple word of promise, a person creates an island of certainty in a sea of uncertainty.

THE POWER OF PROMISES---Smedes

I'm asking you to make a promise to rebuild with us.

- Close the evening by praying for the vision of the Life Group. Not only do we want to see God transform us individually and as a church body, we seek him to transform our Life Groups. Again you could pray along the following themes:
 - a) What do we long to see God do in our LG meetings?

- b) How many more people could we see added to our group?
- c) Pray for the names of our contacts/friends who do not know Christ personally.
- d) Pray for the development of leadership in the group.

TIPS for being a good facilitator:

- POSTURE: Allow for lots of changing of positions as you pray; standing, sitting, kneeling. People should feel free to express their prayer and praise in many ways. Break into small groups if the LG is large, especially on #8 + 9.
- FEAR OF PRAYING: Some in your LG may be paranoid to pray out loud in a group. You may want to get the elephant out of the room at the very start by just talking openly about that. Your goal should be to graciously challenge everyone towards learning to pray in the group setting, while still creating a safe environment for them to move in that direction as they are enabled.
- Therefore never pray in a circle (which can embarrass them), and mix up the approach to prayer with:
 - a) Some group conversational prayer (described above).
 - b) Some smaller group prayer of 2-4 people or by gender (#5,8,9)
 - c) Silent prayers- where all can participate simultaneously in silence
 - d) “Korean” style prayer where everyone prays audibly together
- Don't do everything yourself!!! The more people involved in making this a great first HNP- the greater ownership and growth will occur among your members!