

Pastors of Prayer

By Trey Kent



I pastor Northwest Fellowship, a mid-sized church in Austin, Texas, that we started in 1993. There's nothing exceptional about our church or city—except for prayer. Now that we see how a city can be changed by ordinary, humble pastors and Christians who are willing to obey the call of Acts 1:14 to unify around prayer—and to do it unceasingly—our city is being overtaken by the power of prayer. Of course, there's more to seeing your city changed, but prayer is where it all begins.

John Burke, pastor and bestselling author of *Imagine Heaven* and *No Perfect People Allowed*, says: “I’ve been around Austin for 40 years, and I’ve never seen such unity among churches, favor in our city, or impact for the gospel—and I believe this movement of unceasing prayer undergirds it all.”

The Austin story, comprised of normal people, normal pastors, normal churches—and an extraordinary God—is a 10-year history of God's grace through prayer. This is not a fad or a short-lived movement. Jesus is awakening His House of Prayer—the Church—in this hour. Here in Austin, we just experienced a decade of unceasing prayer that has forever changed my life, our family, our church, my ministry, and our city. We will never be the same.

The Unceasing Prayer Movement, a local church-based strategy, is spreading to cities and nations across the earth. Why? Because it is Jesus' heart. It is so simple and attainable. If your church sees Jesus as the answer to your city's problems, prayer can bring real and effective change.

These are the most exciting days to be alive! Our dream is to see Austin, Texas, become the most prayed-for city in America! It's also our dream that your city is transformed by unceasing prayer. It is so doable.

THE AUSTIN STORY

My part in this historic, decade-long prayer journey began with God speaking to me under a light pole in Austin, Texas, and culminated with confirmation during a night of worship and prayer in an upper room in Jerusalem, Israel. On February 18, 2008, my wife, Mary Anne, and I paused under that light pole while prayerwalking our neighborhood. In that moment, God spoke to me clearly about His desire for Austin to be covered in 24/7 prayer by area churches. I know it was God because I had never had such a thought. It landed with undeniable fire. It was a simple idea: 31 churches covering the city in 24/7 prayer with each church adopting one 24-hour day of prayer every month of the year.

That was it. It was a simple, reproducible, unifying, Jesus-exalting, God-sent idea to mobilize each church in Austin to be a praying church. After receiving this vision, I wondered about Scriptural support for the idea. Immediately I thought of 1 Thessalonians 5:17: "Pray without ceasing." I learned very quickly that no one person can pray without ceasing on his or her own; we need each other to pray 24/7. Through this mutual support, I believe every church in American can be a praying church.

We are thrilled to see God moving in unprecedented ways in our city. Austin has been covered in 24/7, unceasing prayer by area churches for more than 10 years. We have about 100 churches in the greater Austin area who have adopted one day of prayer for our city every month. We host quarterly prayer meetings that have hundreds and sometimes thousands of believers across denominational lines meeting together to worship, pray, unify, and cry out for Jesus to change our city. We have Caucasian, Hispanic, African-American, and Asian churches united in a prayer movement that has brought true unity to a once openly divided city. We have yet to “arrive,” but our city is more unified and transformed than I’ve seen it in the 25 years I’ve lived and pastored in Austin.

The vision for unceasing prayer in your city begins with a pastor or pastors. This was a shocking thought for our city. Very few pastors were leading their churches to be praying churches for the city. Most pastors didn’t see themselves as the key to a movement of prayer. Often, pastors delegate prayer to intercessors, prayer teams, and other prayer-driven ministries. Yet, this movement of prayer begins and ends with local church pastors who are the key to raising up and maintaining praying churches that will literally transform our cities.

Most pastors begin by mobilizing 24 people to adopt one hour of prayer, thus covering a full day of prayer. It’s the beauty of this simple prayer model! Every church, large or small, can adopt a half or a full day of prayer. This allows pastors to highlight the vital importance of prayer at least once a month and to continue the process of building a culture of prayer in their churches.

OVERCOMING SKEPTICISM

At our first Unceasing Prayer Pastors Luncheon in 2008, we

cast the vision for pastors and churches to adopt a day of prayer for our city in the coming year. Rick Randall, the pastor at Austin Cornerstone Church, stood up and said, "I don't think every church is to be a praying church like this, and I don't believe we are all gifted to be intercessors."

It was not one of our best moments in spreading the vision. We recovered from the comment and got at least a dozen churches to adopt a day. As Randall was leaving the meeting, his dear friend Pastor Geno Hildebrandt of Hope Chapel said he "guilted" Randall into involvement by suggesting, "Why don't you adopt 12 hours, a halfday of prayer, and we will adopt the other 12 hours. We will split our day of prayer." Randall begrudgingly agreed—and then the miracle began. As he led his church to pray for our city that half day a month, God began to ignite his heart and the church's heart!

Pastor Randall's story doesn't end there. He began leading his church in adopting a full day of prayer every month, but he also called his church to an even more radical pursuit of God. One day he called me and invited me to attend 24 hours of prayer at his church.

I wasn't sure what he meant because it didn't seem any different from our normal strategy. He patiently explained that his church had a slightly different plan. They invited their entire congregation to come to the building to pray together for 24 straight hours. No one was going to leave!

I went to that historic prayer gathering. Fifty-five of us stayed and prayed non-stop together for 24 hours. It not only changed me but revealed clearly what God can do with a resistant pastor who simply adopts a day of prayer for the city. Randall led his church through nine months of intense prayer. They had prayer meetings morning, noon, and night, praying for the lost to be saved and for believers to be salt and light. At the end of the nine-month season, around 300 people had come to Christ. The power of prayer was on display!

Pastor Randall joined our newly formed Unceasing Prayer Leadership Team in 2011. He is now spreading a passion for prayer into once untouched areas of the city of Austin. He is the senior chaplain for the Austin Police Department and is helping to bring unprecedented change as he serves our city and city leaders.

This is critically important, because right now, in your city, there are pastors who are prepared to lead their churches in 24/7 prayer for spiritual awakening. The goal is full-on revival for the city, driven by men and women who have laid down their agendas to unify for a greater move of God citywide. We don't believe the adage that "prayer is for some churches but not for others." We believe that when Jesus called His Church a house of prayer for all nations, He meant every church.

Order *City of Prayer* by Trey Kent and Kie Bowman

THE REST OF THE TEAM

Let me introduce you to the other five team members who joined Randall and me to lead the Unceasing Prayer Movement in Austin.

David Smith, the executive director of the Austin Baptist Association, joined us in 2011, and the three of us formed the nucleus of the original Unceasing Prayer Leadership Team. Dr. Smith serves 200 Southern Baptist churches in the area, and is a key unifier, team player, and powerful agent to spread the vision for unceasing prayer, both locally and beyond. He says this about his involvement:

The Unceasing Prayer Ministry in Austin that God birthed over 10 years ago has been one of the highlights of my ministry

here as the executive director of the Austin Baptist Association. As associational director, I am tasked with casting a vision for our association of churches that can only come about as we work together. In the case of unceasing prayer, it can't be accomplished as one church or even as one denomination.

It requires the Body of Christ to come together. Unceasing prayer is essential to the vitality of our relationship to the Lord and our ability to function in this world. Unceasing prayer is that continually ascending prayer that sees every aspect of life as an opportunity to commune with God.

Will Davis, senior pastor of Austin Christian Fellowship, leads six church campuses and has written extensively on prayer. Davis joined our team in 2014, bringing a wealth of knowledge and experience in prayer. He is a lifelong Austinite whose father has a significant legacy in the city through law and politics. Pastor Davis brings a relational equity in our city second to none. At a recent prayer gathering for leaders, Davis said, "PBS just did a documentary on Austin featuring South by Southwest and how Austin became weird. They missed that the real story of our city is how Austin became the most prayed-for city in America and how a new generation of leaders are rising up to change our city."

Kie Bowman, a national Southern Baptist leader and pastor of Hyde Park Baptist Church in Austin, joined the Unceasing Prayer team in 2014 when our city water source was at a historic low. You will read the full story later, but this crisis caused pastors to come together to host a citywide prayer meeting at Hyde Park Baptist. One thousand area believers gathered and cried out all evening for rain and revival.

Dr. Bowman not only hosted the prayer meeting, but became a key player in spreading a passion for God through personal

prayer, prayer meetings, and writing numerous books equipping believers to become more fruitful disciples. Bowman's passion for prayer and the prayer movement is unprecedented. He's also the co-author of this book.

Abraham Perez joined the Unceasing Prayer team in 2014. He is a national Hispanic leader who pastors Reconciliation Church in Austin, and equips pastors through his Healthy Pastors Grow ministry. Pastor Perez has done more to mobilize area Hispanic pastors toward unity and prayer than any other leader in our city. His church is serious about prayer; they have maintained two hours of corporate prayer, seven days a week for 12 years, and counting.

According to Perez, "Unceasing prayer has been the vehicle to unify pastors and churches in our city to intercede for revival. The movement has brought unity to many pastors who were isolated and doing church all by themselves. We have become a body and a team to intercede for our city."

Jordan Mkwanzazi, originally from Zimbabwe, is the senior pastor of Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in downtown Austin. He's a seasoned pastor with a deep heart for God and His people. We met Mkwanzazi shortly after the tragic Charleston, South Carolina, church shooting in 2015. After the death of nine African American believers who were attending a Bible study at Emmanuel AME Church, we were compelled to hold a prayer meeting in Austin at the exact time of the shooting one week after the murders occurred. Pastor Mkwanzazi graciously hosted our prayer meeting. With only a few days' notice, hundreds of area believers stood in solidarity to pray, unify, and worship Jesus together. This overflow crowd was a sign and a wonder to our city.

Shortly after this event, Mkwanzazi joined our team. He is doing a phenomenal job leading his church to build a culture of prayer. He explains their journey: "Metropolitan AME Church has shifted towards becoming a church that embraces a culture

of prayer. We have moved from Wednesday night prayer meetings to overnight prayer gatherings, to having every Monday morning intercessory prayer. Prayer has become the center stage of our ministry. We are evolving as a church into fearless, bold, and committed prayer warriors."

AN UNREALIZED OPPORTUNITY

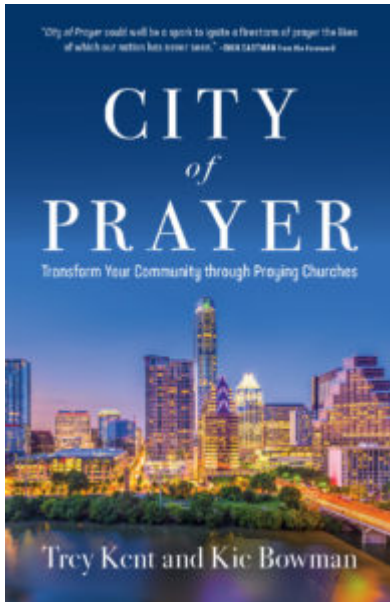
The list of Austin area pastors who have helped us pray more than 87,600 nonstop hours (24/7 for 10 years) for our city is literally in the hundreds! They include Bible churches, Methodist, non-denominational, Assembly of God, Southern Baptist, and on and on—all committed to Jesus transforming our city through praying for unity according to John 17 and revival in keeping with 2 Chronicles 7:14: "if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

In September 2017, Pastor Jim Cymbala of Brooklyn Tabernacle returned to Austin for a second time to lead pastors in a day of training and prayer. The day before the event, our Unceasing Prayer team, under Kie Bowman's leadership, invited national and citywide prayer leaders to attend a one-day round table discussing the prayer movement across America. We were blessed to have Ronnie Floyd, senior pastor of Cross Church and president of the National Day of Prayer; Dave Butts, chairman of the National Prayer Committee; and other key prayer leaders across America join us. It was an extraordinary time.

As I reflect on the event, one key message consistently rang true as leaders spoke: This is the season for senior pastors nationwide to rise up and lead their churches to become praying churches. This, we all agree, is not only the missing link but is the astounding opportunity awaiting us in our

great land!

Praying pastors who establish their churches as houses of prayer are leading the greatest army ever mobilized in world-history—the local church.



—TREY KENT was instrumental in launching the Unceasing Prayer Movement in Austin. This is taken from his book *City of Prayer*, which he co-authored with Kie Bowman. *City of Prayer* is available with multiple copy discounts at prayershop.org. It needs to be in the hands of every pastor, prayer leader and believer who desire to see their city transformed by the power of God!