

What's a House of Prayer?

By Jonathan Graf



Many leaders today use the term “house of prayer” to describe what they want their churches to become. Most of them mean that they want more prayer to take place or that prayer should be central to their ministries. What does the phrase mean biblically?

In Matthew 21, Jesus cast the money changers out of the Temple. “‘It is written,’ he said to them, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers’” (v. 13). After this, “The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them” (v. 14). That is a picture of what a house of prayer really is.

While some may use the story to teach that we shouldn’t sell CDs and books in church, that’s probably not what Jesus was getting at. The money changers were charging exorbitant rates for sacrificial animals, implying that the animals brought by the people were not good enough. They had people over a barrel, keeping some from worshiping.

That’s why Jesus quoted Isaiah 56 when he threw out the money changers. Throughout the passage, outcasts of Hebrew society (eunuchs and foreigners) were able to freely worship in God’s Temple: “‘Their burnt offer-

ings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’” (v. 7). A house of prayer is a place of acceptance—a church that will welcome everyone and will shun no one. The house of prayer has no barriers to prevent people from seeking God.

That’s easier said than done. No matter how free from prejudice we may appear, we tend to feel more comfortable in churches with people who are like us—in the same socioeconomic class, race or season of life. Usually, we choose which church to attend by asking, “How is it going to meet my needs?” When that happens, we can’t help but give off “not-for-you” vibes to a visitor who is different.

The only way for a church to overcome its exclusivity is for its people to gain God’s heart and to look at things through His eyes. No one can understand the Father’s heart without prayer! A prayerless person or church cannot and will not see things through God’s eyes. It’s impossible to act in God’s love and power without knowing His heart.

A number of years ago Canyon Ridge Church in Las Vegas had an interesting visitor. Cathy was a meth addict and a prostitute who had lost her daughter to the state welfare system. Early one Sunday morning, after a night of prostituting, with \$800 from the night in her pocket, still dressed for her craft, Cathy drove by Canyon Ridge. She was moved to pull in. That morning the pastor spoke on “The God of Second Chances.” Cathy did not accept Christ that day, but as a statement to God that she wanted a second chance, she put all \$800 in the offering plate at the end of the service. A little while later the pastor led her to Christ. Today, Cathy is a pastor’s wife, as she and her husband planted a church in another part of Las Vegas.

Here’s my question to you. How would your church have responded to Cathy if she walked in your doors one Sunday morning? Would your ushers escort her out because she was not dressed appropriately? Would people stare? Or would people warmly embrace her so she could find God without any hindrances?

Pray for God’s heart to be a House of Prayer!

*Jonathan Graf is author of *The Power of Personal Prayer* and the president of the Church Prayer Leaders Network. The CPLN will be holding its 8th annual national prayer convention at Shandon Baptist Church in Columbia, June 11-13. Go to www.prayerleader.com for more information.*



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