

Prayer Band Work

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Study by W. D. Frazee—October 27,

"Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" Matthew 13:31,32.

The kingdom is like a mustard seed. It is the least of all seeds. What does least mean? Small. But when it is grown it is the greatest among herbs.

Jesus does not say the kingdom is like a grain of sand. What is the difference between a grain of sand and a mustard seed? A grain of sand will always be small. The world is inclined to emphasize large things, but sometimes we come to feel that everything that is good is supposed to be small. But Jesus is talking about something that is small in its beginning, but doesn't stay that way.

There is no particular value to a thing being small. God would have rejoiced to have made Israel a strong, prosperous nation what would have eventually filled the whole earth. So let us not confuse smallness and Godliness. On the other hand, let us remember that when God does a work in this world He often starts with something small. But Jesus is commenting that it doesn't remain that way. It grows.

The way it grows is the thing we want to study. The way the mustard seed grows is the way every living thing grows. The mustard seed is a very tiny seed, but the thing that grows is smaller than that—the germ which is in every seed. It is a very tiny thing.

How does it grow? It multiplies by division. One cell which has been formed divides into two. Those two divide into two which makes four. And those four each divide into two and that makes eight. It goes fast, but to start with it is very small.

You can see how the Devil would try to prevent that first division, and how he would try to prevent it at each step. If he can stop it at any point, the plant or the animal is stunted, undeveloped. Things stop right there.

It is too bad for a church to reach a certain membership and stop. Something is wrong, unless the members have gone off and starting new places. But if the members of the church come and go like a door on its hinges, that is evidence that something is wrong. In God's plan there is to be continual growth. That is the way the work is to be finished.

"The laws of Christ's kingdom are so simple, and yet so complete, that man-made additions will create confusion. And the more simple our plans for work in God's service, the more we shall accomplish" *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, page 215.

If we want to accomplish more, then our plans should be more simple. Human wisdom goes in the opposite direction. As time goes on organizations and plans and methods become more complex. That is one of the reasons why down through the ages God has had to scrap a whole system man had thought was wonderful. God has had to throw the whole thing into the wastebasket because it became so complicated.

Look at the Jewish system in the days of Jesus. If there was anything ever complicated the Jewish system was. The scribes and pharisees had it work out in detail. The Roman Catholic system is another one cut after the same pattern. Complicated and intricate. But in God's plan things are to be very simple.

The way to grow carrots is the same way it was a thousand years ago. The way to win souls is basically what it always has been.

We are given a divine formula from the Spirit of Prophecy. This statement is based upon the Bible, like all things in the Spirit of Prophecy. I have been studying it for thirty years, and it says the same thing to me now that it said thirty years ago. I am interested in the way it is worded. It starts with two sentences, each one of which begins with why, and that question is still echoing down the isles of time.

"Why do not believers feel a deeper, more earnest concern for those who are out of Christ? Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another?"
Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, page 21.

Suppose we took this question very literally, and begin to write down the reasons why it isn't done. What would you say?

Somebody might say, Well, I never thought of it.

That would be one reason.

Somebody might say, It is possible to be busy.

There might be some other answers. But after we get through with the answers, the book still says, Why not do it?

That's one thing about dealing with a book. After you have gotten all through, you come back and it still says the same thing.

Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another? What do we call such a meeting? A prayer band. I have been in institutions and churches where there were prayer bands. But it is seldom that you see prayer bands as simple as this is. We don't have many prayer bands, but so often a prayer band is a meeting presided over by someone who has been appointed, and a group of people are assigned to come together under his or her leadership, and they sit there and listen. Then one or more are asked to pray. And the number may be anywhere from four or five up to a dozen.

This is not talking about that kind of thing. I shall not seek to oppose it. Every meeting for prayer is to be encouraged. There is nothing wrong with groups of people getting together for prayer. I simply point out that this statement is not talking about that. It is dealing with something fundamentally different.

"In our churches let companies be formed for service. Let different ones unite in labor as fishers of men. Let them seek to gather souls from the corruption of the world into the saving purity of Christ's love.

"The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err"
Ibid.

In other words, we do not need to doubt its efficiency. This is the plan of somebody who cannot err. We can read something in a farm journal and try it out. Maybe it will work, and maybe it won't. We can read something in a medical journal and try it out. Maybe it will work, and maybe it won't. But this is not like that. This is the plan of One who cannot err.

Notice it isn't only that Christ does not err. He cannot err, because anything He says is truth. It isn't merely that He says the truth. Truth is what He says. That's why the Bible says God cannot lie. If God says let light be over here in a dark place, what happens immediately? There is light there. He spake and it was. Nothing had to happen to make it come true. It was true as soon as He said it.

Oh, the power of the Word of God.

Here is something God has said. He said for two or three to meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another. This plan, as a basis of Christian effort, has been presented to me by One who cannot err.

"If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers. If in one place there are only two or three who know the truth, let them form themselves into a band of workers. Let them keep their bond of union unbroken, pressing together in love and unity, encouraging one another to advance, each

gaining courage and strength from the assistance of the others. Let them labor in Christlike love for those outside the fold, forgetting self in their endeavor to help others. As they work and pray in Christ's name, their numbers will increase; for the Saviour says: 'If two or you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven.' Matthew 18:19." *Ibid*, page 22.

What is the number for one band? Two or three. But suppose there is a large number in the church. Then what is to be done? They are to be formed into small companies.

The work of these small companies is a two-fold work. What are they to do? Work not only for church members, but for unbelievers.

Here, as happens frequently in the Spirit of Prophecy, Sister White gives the Bible statement underlying all she has written. She quotes the Biblical promise which substantiates the things she has presented.

Jesus is trying to do two things. He is trying to get some people together, and He is trying to work on a plan that no matter how few people get together, it will work.

You say, Then it would work if only one would do it.

God says two. Since that is His plan, we had better accept it, hadn't we?

When I was a boy I remember reading about a missionary who went off to a heathen land. It was a missionary of another denomination. There were not any Christians in the area he came to, so he set his heart to pray that the Lord would help him to find one man. As he kept on learning the language, and getting acquainted with the people he was always on the lookout for that man.

One day he was brought into contact with a young man. As their conversation developed the conviction came into his soul, There is my man. He kept after him until he got him, and that young man became his right hand man in the evangelism of that area.

That man understood the thing we are trying to deal with this afternoon. If I am alone, my first business is to get a partner. When there are two of us, then we can get two more. That makes four. Then those four should each get one, and that would make eight. Each of those eight should get one, and that would make sixteen. From there on you know what happens.

But the difficulty is that somewhere along the line the Devil breaks that chain reaction, and he gets someone satisfied to be the end of the chain instead of a link in the chain. He gets someone satisfied to be one instead of being a winner, and come to church and be fed, but never feed anybody else.

Today we have thousands who have been won, but who have never won anyone else. And God intends that every one of us, having been won, shall at once go to work to win others. This plan we are studying makes it possible. The thing set before us is to plead for souls.

How many meeting together? Two or three. I like the way God puts it there. It is just right. If you have three, and one can't come, there are two, and it is ok. Two can still claim the promise.

You say, wouldn't it be the same if you have four or five or six?

If you have ever been through this over the years, you will understand it far better than any words I can say that will explain it. When you begin to have four or five or six or seven, you have something else, not this. It is all right to have more, but it won't be this.

To state it another way, if you have four or five or six or seven, then you still need to revert back and have two or three. The meeting with four or five or six or a dozen should not be a substitute for two or three meeting together. They should be an addition.

The basic thing is two or three meeting together and pleading with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another. It is hard enough to get two or three together and have all agree in praying for the same thing. But it would be amazing if you could get a dozen people together who would be equally burdened about the same soul.

I want to look at this promise again. As they work and pray, their numbers will increase. Do you believe that? Well, you all say you believe it because it is inspired. But do we really believe it? We are told that we will act out all the faith we have.

Suppose we were poor. Suppose we needed some money. Suppose I should tell you that there is a place up here on the mountain where there is gold to be gotten for the digging. And I should say to you, At six I am going up there, and if there is anybody who wants to know where the gold is, we will go up there together.

If you believed me, where would you be at six? You would be right there. And nobody would have to ring you on the telephone and remind you. And you wouldn't say the next day, Oh, that's right. We did have an appointment, didn't we?

If you and I really believe that two people, or three, meeting together and pleading for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another, their numbers will increase, what will we do? We will do what it says.

We will do what it says, if we want the numbers to increase. And I suppose we all do. We want people in the kingdom, don't we? We want souls in the church. We want babies born into the kingdom of God who will drink the milk of the Word, and grow up into the stature of men and women in Christ. This is God's wonderful plan for bringing many unto glory. Oh, it is a wonderful plan.

That's the way children are born. Two people who are married enter into a fellowship together, and a child is born. Is that a way for children to be born? It is the only way. There are no factories where babies are turned out. Man has not found a way to do that. They can send a moon around the earth every ninety minutes, but there is no light in it, and its days are numbered.

There is just one way children are born. And God wants us to learn from that how souls are born. Somebody has to beget them. Somebody has to bear them. And the process of begetting and bearing is used in the Scripture for soul winning.

Paul says to his converts:

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" Galatians 4:19.

Paul also says:

"For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel" 1 Corinthians 4:15.

Paul was the spiritual father and mother of his converts. But usually in God's plan it is His endeavor to associate people together. Paul and Barnabas went out together. And when they differed, Paul chose Silas. Why did he choose Silas? He recognized the divine plan.

When Jesus sent out His disciples, did He carry out this plan? Yes. He sent them out two and two. None was sent forth alone. Brother was associated with brother, friend with friend. They prayed together. They talked together. They communed together. They reported and encouraged each other.

When I was about ten or eleven years old I came under the influence of Elder Luther Warren. Forty years ago he was one of the greatest evangelists in the denomination. He had been very active in the young people's work, and in medical evangelism. He was a strong young people's worker, a personal worker teaching other people.

At camp meetings Elder Warren would not only have meetings in a tent, but he would have informal groups who got together to learn how to win souls. And he used to keep working on this idea of a little prayer band of two or three. That's the way I got the seed in my head.

When I was about fourteen my mother was sent to a school to teach. She had the lower grades, and I was in the eight grade. I had made a new consecration to the Lord the summer before, and I had *Steps to Christ* that I was reading.

There wasn't much spirituality in the school. I got to thinking about what could be done. I had this prayer band idea that Elder Warren had put there. I do not know at that time whether I knew about this reference in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7 or not. Maybe I did, and maybe I didn't. But the idea was before volume seven was written. Oh, yes. God has been using it down through the ages.

One morning I was walking down the road to meet a boy I had met whose name was Robert Glass. I said, "Robert, I have been thinking about something. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, page 112 says that one student on becoming intelligent may make a right use of his ability that will be a power for good in the school. He will have a molding influence. If it says that about one student, what could two together do? What would you think of meeting together and having prayer together for the other boys?"

He said, "All right."

So we started meeting together. We didn't have anybody to tell us what to do, where to meet, or when to meet, or how often. But somehow we were led to meet every day. We were interested, and went right after it.

We met in the church, which was off the schoolroom. There was nobody in there. We would slip in there at recess and have a little prayer together, and come on out.

After a few days Erwin, a chum of Robert's, came and joined us. He was inclined toward spiritual things, and he took hold. Before long another boy joined us, and we had four.

Pretty soon Erwin took one of the prayer bands, and I took the other, and we had two bands. That keep on growing and spreading.

Finally the girls heard about it and got started with prayer bands. Before the year was half over I had a group of prayer band leaders I was meeting with. I had not been appointed by anybody. It just grew. And everyone of those prayer band leaders had come up through a prayer band. They were just doing what we are studying here this afternoon.

Well, we had some precious experiences that year, and I learned something about soul winning. It wasn't as easy as it sounds like. Not everybody accepted what we presented. We had some ridicule and opposition. There was never anytime the whole school was in prayer bands. But those who were meeting got a real experience in it.

Some years I had more of an experience, and some years less. But when I was nineteen years old I was called into the work with Elder Tindell in San Francisco. I went there just before my twentieth birthday. I was just a student helper.

Before I had been there very long Elder Tindell asked me to take charge of the young people's work. Well, I had already been working along this plan. I had my eye on getting somebody. One of the first young men the Lord caused me to put my eye on was a young fellow four years younger than I was. He was a senior in high school that year. He was drifting out into the world. He had never been in church school. His father wasn't an Adventist. His father opposed his mother bitterly, and it was with difficulty that she was able to try to keep her children in a religious groove. And this boy was just getting to the place where he would have lost out.

I took a real interest in him. I got hold of him and wouldn't let him go. He told me afterward how he used to resent my coming around and putting my arm on his shoulder. He didn't like it. Later he came to love me and appreciate our fellowship.

He was quite an athlete. He was on the championship high school team in Northern California in swimming. One of the things I was studying with a group of young people were the principles of reform such as competition. That had been a hard thing with me a few years before, and when I got hold of it, it became one of the most precious things in my life. So I was sharing it with them.

But the prospect of this young man giving up competitive athletics was very dark. He didn't know what to do.

One Sunday morning I went out to the florist shop where he was working and slipped in where he was cutting flowers and arranging them, and talked with him and had prayer. He gave his heart to the Lord, and plunged for God in this thing with me. The two of us went at it together.

About this time we were getting ready for an evangelistic campaign in San Francisco in which Elder Tindell was leading out. I was asked to organize the young people to participate in soul winning. The Lord brought to my mind a way to combine these little prayer bands into an organization like an army. It looked simple. We worked on the basis of having little bands of two or three with a leader. Then we put three of those bands under another leader. We called this other leader an associate leader, and I had charge of the associate leaders.

We had about forty young people there. That army in two years won from the world twenty-nine young people. We saw twenty-nine young people baptized by using this method. There were other activities going on. Sabbath School was going on. Young People's meeting was going on. Our evangelistic efforts were going on. But these young people actually got out and got hold of a young person and got him to the meetings. And if a young person came to a meeting there were a dozen young people who were right there ready to grab him and cling to him like a magnet.

One evening we had a couple of marines come in and sat way back in the corner. It was Friday night, and I was speaking. That meeting was no sooner over than there were some young men who got hold of those two marines. Sunday night they were there again, and those young people got hold of them again. Tuesday night my right hand fellow got one of those marines in a room with me, and before we got out that night that fellow gave his heart to the Lord and accepted this message. He kept the Sabbath, and got thrown into the insane ward as the result. He finally got a discharge, and went away to school to prepare to give this message.

It means so much to have somebody ready to grab somebody. Sister White had a dream about gathering berries. She said that while others were looking around at this and that, she was gathering some berries. When she brought them in they didn't have any way to take care of them.

She was disappointed and said, What did you come for anyway?

They said, Sister White, we really didn't think there would be so many berries. But you seemed anxious to come, so we decided we would all come along and have a good time.

Sister White said she could not understand that.

My point is that God wants everyone of us to be ready to grab hold of souls, and hang right to them.

A few years after I had been ordained to the ministry I was holding an effort in a church. A very interesting experience took place. There was a woman who was a frail, sickly soul, and rather timid. Her husband was one of these big, stocky fellows, and had a lot of brute force. He had been in prohibition days a rum runner. He had a big boat that would run illegal liquor from the ships into port. He was quite a bootlegger.

One of my helpers had a prayer band with this sister. They would get together and they would pray for her husband. They kept on praying.

He got under conviction. He said, "I know what you folks are doing. You are praying for me. And if this doesn't stop I am going to leave home."

He meant it. What do you suppose they did? The little woman came to the Bible worker who was praying with her, and said this is no time to stop praying. This is the time to go right ahead. So they did. And he up and went just like he said he would. For days and days and weeks and weeks nobody knew where he was. But they kept on praying.

Finally he came back. It was just about Christmas time. New Year's eve our young people had a program in the church. It was a consecration service. That man walked into that meeting with his wife and sat down and listened to the testimonies of those young people. On the way home he told his wife, "I nearly got up and spoke myself."

When we see experiences like that of answered prayer, it makes us want to do what? Pray more. And as we work and pray in Christ's name, their numbers will increase.

"Young men and young women, cannot you form companies, and as soldiers of Christ enlist in the work, putting all your tact and skill and talent into the Master's service that you may save souls from ruin? Let there be companies organized in every church to do this work. Will the young men and women who really love Jesus organize themselves as workers, not only for those who profess to be Sabbath keepers, but for those who are not of our faith?" *Christian Service*, page 34.

As I look back to that little group in San Francisco I can see what it did for the young people that had a part in it. That young man who became my right hand man

is the young people's secretary up in one of the Northern conferences. He has been in young people's work and evangelistic work all his life. God has given him dozens and scores and hundreds of stars in his crown.

The other day I got an envelope, and opened it. There was his young people's bulletin sent out to all the young people's leaders in the conference. He had penciled a little line which was the little prayer band plan. He hadn't forgotten to use it.

His younger sister got an experience in this. When we first started she must have been around fourteen or fifteen. She was one of our prayer band members. She was just a private in the ranks. But she came along and got a burden for souls. By and by she was a band leader. By and by she was an associate leader. She had a group of bands working under her. She grew up and became a soul winner. She and Marie Graham, now Sister Comstock, were chums together in Colporteur work. She is now the wife of Arthur Delafield, associate of the White Publications.

Each one of you have a glorious opportunity. The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed. And if you want a mustard plant you don't go out and get a big plant and transplant it. No. You plant a little seed.

So I would like to lay on you this thought. Lord, give me somebody to work for and somebody to work with. Give me somebody to pray for, and somebody to pray with.

There are a half a dozen folks here this afternoon that I wish would develop into people who would have a group of bands working under you, but grow them yourself.

Start in with one. Work and pray with that one or two. When you get three or four in your band take your strongest one and put him in charge. Let him pray with this one over here, and keep in touch. Pray with him.

Pretty soon you will have a second band that will grow. Pick a leader out of it and set him to working with a group. Pretty soon you will have two or three or four people you are praying for once a week.

You can have that experience right here on this hill with the people around you. You can reach out into the church and into the community around you. Experiment and see what God will do for you. The plan is simple. The stakes are tremendous. The possibilities are wonderful.

It doesn't take elephants. It doesn't take the ability to preach. All it takes is the ability to carry out directions.

"Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another?" "As they work and pray in Christ's name, their numbers will increase.

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