



April 2009

The Word of God NEWSLETTER

an
ecumenical
charismatic
missionary
Christian
Community

How good and how pleasant it is ...

Hosanna 2009: Dwelling in unity, at least for a day!

By Phil Tiews

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Hosanna 2009

Answered Prayer

Keep Praying

Facing hard times

**40 Days Prayer
Room**

And More ...



**Drugs killed my son —
God saved my soul.**

**4 years ago was running
from God —
In school to become a
pastor.**



**Bedridden, exhausted with chronic fatigue
syndrome —
Healed, no recurrence for 15 years.**

**Liar, skeptic, blasphemer —
Lover, Saved Believer**

One after another folks brought their 'cardboard testimonies' across the stage at Hosanna 2009 while the people rejoiced in how our God saves! To see the wonderful variety of God's powerful work in the lives of brothers and sisters clearly pointed to the theme of this year's Hosanna event—Jesus, the hope for all people.

Baptizing the new high school

Ann Arbor's brand new Skyline High School was the site of the annual Palm Sunday County-wide celebration on April 5th, 2009. This was the first major event in the state-of-the-art auditorium. In fact the

technical crew was unpacking equipment from boxes in order to set up for the rehearsal Sunday afternoon! There were glitches with the sound system, but none of that could dampen the joy of the standing room only crowd who filled the place with rejoicing. This was a grand way to baptize the new theater — with 950 Christians from scores of churches gathering together in unity and love to praise Jesus, our one Lord.

And praise Him we did! In song, in a variety of dance, through the reading of His Word in Scripture, through the 'cardboard testimonies', through the giving of food for the hungry and money, and more. We praised him in English, and Spanish, in Korean, and in sign language.

Young and old, African-American and



What a great way to enter into Holy Week. Celebrating Palm Sunday with Christians from scores of churches across Washtenaw County and across the church spectrum. 950

brothers and sisters came together at Skyline High School to lift Jesus up with one voice in dance and song and prayer ... and love.

Seems to me ...

Impossible?

By Phil Tiews

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Even though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days, should it also seem impossible to me, says the LORD of hosts? Zech 8:6

The Israelites were in a bad way. True, they were back in the Promised Land, but it wasn't all it was promised to be! Everything had been destroyed, the fields were not productive, there were enemies all around. Where was the milk & honey? They got started rebuilding the Temple, which is what they came back to do, but after a couple of years they gave up. That had been over 10 years ago now. There wasn't the money, the people, the resources, the leadership, the vision ... it was impossible!

Into this discouraged situation, God sent Zechariah with a clear message. 'Just because it is impossible for you, don't think it is impossible for me!' This wasn't some self-actualization pep talk. God didn't say, 'buck up, you can do it'. Instead he said, 'you're right, it is impossible for you. So what! Does that make it impossible for me? I am the Lord of hosts, of all the nations, of all the Universe! Do you think I am stymied by this?'

With renewed faith, looking to God, with God's strengthening & intervention, the people finished the Temple in a few years and worship was restored. Who would have thought it?



&

In this issue there is a lot about prayer, just like the last one. How to pray, answered prayers, prayer sustaining during hard times, prayer for our County, and more. God is speaking to us and moving us to pray these days. And the times call for it, don't they? There is the state of the economy [and the economy of our State!], there are disturbing developments on the national level, and our deep desire for transformation in Washtenaw County. We have a concern to share the vision and call of the community with an emerging generation and to find a form of community life that will work for them in today's circumstances.

If this doesn't all seem overwhelming and impossible, I don't know what does. I'm sure you have been tempted, like me, to get discouraged in prayer, to pull back, to settle for smaller goals and hopes. Into this situation, Zechariah's words resound today, 'Even though it seems impossible to you, should it also seem impossible to me, says the Lord of Hosts?' No! Not at all!

As we pray we need to keep our eyes steadily on the Lord. The measure of what is possible is not the magnitude of the problems or of our weakness, but rather the Lord's power and his passion to fulfill his purposes! We and the world around us desperately need hope in these days, and it is found in Him. Let's pray!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'PT' or 'Phil Tiews'.

Hosanna 2009

Dwelling in unity [continued]

Asian and Latino and white, Catholics and Presbyterians and Pentecostals, brothers and sisters from a kaleidoscope of backgrounds and traditions with one heart.

Coming together through service

The variety of different churches participating in Hosanna was visible for all to see on stage. A dozen churches had people leading a portion of the program. And that is not counting the two youth dance groups which drew from several Korean churches, or the Hosanna Dancers from another dozen churches, or the Cardboard Testimonies, or the Hosanna Choir. Literally dozens of churches had participants in the evening's program.

But what is not so obvious is the many churches who served in the background to make Hosanna possible. Coming early for setup, helping with parking and serving as ushers. A team from Christian Love Fellowship put in many hours developing stunning promotional material in print and electronic formats. A planning team from several churches began meeting months earlier to get a vision and pull together the churches so that we could have this grand celebration together.

The commanded blessing

Hosanna 2009 almost didn't happen. Just three months before Palm Sunday we still didn't have a venue. All our previous options were unavailable—and so was Skyline High School! Whether it was the stress of the economy or whatever, churches were slow in stepping up to participate, we had no program! And then the Lord started to open doors. Skyline became suddenly available. A plan and participants began to come together. Before we knew it, the day was upon us and we experienced one of the most joyous Hosanna's ever!

Psalm 133 declares that the Lord has commanded a blessing where brothers dwell in unity. He is pleased to see His children come together in love and let His pleasure be known. Certainly that is what was experienced by those blessed to be able to attend Hosanna 2009.

Mark your calendar now for Hosanna 2010 on Palm Sunday, March 28th and be part of the blessing next year!

[For pictures of this year's event, go to www.pact-Washtenaw.org.]

Jesus, Hope of all People



Jesus' Teaching about Answered

One of Jesus' most frequent promises in the Gospels is that God will answer prayers. Unfortunately, many Christians have lost faith in that promise and approach prayer as a means to inner peace, but not as something that will change anything. Prayer becomes a religious exercise in "a-wishin' and a-hopin'."

Sometimes the texts on prayer have become too familiar to us or we didn't receive what we prayed for, so we can overlook or discount this promise. Jesus taught some principles about prayer that are worth revisiting.

The Importance of Asking

James 4:2 says, "You do not have because you do not ask." Not asking is a fairly sure way of not getting an answer.

Matthew 7:7-8 says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened."

He is saying the exact same thing twice, so he must really mean it.

The Manner in Which to Ask

1. Ask confidently.

We can have confidence because God is our Father, He loves us, and He wants to give us good things. In John 16:27 Jesus explains WHY God loves us: **"the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God."** We have favor with God because we have accepted His Son, so He is glad to move on our behalf because that, in turn, glorifies Jesus. (Even evil people return favors.)

2. Be Persistent.

Jesus tells the story in Luke 11:5-8 of the man who asked his friend at midnight for some bread and kept knocking until his friend got rid of him by giving him some bread. In Luke 18:1-8 Jesus tells about the widow who persisted with the unjust judge until she got what she wanted. (Those of us who have had small children know that their persistence often gets them what they want, so we can understand the dynamic here!)

Remember, God didn't say WHEN He would answer—just that He WOULD answer.

Is Jesus saying we should pester God, until we wear him out? No. The sleeping friend/unjust judge are not symbols of God but of obstacles to getting our answers. We need to persist because there can be spiritual blocks involved—in us, in others, or even in the heavenlies (see Daniel 10:12-13)—and persistent prayer allows God to deal with those blocks. Do we need to understand the blocks? Nope. Jesus says nothing about "discovering and analyzing blocks" to get our prayers answered—he just says that OUR part is to be persistent. (If God wants us to know about any blocks, he will tell us.)

The Importance of Faith for Prayer

Jesus corrected the disciples about

their faith more than anything else. Correcting them for unbelief indicates that faith is something we can choose to exercise. It is not just a feeling but a choice to believe God and his word, despite contrary data and pressures. We need to persist not only in asking but also in believing, repeating, and confessing his promise.

Jesus said to his disciples in Mark 11:22-24, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." Again, Jesus makes his point twice.

We should ask God, then thank Him, then choose to believe for as long as it takes to get our answer. (If we stop, then we are exercising a belief that nothing will happen.)

Two Main Reasons Prayer Is Not Answered

1. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly" (James 4:3). If we follow Jesus' guideline about persistent prayer but there is something wrong in what we are asking for, God will move in and adjust our prayer to make it a correct prayer. When we are in a state of "persisting," God can grab a hold of us because praying gives Him access to us. Therefore, asking somewhat wrongly at the outset does not have to become a block to getting our prayers answered.

2. "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great

Prayer

By Marsha Williamson

reward” (Hebrews 10:35). This is, I think, how most Christians fail to get their answers. After a week, a few months, a few years, we all get tired, so it’s easy to throw in the towel and then sputter something about not understanding God’s mysterious ways and promises. Please note that in the promises listed above, God never says WHEN He will answer the prayer—He just promises that He WILL. Remember Monica who prayed for the conversion of her son Augustine for twenty years? We all know how that ended.

Conclusion

According to what Jesus says about prayer and our role in it, Christians should expect ALL their prayers (or adjusted prayers) to be answered sooner or later—and I don’t mean that namby-pamby cop-out “Yeah, God answered and said no.” George Muller, who ran an orphanage in England, kept a column in a journal of what he prayed and another column for answers. His “answered” columns are proof the promise is true.

He did pray, however, for the salvation of two friends for over twenty years but died without seeing that happen--you know, “unanswered prayer.” At Muller’s funeral, one of the men gave his life to the Lord, and the other did so on his deathbed. Muller got his prayers answered AFTER he died. How cool is that? Remember, God didn’t say WHEN He would answer—just that He WOULD answer. Try a journal with two columns for a few weeks and see what happens.

Struggling with prayer? Here’s help.

Praying is as important as breathing

By Dave Mangan

One of the most important vehicles in maintaining any healthy relationship is communication. In our relationship with Jesus it is no different. Obviously then, prayer is an extremely important facet of our lives. We do this, not to keep God up to date or to keep Him on the ball, but rather, to grow in our relationship with Him and to be available to Him. This being the case, prayer deserves a lot of effort on our part.

Even though we can all concede the importance of prayer, we also can easily confess great difficulty in doing it. Often these difficulties can get us to the point where we accept a very poor prayer life, or at least a lot less than what God wants for us.

His highest willingness

Perhaps the first step in overcoming these difficulties is realizing that our attitude toward prayer may be wrong. Sometimes we can view God as someone who has laid an obstacle course before us, and if we successfully navigate it we get to speak with Him. But this attitude negates the very act of Jesus’ death and resurrection that gave us free access to the Father. I once heard Dr. Robert Cooke express this very well. He said, “Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance but laying hold of His highest willingness.”

We could start then by asking the Lord to reveal to us any poor attitudes that we may have. And then we can ask Him for the grace to let them go. We need to realize that prayer is one of the most exciting things we can do. I realize that it doesn’t often feel like that. I know that is the case for me. But that doesn’t change the truth — when we are praying we have the ear of the Master of the Universe!

Any problems are on our part. We need to give Him our ear as well.

Necessary for survival

It could be the case that we don’t value prayer enough. I’m sure if someone were to ask us if prayer is important we would all give the correct answer. But do our actions betray us? In reality, prayer is not just a Christian accessory, it is necessary for our survival.

Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all vigilance; for from it flow the springs of life.” The word “keep” here does not mean “keep” in the sense of being possessive. Rather it refers to keeping a garden, making sure that all is well and that life is coming forth. Being an active participant in our life with God is the only sure way of bringing forth real life in us, for it all comes from Him.

In short, we need to pray. If you find that your prayer life is poor, don’t give up. A poor prayer life is better than no prayer life. Just let it be a springboard to a better prayer life — step by step. Let us ask the Lord to help us and to bring us to the point that we can see that praying (however much time we spend doing it) is as important as breathing.

A poor prayer life is better than no prayer life. Just let it be a springboard to a better prayer life — step by step

What is it like when the economic downturn gets personal?

In the Garden [think Gethsemane!] with the Lord

By Steve Lucchetti

Economic times are tough and few industries have been hit harder than auto companies. I have worked at Ford for more than 24 years but the past year has been extremely stressful. Buyouts followed by layoffs followed by more buyouts have been the rule of the day. As various buyout/layoff deadlines have come and gone, the tension at work has risen higher and higher. Everyone has constantly been wondering who would go next and when/if the next time would be them. Being human, it was impossible not to have some of the same feelings and thoughts. While the Lord sustained me, the tension was real, palpable, and almost unceasing!

As the latest round of promised cuts at Ford was approaching, somehow I sensed that perhaps this time it might be my time. When I was approached by my supervisor without warning early in the morning on Jan 28th and heard, "Please come with me . . ." I knew that indeed it was my time! As we walked to the office where I would be given the final word, I could sense the tension and at one point I said to her, "It's OK."

Walking along, I would love to say that I prayed, but unfortunately it's all a blur now and I can't remember. I do know that as the deadline approached, Judy and I as well as the brothers and sisters in our sharing group had been praying a lot about my job situation.

Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Lk 22:42
Life since the 28th has been an emotional merry-go-round. I've cycled and re-cycled through all the human emotions – fear, hate, love, sorrow, anxiety, embarrassment,... Name the emotion and I've felt it to varying degrees depending on time of day, who I was with or NOT with, and what was going on around

me. On too many occasions I would wake up in the middle of the night or early in the morning with a cold sweat and in total fear about what was happening and going to happen. At times I tried to reject it all as a bad dream and hope that I would wake up – sooooo.

Sustaining me through this period was God's love for me and my love for him along with the love and prayers of my wife and sons as well as the prayer support of brothers and sisters. When it was darkest, something would always happen to remind me of God's love for us. Without a doubt some of the darkest days were the days and weeks immediately after the 28th. Yet, on Friday the 30th, we received a call from a brother and sister inviting Judy and me out as their guests for a dinner at a steakhouse on Saturday. They didn't know that I had just been laid off. They had been given a restaurant gift card and wanted to share their blessings. They were shocked when they heard what had happened to me and we ALL rejoiced on how the Lord used them to bless Judy and me.

As hard as the times got (and get), the Lord was always there calling me back to center on Him. When I would turn away from whatever the raging emotion was at the time and look to Him – I would receive peace. Sometimes it was a dinner, other times it was a kind word from a friend, and still other times it was prayer with the Lord that called me to re-center on Him. His presence never failed when I was in need. The more I was off-center and turned to the Lord – peace would come. This was definitely NOT my will to happen to me or my kids or . . . BUT sometimes the Lord needs to move us from one place to another and because we don't see the entire picture it can be a bit frightening and/or disconcerting. The more I trusted in

him and concentrated on his love for me, the more at peace I found myself. Of course then the merry-go-round would speed up a bit and the process would start all over . . .

Yet not my will but yours be done. Lk 22:42b

As the Lord prayed that his cup be taken away, so too did I pray. This was NOT a path that I chose to take. And yet late last year and into January, looking around at my co-workers, many with young children and some single parents, I vividly remember praying, "Lord, if my going means some of them can stay longer, so be it." So it was, and so it is. Despite the hard times, I continue to thank the Lord for his mercy.

Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' Mt 6:31

I don't know what the future holds. What will that job be? – I don't know. Will there be a new job? – I don't know. The Lord (through the generosity of Ford) has provided me with a good severance package (Praise God) as well as the ability to take an early retirement, and a number of months of assistance with an outplacement employment agency to help me put together a resume, write cover letters, practice interviewing skills – all the *physical* things I need to successfully look for a new job. . .

IN SPITE OF ALL THAT what I've learned is to trust more and more in Him and His love for me and His provision for me and my family. The Lord now has more of my attention than ever before. As I look to him I know that he loves me and is taking care of me and my family as he always has. He has my future in HIS hands – and I'm perfectly happy to let Him have it!!! ■

Prayers from the 40 Days Prayer Room
Off the Wall

For 72 hours in March we joined the County-wide prayer vigil, crying out to God for Washtenaw. Our prayers ascended as incense to the Lord and spilled out onto the prayer room walls.—Editor

Our prayer and God's mercy are like two buckets in a well. While one ascends, the other descends. —
 Mary Hopkins

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

May your will become for each one of us so impelling and attracting that we think of nothing else all day.

Let your hand be over the poor and needy.

No city, no county is so far away from you that it cannot be brought back to you.



Isa.61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.

Your name is like honey on my lips ... oh how sweet, how infinitely desirable are you. Your Spirit like water to my soul. Your word is a lamp to my path. Jesus I love you.

Come Lord Jesus! Penetrate the darkness around us and in us. Let the light of your Holy Spirit saturate us and everyone in this county with the truth of your love. May

truth and beauty and knowledge of your abundant mercy draw all men deeper into a relationship with you. May you be recognized as precious and entirely unique and set apart from every other god in this county.

Isa.40:3-4 A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD ; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

Jn.20:21 As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.



Zech.8:6 If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of these people in these days, will it also be too difficult in my sight? declares the Lord of Hosts. We are not the measure of what is possible — God is!!

Passing on a vision and a life
'Community Life Nights'

Many of us were profoundly impacted by early experiences in the community in households or clusters. These were little hot-houses where growth in faith and formation into the image of Christ could flourish. That was then, and it effects our identification with The Word of God to this day. But these expressions of community are not available to new people today. Prayer meetings are important and wonderful, but how can new people, especially a younger generation of singles and families 'catch' our vision and life which is best passed on through personal relationships?

The quick answer is 'we don't know!' The circumstances in our lives and the circumstances for new people have changed a lot over the years. The pressures on life, particularly time pressures, seem to have increased exponentially. However, we need to find some fruitful ways of reaching out and incorporating new people into our vision and life if we are to pass these on to a new generation.

So... let's try households again—sort of! We are actually thinking of a much more limited experiment. Think of a short-term non-residential household, a STNRHH! That is too unwieldy so how about Community Life Nights, CLN.

The idea is to take a few evenings and provide an environment for community relationships to flourish through eating together, fellowship, engaging with one another in small groups and night prayer. Something that will be positive for young families and give us a chance to do what we have always done best, 'body evangelism' - expressing God's love through ours.

We are going to target four Saturday evenings in June and July for this experiment, June 6 & 20, July 11 & 18. We will meet for dinner at 5:30 pm followed by small groups that are either support groups or topical. There will be a program for the children during this time and we will all end together with brief night prayer. A lot like old non-residential households, huh!? In order to make this a bit easier to pull off, we will cancel the district dinners after the prayer meetings for those months.

Stay tuned for more information and discussion of this idea. If you have suggestions or would like to help out with meals, the children's program or leading a small group on some topic, please contact Phil Tiews 994-3243.

This may not prove to be a 'final' answer, but it is a step forward — and will be a lot of fun in the process!



♪ I will arise so early in the morning ... ♪



Women's Breakfast

**Saturday, April 18th
9-10:30 am**

**Covenant Presbyterian Church
5171 Jackson Road**

**Carol Slomiany will be sharing with us.
Great Fellowship and Breakfast, too!**

Bring a friend or neighbor along

Cost: \$4 or students/seniors \$2

Join us in April & May

**4/19 Prayer Meeting, 4:30-6:00 pm
Covenant Presbyterian Church
5171 Jackson Road**

**5/2 Band of Brothers 9-11 am
Covenant Presbyterian Church
5171 Jackson Road**

**5/3 Prayer Meeting, 4:30-6:00 pm
Covenant Presbyterian Church
5171 Jackson Road**

**5/17 Prayer Meeting, 4:30-6:00 pm
Covenant Presbyterian Church
5171 Jackson Road**

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