

A Guide for Prayer Cells

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The prayer cell is being rediscovered today as one of the divinely ordained means of spiritual progress. Emphasizing especially the discipline of daily prayer for each member of the fellowship, these small Christian associations are multiplying around the world. The word "cell" has been applied to them as being indicative of the spontaneous nature of their origin and expansion. Some cells may concentrate upon a discipline other than prayer, such as Bible study or Christian service; but regardless of their particular interest, general aims are the same. Undoubtedly the resurgence of interest in this kind of communion is one of the great spiritual movements of our time.

The "cell" idea has been gaining momentum in the last twenty years. Led by such men as Samuel Shoemaker, Elton Trueblood, and others, it has been represented far and near. College students have been especially attracted to it, and thousands of cells have been formed on campuses across the country. One student group, inspired by the World Christian Conference in Oslo in 1948, organized "The Life Stream Foundation"; it publishes a small magazine to carry news of prayer groups around the world. A recent cell group conference for students at Ann Arbor, Michigan, attracted 234 representatives from 30 universities. Churches likewise have sensed the opportunity. In many local congregations, such as the notable Calvary Church (Episcopal) in New York City, cells have been organized throughout the parish. Now several of the larger denominations have adopted this policy as an official program of the church and are seeking to promote it on a national scale, the "Methodist Prayer Life Movement" headed by Thomas Carruth being the most aggressive example.

This movement is endowed with tremendous spiritual potential if it can escape the pitfalls of superficiality and irrelevance. Prayer cells can easily defeat their own purpose by becoming too ascetic or too self-sufficient. Moreover, there is the inherent tendency within small groups of this kind to become so subjective in analyzing their own problems that they lose

the sense of Christian responsibility. The call, for this reason, and particularly those specifically formed for prayer, must be thoroughly dedicated to Jesus Christ. It must be Christian in all its purpose or it should not exist. To maintain this principle, members of a prayer cell should be committed to the infallible authority of the Holy Scriptures and should express this faith in continuous Christian witness and service.

Among those motivated by a genuine Christian concern, who hunger for the intimate fellowship which the prayer cell provides, the real problem is not that they will misuse the ideal, but that they will not find it. Without any specific direction at this crucial point, many Christians are missing the privileges of a prayer cell because unaware of its potential. To meet this need of practical knowledge for busy people, as well as to stimulate interest in the creation of prayer cells on the Asbury campuses, *A Prayer Cell Guide* was recently published. It was not intended to be a rigid rule book, but only a guide to help interested persons get started in this discipline. In the shortest manner deemed expedient, it endeavors simply to answer some of the most elemental questions concerning the need and operation of a prayer cell.

(Copies of *A Prayer Cell Guide* may be secured from the Asbury Theological Seminary Book Store, Wilmore, Kentucky, at 10¢ each, or \$7.00 per hundred copies.)