

Cooper Green Men's Prayer Group



Closer to God as we Gather

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The Genesis of The Cooper-Green Men's Prayer Group

by John Yates

In 1972 James Cooper, a popular State Farm Insurance agent in Dahlonga, felt an urge to start a men's early morning prayer group. Cooper was a member of Dahlonga Baptist Church and, at that time, was a deacon of the church. He shared his ideas with Rev. Bob Green, who had been pastor of Dahlonga Baptist Church since 1969. Pastor Green encouraged Cooper to pursue his dream.

During the regular October 1972 monthly meeting of the deacons of DBC, James Cooper discussed the idea of a weekly men's morning prayer time. Motion was made by Jack Carpenter, with a second by Hoyt Robinson, and duly passed by the deacons to have the chairman, John Pearce, work with the DBC Brotherhood in following up with this idea. Deacons present and supporting this idea were Charles Wehunt, Walt Grindle, James Cooper, Price Bowen, Guy Wimpy, Bill Bellamy, Jack Carpenter, Hoyt Robinson, L.B. Freeman, Craig Poore, John Pearce and John Yates. Pastor Bob Green was also present and supported the idea.

At the next deacons' meeting, November 5, 1972, Chairman Pearce reported that the DBC Brotherhood also supported the idea of a weekly men's prayer meeting, and James Cooper was encouraged to "go with it".

The next historical fact I have been able to find was an invitation written by James Cooper and printed in the January 2, 1973 DBC Newsletter. "Men. Start the New Year off right. Be

at the Early Morning Prayer Service every Tuesday morning from 7:15-7:45. Come as you are, we have a great time as we fellowship and pray together. We have a different person each week to lead the service. The ones who have attended have been blessed and I am sure you will receive a blessing. What better way to start the day than to pray. We need you, and God can use you. See you Tuesday at 7:15." signed James Cooper.

Of the twelve deacons and pastor who were a part of this idea initiated and developed by James Cooper, only Charles Wehunt, Hoyt Robinson, John Pearce and John Yates are still alive. With exception of John Pearce, a member of Gainesville First Baptist Church, Wehunt, Robinson and Yates are active members of Dahlonega Baptist Church.

Now, I venture into unverified waters, always a chance to be mistaken. I remember in the early days of the Men's Prayer Meeting that the meeting was held in the basement of DBC. I was employed as principal of Lumpkin County High School for the years 1971-1986, at which time I retired. During those working years; I was not able to attend every Tuesday, as many others also could not, but I attended as often as possible and was always blessed.

The basement, or fellowship hall, of DBC in 1972 was an enigma. The electrical wiring of the basement was inadequate, to the extent that two coffee pots and a toaster oven using the same outlet would blow a fuse. The group, which was quite small in the early days, had to learn how to arrange the use of outlets to prevent disaster.

During the times I was able to attend; I recall Price Bowen, Walt Grindle, Raz Copeland, and Dean Will Young as usually being present. Sometimes I would see Jack Carpenter, Johnny Walker or John Pearce, but their jobs would often prevent their attendance. I'm sure there were several other men in that category. I remember that so often Raz Copeland, who delivered milk to the lunchrooms of all the public schools in

Lumpkin County, would bring to prayer meeting ½ pint cartons of chocolate and plain milk. What a blessing this humble man was!

The intent for men of all Christian faiths to be a part of this prayer group was always a part of James Cooper's dream. This slowly became a reality and the group grew. Cooper gave a report to the Church Council of DBC on January 19, 1975, two full years after the first meeting of the prayer group. His report is quoted here: "Men's Tuesday Morning Prayer Service - Some 35 men in our community have attended the service. Ten pastors of different denominations and leaders of various institutions have attended and participated. The Methodist pastor from London, Rev. Dobson, was impressed by the fellowship and spiritual inspiration."

For the record, James Lavonia Cooper died June 15, 1998. He was 77 years of age and had spent his last 37 years in Dahlonega. He grew up in Hall County and graduated from Lyman Hall High School. He served for a while in the U.S. Air Force and also played baseball. Many old timers still recall Lavonia Cooper playing semi-pro baseball for several years in Georgia, Florida and Virginia. Cooper also played for Owen-Osborn Mill in Gainesville and Dundee Mills in Griffin. He played out-field and sometimes pitched. Curt Moore, who lived in Dahlonega in the late 1990s and attended the prayer group regularly until he moved back to Gainesville, remembered playing semi-professional baseball with Cooper around 1959-64. Moore remembers when both he and Cooper interviewed for the same insurance job (All State) in Gainesville in 1960 and Moore was selected. Cooper then went to Dahlonega as State Farm Agent. Moore said that Cooper got the best job.

James Cooper was a friendly person who always had a smile and warm handshake ready for anyone and everyone. He and Lou, his lovely wife, were proud parents of Ann, Patsy and Jimmy. Patsy and Jimmy live nearby and Ann lives in South Carolina. Cooper's brother, William Buck Cooper, lives in

Lawrenceville and was helpful in providing information for this paper. Lou spent her last few years in a nursing home in Gainesville and died several years ago.

The men's prayer group continued to meet in the basement of the Dahlonega Baptist Church until 1987. The church had purchased the Whitmire home and property adjacent the church and converted a building which had been used as a warehouse into a fellowship hall. The men's prayer group moved into this facility, named the "Speer Center" in memory of John Speer, a former member of DBC. This facility was used by the group for its Tuesday morning gathering place until April, 2001. At that time a new Dahlonega Baptist Church building had been completed and its new Fellowship Hall became home for the group.

Shortly after James Cooper's death in 1998, the men's prayer group took action to name the group "Cooper Men's Prayer Group". This tribute to James Cooper's memory as the developer of this dream of his to have a men's group of Christian believers meet regularly on Tuesday mornings is a small reflection of the love we men of the group have for "Ole Cooper".

Cooper's quiet and unassuming leadership kept our group focused for more than 25 years. His gentle nurturing spirit kept the group growing and all who knew James Cooper continue to hold the memory of this humble Christian in high esteem.

We continue to meet and to hold dear this privilege and opportunity to gather, to fellowship, to pray, to listen to devotionals and testimonies. Our leadership continues. We are independent and yet we acknowledge our interdependence with each other and with God, our creator and redeemer. The mantle of leadership moves freely among us and around us. There are those who come very early to open the doors on Tuesday morning, to bring breakfast foods, to make coffee, to arrange tables and chairs, to greet others, to keep us up to date concerning needs of people locally and around the world, to col-

lect data and send email news to us, to preside, to lead our collective prayers, to get addresses and mail letters of support or sympathy to others, to introduce speakers or guests, and to come and pray. To keep a group this size focused and listening to God is no small task. First of all it is God's call to each of us to be there and to be used as God and as the group determines. All jobs in the leadership of our group are important. We give God the glory and the praise for the work that is being done. It is in this attitude that we honor the memory of those leaders of our past and are thankful for those who lead us now.

One of those quiet leaders who was such a great spiritual leader for so many of us during his role as pastor of Dahlonega Baptist Church from 1969 until his retirement in 1992 was Bob Green. He was always a part of the prayer group and became a regular attender after retirement until his death in October 2007.

Many men in the prayer group were nourished by his knowledge and led by his spirit of peace and love. After Bob Green's death, the group took action to add his name to the name of the Cooper Men's Prayer Group. We now respectfully call our selves the Cooper-Green Men's Prayer Group.

When members of Bob Green's family joined the group on a Tuesday morning in 2008 to hear the love and admiration the men had for Bob Green, there were 126 people in attendance. To the best of my memory, that is the largest number we have had in attendance.

A member who keeps a count of our attendance told me that the average attendance in 1996 was 14. Attendance grew to an average attendance in 2009 of 52 people. On January 11, 2010, this writer conducted a tally of the 51 men present, which confirmed that on that day the average age of those in attendance was 67.6 and the median age was 68. Also 62% of the men present indicated that they were retired.

The Cooper-Green Men's Prayer Group is all of this and yet is so much more. There is a list of over 100 men who have attended at one time or another. No one keeps roll and marks someone absent when not in attendance. However, all of us encourage, invite, and are concerned about those who are special to us in many ways. During those days when we met in the Speer Center, we bonded with a dear brother who was with us a short while, received love and encouragement from all, and died too soon in his life. The group collected money in his memory and bought Bibles to keep and have available when we meet. Years later we drafted one of us who was a song leader by profession to play his guitar and lead us in songs each Tuesday. The group collected money and purchased hymnals to be used each week for our singing.

What is it that causes 50 to 60 men to get up early enough to attend the Cooper-Green Men's Prayer Group every Tuesday? Ask 50 men who attend regularly why they come and you may get 50 different but similar answers. Hopefully, the dream of James Cooper and the history of this men's prayer group that has been represented in the previous paragraphs will suggest part of our answers.

Christian men of many denominations and various walks of life come together at 6:45 am on Tuesday mornings to fellowship with kindred spirits, have a cup of coffee, eat breakfast food, visit with old friends, make new friends, share testimonies and prayer needs, sing, pray, and listen to the Holy Spirit and to each other. That's why I come. My faith is strengthened, my compassion is enhanced, my awareness of the needs of others is increased, my own needs for prayer are met by the prayers of others, my love of God is lifted as I feel the love of my fellow man while we pray, and I am close to God as we gather.

**James Cooper's dream is my dream.
Thank you, "Coop".
Thank you, God.**

Necrology *of men who were a significant part of the Cooper-Green Prayer Group at one time during their lives.*

1979	Jack Carpenter	2012	Curt Moore
1979	Walt Grindle	2012	Derrick Darby
1979	Will Young	2012	Mike Pyott
1985	Price Bowen	2012	Lewis Wilcheck
1985	Raz Copeland	2013	Wayne Eubanks
1997	Jim King	2013	Ray Hughes
1998	James Cooper	2013	Fred Turner
1998	Leo Carver	2013	Larry Walton
2001	Robert Laird	2014	Ron Buchanan
2002	Jimmy Walden	2014	John Martin
2003	Rip Wingo	2015	Henry Byrd
2004	Rudy Myers	2015	Russ Zimmerman
2007	Virgil Beck	2016	Judson Batts
2007	Robert Green	2017	Ben Brown
2007	Kenneth Seabolt	2017	Bud Brown
2008	Harry Schachter	2017	Jewel Hood
2009	Bob Moseley	2017	Austin Meadows
2010	Walt Danchak	2018	Joe Wilson
2010	Forrest Lashley		
2010	Matthew Miller		
2010	G.L. Wigley		
2011	Eugene Elrod		
2011	Harold King		
2011	John Owen		
2011	Dan Turnbaugh		
2011	Johnny Walker		