

August 5, 2020

Good morning, Everybody.

Tonight is our mid-week prayer meeting. I look forward to these more than ever at any time in the past; undoubtedly because we're still not completely phased back into our normal church life, and we're not seeing each other nearly as much. But also because it's been refreshing to enjoy a little change in our normal routine. Joining all together as three or four men lead us has been good for us. We've had the opportunity to focus on the great scriptural themes for prayer and to learn how to pray about them as we've been led by brethren exemplifying how to pray scripturally-informed content earnestly. I go away from these times feeling *edified*. Really *strengthened* in faith and confident about the future.



A Prayer Meeting in the Past

I remember very little about church services when I was a boy, but I do vividly recall one prayer meeting. Its memory has returned many, many times.

The summer after I accepted Christ, our family moved to the tiny town of Luray, Kansas (truly *tiny*; population, including surrounding farms, less than 300; that's less than half of Mount Calvary's church attendance for a Sunday service). This was the small, isolated surrounding in which we lived for the next five years; from

my seventh grade up until just a year before I enrolled at Bob Jones University.



In the early Fall three years ago, I returned to Luray for the first time in almost 35 years and took a picture of the church building as it is today;

unchanged in every way. Exactly as it was when I was a teenager, except that some years ago it was sold to a mortuary in the next town over, and it is used now for a chapel when a place is needed for the funeral of someone who will be buried in the Luray cemetery.

The church's attendance was so small that on Wednesday nights it would be only our family of six, the middle-aged couple who had founded the church, and two or three elderly widows, including Dora Gardner, who had followed our family to Luray from the last town in which we'd lived. Her house was right across the street from the church building, the tiniest house in our tiny town. You can see it in the picture below—the little yellow building to the right of the church.



Mrs. Gardner was so loyal and so kind. Every week of the year she made an applesauce cake for our family. On Fridays or Saturdays. We all got to where it was almost indispensable to our psyche of weekly wellbeing (smile). It went fast but, unfortunately, not far in a family with four hungry boys. How she was able to do it on what must have been her miniscule Social Security check is a wonder.

One Wednesday night the men of the church and I were praying together. We were in the 2nd and 3rd pews from the front, to the left of the aisle. The ladies were praying in the back pews to the right of the aisle. In the next picture you can see where we were. And again, nothing has changed from what it was then.



Two of us were in the one pew, leaning over forward, and the other was in the pew in front of us, sort of half leaning across its back in order to partially angle toward us as we prayed. The older man to my left was the one praying in the moment I'll never forget.

For some reason, I had an urge to lift my head and open my eyes and look

around. And when I did, I noticed from the side that the man in the pew in front of us had his eyes sort of half open. I must have been afraid that he would notice that mine were all the way open, because I immediately closed them and dropped my head. But a bad thing happened.

A little doubt sprung up in my heart about this man. I felt like maybe he was kind of unspiritual; maybe even hypocritical. How could he have his eyes open while we were praying? What was he doing? Was he thinking about something else? Wasn't he praying?

I don't guess it occurred to me that if it had been wrong for him to have his eyes half open, it had been wrong for me to be able to see him with mine!

But for awhile, I don't know how long, maybe a few weeks or months, I was critical and hardened my heart a little bit toward him. That's why I've remembered the moment so many times through all these years. Because it affected my attitude. And because of who it was. It was my dad.

Life in Luray

When we lived in Luray I was only vaguely aware of how hard it was for mom and dad. To this day I don't know, but I can pretty easily imagine it.

Dad had to work somewhere besides the church in order to put food on the table. When we first moved to Luray, he found a job pouring cement for a contractor. He also plowed fields for the other man who prayed with us that night, the good man who had founded the church. Finally, he began to paint barns, and that must have worked out best of all because he was able to keep at it right up until we moved away. He also painted those grain elevators in the first picture. I have *vivid* memories of that, because he had rigged up some kind of seat from which he could lower himself down their side from the top. The seat swung from ropes attached to the top of the elevators that dangled all the way down to the ground and that supposedly would catch him if he fell—*if*, that is, I was paying attention and was strong enough to keep hold of them down there on the road alongside the elevators. Highly questionable of me on both counts.

It never occurred to me for many years afterwards that my dad was *really* wiped out on Wednesday nights. Especially in the summers when the Kansas heat was unbearable, and the only thing to cool even part of the house when he returned home was a swamp water cooler in one window downstairs. Why did I never consider that he might have had his eyes half open just to be able to stay awake?! Or that he had opened them just for an instant, like I myself had? I don't know. But to this day I feel bad about being so unfairly and unfeelingly critical of him. And to think that this one Wednesday night is the only prayer meeting I remember clearly from all those years. Sorrow upon sorrow.

But here's the good thing (smile). One reason that it comes back to mind so often is because I see many of you folks coming out to prayer meeting after long, long, hard days; sometimes without even being able to get home for supper. Or without time for the moms to be able to clear the table afterward before hurrying to the service with a van full of little ones in tow. Which means, of course, that all the dishes are still sitting there when you get home.

You don't know the little scenario that has resurfaced in my mind so many times out of that experience from my childhood, or that it always makes my heart go out to you.

So all of that to say this: to come to prayer meeting in the middle of the week, and to keep your eyes closed without falling asleep (smile) . . . that's pretty big. And it's one reason that our prayer meetings are such a *huge blessing* to me.

Because you folks consistently make the sacrifice. And because the Lord blesses our church in response to your doing it. If I weren't as persuaded of that as I am of my own existence, I'd suggest that we discontinue the prayer meeting and do something that matters.

So . . . I'm looking forward to our time tonight and especially to the day when we can once again all meet together on a Wednesday night. And one thing you can be pretty sure of, my eyes will probably stay closed (smile).

Praying for You Today,

Pastor Minnick