

## 1857 Prayer Revival in America

A quiet, zealous forty-six-year-old businessman in New York was appointed on July 1, 1857, as a missionary in downtown New York at the Dutch Church. Jeremiah Lamphier had been converted in 1842 in Broadway Tabernacle, Finney's church that was built in 1836.

Lamphier felt led by God to start a noon-time weekly prayer meeting in which business people could meet for prayer. Anyone could attend, for a few minutes or for the entire hour. Prayers were to be comparatively brief. Lamphier's group met on the third floor of the old North Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton Street in New York. Lamphier printed some handbills announcing the prayer meetings with the title, "How Often Should I Pray?" He left these in some offices and warehouses. He also put one on the door of the church on the street side.

The first day, September 23, 1857, Lamphier prayed alone for half an hour. But by the end of the hour, six men from at least four denominational backgrounds joined him. The next Wednesday there were twenty. On October 7 there were nearly forty. The meeting was so blessed that they decided to meet daily. One week later there were over one hundred present, including many unsaved who were convicted by the Holy Spirit of their sin.

### MOMENTUM GROWS

Within one month pastors who had attended the noon prayer meetings in Fulton Street started morning prayer meetings in their own churches. Soon the places where the meetings were held were overcrowded. Men and women, young and old of all denominations met and prayed together without distinctions. The meetings abounded with love for Christ, love for fellow Christians, love for prayer, and love of witnessing. Those in attendance felt an awesome sense of God's presence. They prayed for specific people, expected answers, and obtained answers.

Newspapers began to report on the meetings and the unusual spirit of prayer that was evident. Within three months similar meetings had sprung up across America. Thousands began praying in these services and in their own homes. In New York, gospel tracts were distributed to those in attendance, with instructions that they pray over the tracts and then give them to someone God brought to mind.

The three rooms at the Fulton Street Church were filled beyond capacity, and hundreds had to go to other places. By early February a nearby Methodist Church was opened, and it immediately overflowed. The balconies were filled with ladies. By March 19 a theater opened for prayer, and half an hour before it was time to begin, people were turned away. Hundreds stood outside in the streets because they could not get inside. By the end of March over six thousand people met daily in prayer gatherings in New York City. Many churches added evening services for prayer. Soon there were 150 united prayer meetings each day across Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Meetings began in February in Philadelphia. Soon Jayne's Hall was overfilled, and meetings were held at noon each day in public halls, concert halls, fire stations, houses, and tents. The whole city exuded a spirit of prayer.

### PRAYER MEETING FERVOUR

Almost simultaneously noon prayer meetings sprang up all across America in Boston, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, Vicksburg, Memphis, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago, and in a multitude of other cities, towns, and in rural areas. By the end of the fourth month, prayer fervor burned intensely across the nation. It was an awesome but glorious demonstration of the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit and the eager obedience of God's people.

America had entered a new period of faith and prayer. Educated and uneducated, rich and poor,

business leaders and common workmen—all prayed, believed, and received answers to prayer. Even the president of the United States, Franklin Pierce, attended many of the noon prayer meetings. This was not a revival of powerful preaching. This was a movement of earnest, powerful, prevailing prayer.

All the people wanted was a place to pray. Sinners would come and ask for prayer. Someone would individually pray for them, and in minutes the newly saved person was rejoicing in Christ. Prayers would be asked by name for unconverted friends and loved ones from all over the country. In a day or two, testimonies would be given of how the prayers had already been answered. In some towns, nearly the entire population became saved.

### A SPIRIT OF PRAYER

Six months previous to Lamphier's prayer meeting boom, few would have gathered for a prayer service. But now a spirit of prayer occupied the land, as though the church had suddenly discovered its real power. The majority of the churches in most denominations experienced a new dimension of prayer. The Presbyterian Magazine reported that as of May there had been fifty thousand converts of the revival. In February, a New York Methodist magazine reported a total of eight thousand conversions in Methodist meetings in one week. The Louisville daily paper reported seventeen thousand Baptist conversions in three weeks during the month of March. And according to a June statement, the conversion figures stood at 96,216—and still counting. All but two of the youth in one high school were saved. A similar event took place in Toledo, Ohio. These are just brief examples of what was happening constantly all across the nation.

The accounts of the prayer meetings during those revival years describe how the people would quietly gather at the place of prayer promptly at the appointed hour. Whoever was leader for the meeting—a layman or a minister—arose and announced a hymn. They sang one or two verses with great joy, the leader prayed briefly, and then turned the service over to the members. Any person was free to speak or pray for no longer than five minutes. If the person took more than that time, a small bell was rung and it was someone else's turn.

Requests for prayer, often coming from distant places, were spoken or read. Often sinners arose and requested prayer for themselves. Members gave testimonies of answers to prayer, and the people praised the Lord. Brief exhortations on prayer or revival were allowed but limited to five minutes. Many testified of revival progress in various locations. Promptly at the closing of the hour the leader rose and pronounced the benediction, and the people quietly left the building. Occasionally someone might stay behind to pray with a spiritual seeker.

### THE INVISIBLE CLOUD OF GOD'S PRESENCE

A canopy of holy and awesome revival influence—in reality the presence of the Holy Spirit—seemed to hang like an invisible cloud over many parts of the United States, especially over the eastern seaboard. At times this cloud of God's presence even seemed to extend out to sea. Those on ships approaching the east coast at times felt a solemn, holy influence, even one hundred miles away, without even knowing what was happening in America.

Revival began aboard one ship before it reached the coast. People on board began to feel the presence of God and a sense of their own sinfulness. The Holy Spirit convicted them, and they began to pray. As the ship neared the harbor, the captain signaled, "Send a minister." Another small commercial ship arrived in port with the captain, and every member of the crew converted in the last 150 miles. Ship after ship arrived with the same story: both passengers and crew were suddenly convicted of sin and turned to Christ before they reached the American coast.

The battleship North Carolina was anchored in New York harbor as a naval receiving ship. More than a thousand young men were on board. Four Christians agreed to meet together for prayer and knelt on the lower deck. The Spirit of God so filled their hearts with joy that they broke into song. Ungodly

men on the top deck heard the singing, looked down, and saw the boys kneeling. They began running down the stairs, mocking and jeering. The convicting power of the Holy Spirit so gripped them that by the time they reached the bottom deck they fell on their knees and began crying for mercy.

Strong men who were deep in sin were broken down by the Spirit's power and knelt humbly in penitence and faith. Night after night the sailors prayed, and hundreds were converted on the ship. Ministers were sent for, and they came out from shore to help in the gracious work of the Spirit. The battleship became a mighty center of revival. Converts of the movement, completing their periods of training, were sent out to other navy ships. Wherever they went revival fires were kindled in other naval vessels.

#### IN HOMES, SHOPS, FIELDS, AND CHURCHES

Reports came in of hundreds being converted in prayer meetings, private homes, workshops, and fields. Often the doors of businesses held signs reading, "Closed, will reopen at the close of the prayer meeting." Five prayer meetings took place daily in Washington, D.C. Five thousand or so attended daily services in the Academy of Music Hall.

In Philadelphia, Jayne's Hall removed partitions and added space for six thousand people to attend daily meetings. For months multitudes of churches opened every evening for prayer, and some of them had from three to five services of prayer each day. All were filled. The services consisted of simple prayer, confession, exhortation, and singing. But it was "so earnest, so solemn, the silence. ..so awful, the singing. ..so over-powering" that the meetings were unforgettable. A canvas tent was erected for outdoor meetings, and it immediately filled with people. In four months' time, a total of 150,000 people attended the ministry in the tent, with many conversions. Philadelphia churches reported five thousand converts.

The Presbyterians in Northern Ireland heard of the awakening in Philadelphia and sent fraternal delegates. These delegates returned to their homeland and reported what they had seen, and the revival broke out in Ireland, spreading across the British Isles.

#### REVIVAL IN THE ARMY

Because of the bitter tensions of the Civil War and the slavery issue, for a time it seemed that the southern states would not be as powerfully influenced by the revival as the northern ones had been. Others dispute this assumption. An unusually powerful revival broke out among the southern troops stationed around Richmond, Virginia, in the autumn of 1861. It began in the hospitals among the wounded men and then spread into the camps as these men returned to active duty. Prayer meetings were organized and hundreds converted. The movement spread rapidly throughout the army, reaching the troops of Tennessee and Arkansas.

Revival was encouraged by Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, who were well known as devout Christians. By the mid-summer of 1863 the revival had spread through all the Confederate armies, and thousands of men had been converted. Chaplains and lay missionaries went out among the troops, preaching and distributing tracts and dealing personally with hungry hearts. By the end of the war at least 150,000 soldiers had been converted, and more than a third of all of the southern troops had become praying men. The revival among the southern troops was primarily a revival of prayer, as the earlier revival in the North had been. While the best estimates are that 6.6 percent of the entire population of the United States was converted during the revival, the percentage among the southern troops was 21 percent. The North really did not win the war—prayer and a mighty revival did!