

Praying Hyde—The Apostle of Prayer—The Man Who Never Sleeps



John Nelson Hyde

This is the story of a humble man—the son of a devout Presbyterian pastor from Illinois, by the name of John Nelson Hyde. It all began when John’s older brother, Edmund, heard his father fervently pray that God would send workers into the harvest. To that end, Edmund enrolled in the seminary, planning to be one of those harvesters. But it wasn’t long before he became ill, and his dream was cut short by his death. It was then that his brother, John, then caught the vision and studied to go to the mission field in Punjab, India.

During that time, there were nearly a million unbelievers in an area served by only five missionaries. His efforts required incredible patience because it was a painstakingly slow transition. After his first year on the field, he penned the following letter to his seminary.

Yesterday, eight low-caste persons were baptized at one of the villages. It seems a work of God in which man, even as an instrument, was used in a very small degree.

Pray for us. I learn to speak the language very, very slowly: can only talk a little in public or in conversation.”

Hyde was partially deaf, which no doubt added to his struggle to master the complex native languages. Though mission authorities tried to encourage him, they were frustrated when he spent more time studying his Bible than he did in language study. And rather than displaying the outgoing personality of a missionary, he seemed much more withdrawn and intensely private; not a good fit for a traditional mission worker. Over time, he did become somewhat fluent in the local language, but he never lost his passion for God’s Word. Faced with natives’ unveiled persecution and only a rare convert, he invited other missionaries to join him to intercede for a spiritual breakthrough in India. In fact, in 1899, his call to pray was so intense that he spent whole nights on his face before God. He wrote the following in a letter to his college:

Have felt led to pray for others this winter as never before. I never before knew what it was to work all day and then pray all night before God for another... In college or at parties at home, I used to keep such hours for myself, or pleasure, and can I not do as much for God and souls?

In 1904, a group made up of Indian converts and American missionaries led by John Hyde, united at Sialkot, (now known as Pakistan), for the first annual convention of the Punjab Prayer Union. Participants set aside a half-hour each day to pray for revival, and the result was a stunning anointing that fell upon them all. Each year thereafter the group gathered to fast and fervently pray for the lost. Hyde supervised the prayer sessions, and those involved were astonished at his vision, discernment and incredible burden for souls.

Then in 1908, Hyde was inspired to pray in the impossible—for the salvation of at least one convert, each day in India. And God answered with an enthusiastic *yes*—and by the end of the first year, 365 converts had been added to the kingdom. Then he began to pray for two souls a day, and as a result 800 responded to the gospel that year, and yet he wasn’t satisfied—he still wanted more.

When the 1910 convention gathered, those nearby were dumbfounded by Hyde's faith and the way he prayed, demanding, **"Give me souls, God, or I die!"** During that session, he shared his latest vision, that he was again doubling his goal—four souls a day and would accept no less. By then he had acquired the name "Praying Hyde," and revivals in major Indian metro areas sought to engage his prayer efforts. In fact, there was such a tremendous weight on his spirit when the numbers didn't add up, that he couldn't eat or sleep until he had prayed through, and felt God move in response. As a result, the numbers continued to multiply exponentially.

At one point when he was forty-five of age, his friends convinced him to consult a Calcutta physician about his quickly declining health. Travailing for years had clearly cost him dearly, but they were shocked when the doctor diagnosed him with a malignant brain tumor, which was ultimately responsible for his death.

Yet, Hyde lived for almost two more years, and during that time, he saw a wave of revival sweep India and the Punjab, to which no other could compare. When it became clear that he was going to die, he returned to his home in Carthage, Illinois, where, just before he left for heaven, he said, **"Shout the victory of Jesus Christ."**

Before his death, he wrote the following:

On the day of prayer, God gave me a new experience. I seemed to be away above our conflict here in the Punjab and I saw God's great battle in all India, and then away out beyond in China, Japan, and Africa. I saw how we had been thinking in narrow circles of our own countries and in our own denominations, and how God was now rapidly joining force to force and line to line, and all was beginning to be one great struggle. That, to me, means the great triumph of Christ. We must exercise the greatest care to be utterly obedient to Him who sees all the battlefield all the time. It is only He who can put each man in the place where his life can count for the most.

In the end, he spent countless dark nights, praying and weeping on the cold, bare floor, not sleeping or eating, interceding for souls, which came first, one a day, then two a day, until four and then eight souls were saved each day and baptized into the kingdom.

The burden to pray was so heavy that it could be felt by those who were nearby, who were similarly affected. Hyde's bed was rarely slept in, because he spent most nights groaning for souls on the floor, and as a result, the number of converts all over India grew by leaps and bounds.

After his death, the medical examiner was stunned to discover that his heart was no longer located to the left of midline, but was now located on the right, probably after lying on the hard, cold floor for so many years. **Some of his friends believed that he had prayed so hard that his heart had actually changed location!**

In the end, revival doesn't come because we talk about it, or are interested in it. It comes from a burning desire to see it happen and do whatever it takes to make it so.

Let's ask ourselves this question: "Do I burn for the salvation of the lost—burn for revival?" If no, why not?

"Give me souls, oh God, or I die!" –John Hyde, 1910, Sialkot Convention

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Steve and his wife Diane founded Refuge Ministries and a presence-driven publishing company Deeper Life Press. Steve is a regular contributor to many prophetic publications including the Elijah List, Spirit Fuel, and the Identity Network. His writings have been read worldwide by hundreds of thousands of people. He also has been interviewed by the Trinity Broadcasting Network and a few other TV programs. Steve's books, articles, and videos have touched countless lives around the world. The Porters reside near Rochester, NY.