

27. Prayer and Growth

Contributed by LG Parkhurst Jr
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They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. -- Acts 2:42

When the Schaeffer family began L'Abri, they were perfectly willing for it to always be a small work, of only two or three people at a time asking questions, if that were God's will for them. They did not succumb to the world's notion that success means material growth, larger buildings, or more people in one's organization. Nor did they pray for that type of success. They prayed only for the people of the Lord's choice to come to their home and for His provisions to meet their needs. They did not pray for large or small numbers, but only for God to send any needy people that He had prepared them to serve in their House of Prayer. They did not specify the type of people for God to send, but they did want to do the work of evangelism. Because they wanted to lead sinners to the Savior, God often sent them people whose life style and thoughts were radically opposed to their own; people who were often desperate because they had come to see the futility of their beliefs and ways of living. Therefore, to demonstrate His ability to answer prayer and because His compassion for these types of people is so great, God very quickly sent them as many as 75 people at a time to eat and ask questions in their small living room in Chalet les Mélèzes.

The sudden and unexpected growth in numbers at L'Abri meant the Schaeffers immediately needed to begin praying for more space, food, and beds for all those coming to their home. And as the work grew, they needed to pray for more and different material things; for books, tapes, and tape recorders for those who came to study. Some who had been saved before they founded L'Abri helped when they could, but they needed to immediately begin praying for full time Helpers, because those with needs far surpassed their physical capabilities and strength.

God had prepared Fran, Edith, and the girls for a larger work when they began L'Abri, but because the needs were so great the larger work meant they needed to pray harder and longer and eventually remain constantly in prayer. For the Schaeffers, prayer became a state of mind and not just words. Prayer became a constant concern of their loving heart for others. Just as a mother with a critically ill child will think about her child day and night until her concern becomes a permanent state of mind and the child is saved or dies, prayer for the Schaeffers became a state of constant intercession. God led the Schaeffers into a prayerful state of mind for the many who came with desperate spiritual needs, and God never lifted that prayerful state, partly because they love God so much and partly because the needs of others are so great. At times the needs of those who came were so complex and beyond them, that the words of Paul took on greater meaning as they prayed, wept, and sighed before the Lord: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Romans 8:26).

Prayer for God to bless our labors does involve our willingness to always be a "small work," if that is God's will for us. Size is no measure of success, but we are not to use our willingness to be small as an excuse to be lazy. The Schaeffers had determined to work hard for God, even if the fruit would always be small. Attracting large crowds is no measure of our faithfulness to God, many large groups of people have been gathered together for less than noble causes: the large adoring crowds Adolph Hitler attracted before and after he began World War II are a case in point. Only a warped view of success would consider Hitler successful. Success is not measured by size, but by faithfulness. Are we doing all that we know God wants us to do at this present moment? That is faithfulness. Are we praying for God to do His work in us, and use us, any way that He wants to? That is faithfulness. God will bring about the growth that He wants to achieve through us. The fruit of our labors for Him depends on Him.

To discover some of the key elements in faithfulness and the fruit God wants us to bear, we need to see what the Book of Acts reveals regarding the results of the Apostles' faithful preaching and teaching: those who were saved devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. L'Abri was faithful in modeling the practice of the New Testament Church, though L'Abri is a fellowship and not a church or congregation. Those in L'Abri devoted themselves "to the apostles' teaching;" that is, they devoted themselves to the Scriptures--to hearing and obeying the Word of God. Devotion means serving or obeying with a heartfelt concern, a loyal and deep affection. "Doing our devotions" has come to mean a brief moment of prayer and Bible reading each day, but some may try to substitute that for serving the Lord with devotion and deep affection. No matter how small L'Abri remained or how large it grew, devotion to the apostles' teaching would be used by God as a measure of its success, and that is how God measures any work for Him.

God expects His people to be concerned about fellowship, and the L'Abri schedule gave plenty of time for fellowship

around the "breaking of bread" (mealtimes), as well as while working in gardens or kitchens. Many who came to L'Abri had never experienced Christian fellowship before. They had never experienced the love and care of a family until they became a part of the L'Abri family. An essential part of the Schaeffers meeting the needs of those who came meant being a family for them, and helping them find or begin a fellowship or "family" when they left L'Abri. It meant remembering those in prayer who had come and gone from L'Abri.

The New Testament Church devoted herself to prayer, to spending real time with God: people together praying to and praising God. Prayer has always been primary in L'Abri, but not the only thing those in L'Abri do. Rather, they immerse everything they do in prayer, and God empowers their work in answer to prayer.

All of these elements of the New Testament Church will supernaturally flow from people who have come to love the Lord and each other because they truly appreciate God and each other. They will be of one mind and heart, not because order has been imposed from without or threats are made by the groups leaders, but because the Holy Spirit has given them unity through a common faith. Their unity of faith and love makes their prayers more effective and they can accomplish greater things for God.

L'Abri grew as God gave the growth, but L'Abri's growth is not measure of its faithfulness to God. However, we can praise God that by His grace those in L'Abri are faithful to God and the Scriptures, to the great evangelical commission, to the fellowship of true believers, and to meeting the needs of others materially and spiritually by prayer. Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for making L'Abri grow. Thank you for sending people who need help. Thank you for the gift of workers, and for their gift of strength and character to help those you send to L'Abri. Give me your perspective on life and success as I read your Word. Keep me from being misled by the worldly-minded and the world's ideas of success. Keep me faithful to you and your Son always. Amen.

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