

# "THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER"

## Acts 1:12-26

John Grisham is a lawyer who has written a string of novels, some of which have been turned into movies. Do you enjoy reading a great novel? If you do, then you would really enjoy reading through the book of Acts. In the first century, Luke the beloved physician, wrote the gospel of Luke and then he wrote the sequel which is called the book of Acts.

The details in the gospel and its sequel are fascinating . . .

- **Jesus had a miraculous ministry.**
- **Jesus died on the cross.**
- **Jesus was raised from the dead.**
- **Jesus appeared to His disciples.**
- **Jesus taught them about the kingdom.**
- **Jesus ascended back to heaven.**
- **Jesus promised that He is coming again.**

Jesus told the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit. That waiting period would turn out to be 10 days. What did they do while they waited? **They prayed!** Prayer played a significant role in the story of the church as recorded in the Book of Acts.

- **(Acts 4)** The believers prayed for courage to witness.
- **(Acts 9)** Saul of Tarsus prayed after his conversion.
- **(Acts 10)** Cornelius prayed that God would show him how to be saved.
- **(Acts 10)** Peter was praying when God instructed him to go share the gospel with Cornelius.
- **(Acts 12)** The believers prayed for Peter's deliverance from a death sentence.
- **(Acts 13)** The church at Antioch fasted and prayed before sending our missionaries.
- **(Acts 16)** At a prayer meeting in Philippi God opened Lydia's heart to believe in Jesus.
- **(Acts 27)** Paul prayed for God's blessing during the midst of ferocious storm.

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In almost every chapter in Acts you find a reference to prayer. This is no accident. The Holy Spirit emphasized the practice of prayer in the Christian church. Furthermore, He wants us to see that the church must . . .

## PRAY LIKE IT MATTERS!

Dr. Steve Gaines was a man of prayer. He wrote a book using this statement as its title. His words get to the heart of the matter . . .

**Do our prayers matter? Do they make a difference? I believe they do. They matter to God, to the circumstances and people around us, and to each of us as well. Things turn out differently when we pray than when we do not. God will do some things whether we pray or not. But there are some things God will do only if we pray. In many ways, our lives are the result of the prayers we've prayed as well as the ones we have not.** (Pray Like It Matters, *Introduction*, IX)

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That's true for us as individual Christians and it's certainly true for us corporately as the church. What are some characteristics of a church that actually puts prayer into practice and prays like it matters. First, there is . . .

## 1. THE PASSION OF A PRAYING CHURCH

**Acts 1:12–13...** Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. **13** When they had entered *the city*, they went up to the upper room where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James *the son of Alphaeus*, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas *the son of James*.

I would love to have heard the conversation the disciples were having as they made their way to Jerusalem. Surely, they were rehashing His post-resurrection appearances and His masterful teaching concerning the kingdom of God. The Lord's commission to take the gospel to the world still rang in their ears. The sight of Jesus ascending to heaven

made an indelible impression on their hearts. These men were radically transformed by the power of Jesus Christ; they would never be the same. Their passion for Jesus was off the charts!

Hey, if you are going to be a Christian who prays and an active participant in a church that prays, you must have a passion for Jesus. Without it, your prayer life will be like a yo-yo. So, how can we develop that kind of passion for our Lord? It starts with your daily walk with Him. I'm talking about reading the Word and praying on a consistent basis. The more time you spend with Him, the deeper your relationship with Him will become.

**In a church that prays like it matters, there is the passion of a praying church. Secondly, there is ...**

## **2. THE HARMONY OF A PRAYING CHURCH**

Jesus, now seated on the throne at the right hand of the Father, is the Head of the church He promised to build. What did He expect out of those first century believers?

**Acts 1:14...** These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

**"These all with one mind"**— This word means unanimous consent. It's a musical term that means to strike the same notes together.<sup>1</sup>

The resurrected and reigning Lord was smashing cultural norms in His new body—*the church*. In the Jewish temple, men never prayed with women. Now these believers were in the upper room praying with each other. Jesus was building His church into a vibrant, unified community of faith that would literally turn the world upside-down. This harmony is so important in the kingdom of God. It's something Jesus prayed for.

**John 17:11...** "I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 29.

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to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, *the name* which You have given Me, that they may be one even as *We are*.

I believe there's something else we need to see here and that is **the agreement in their prayer requests**. This group was not all over the map in their prayer concerns. Powerful prayer involves agreement among those who are praying. Maybe they were praying together for some of these things...

- **That they wouldn't grieve or quench the Spirit**
- **That God would soften the hearts of the Jews**
- **That hundreds even thousands would be saved**
- **That the Great Commission would be fulfilled**
- **That they would stand firm during persecution**

Here's our challenge . . .

## **PRAY LIKE IT MATTERS!**

**Here's the third characteristic of a church that practices prayer...**

### 3. THE DEVOTION OF A PRAYING CHURCH

Look at verse 14 again. Notice that phrase "continually devoting." It means to endure and to persist in something. The word carries the idea of "*obstinate determination.*" It means that when they prayed, they were deadly serious about it, and nothing could stop them. This principle is sprinkled throughout the New Testament . . .

**Colossians 4:2**... Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with *an attitude of thanksgiving.*

**Romans 12:10–13**... *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.*

During the Apollo missions to the moon, the lunar capsules were off course more than 90% of the time. Yet, through continual communication with mission

control, they were able to make the necessary corrections.

Many times, the church can get off course also. By devoting ourselves to prayer we can make course corrections so we can accomplish what our Lord wants us to accomplish. Billy Graham said that there are 3 secrets to successful ministry—*PRAY, PRAY, PRAY*. That's the practice of prayer!

**We've looked at three characteristics of a praying church—the passion of a praying church, the harmony of a praying church, and the devotion of a praying church. Here's the final characteristic...**

#### **4. THE CONFIDENCE OF A PRAYING CHURCH**

Prayer played a significant role in the development of the church. I want you to see that the believers prayed for guidance in making a crucial decision—who would take the place of Judas (Acts 1:15–26).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 404.

The Lord Jesus was no longer with them to give them personal directions, but they had the Word of God and prayer. In fact, the Word of God and prayer formed the foundation for the ministry of the church as recorded in the Book of Acts (**Acts 6:4**).<sup>3</sup> Focus on verses 23-26...

**Acts 1:23–26... So they put forward two men, Joseph called Barsabbas (who was also called Justus), and Matthias. 24 And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen 25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place." 26 And they drew lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.**

The believers prayed to Jesus for the first time. They desperately needed His guidance. Listen, Jesus chose Matthias just as He had chosen the other 11 apostles. Oh, what confidence they had in the Lord

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<sup>3</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 405.

Jesus! And, based on His earlier word to them, why shouldn't they?

**John 14:12–14...** "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do; because I go to the Father. **13** "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14** "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*."

We can have the same kind of confidence the early church had in the upper room.

## CONCLUSION

### PRAY LIKE IT MATTERS!

Today we have looked carefully at the early church and we have discovered 4 key characteristics of a church that practiced prayer. They include...

**1. THE PASSION OF A PRAYING CHURCH**

**2. THE HARMONY OF A PRAYING CHURCH**

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### 3. THE DEVOTION OF A PRAYING CHURCH

### 4. THE CONFIDENCE OF A PRAYING CHURCH

Will you devote yourself to prayer and to joining other members of this body in specific prayer for the Lord's will concerning who should be on the Pastor Search Team?

These men and women in the upper room had turned from their sin and placed their faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross for their sins and rose from the dead that they might be justified before the Father. **Some of you need to pray and ask Jesus to forgive you and to change your life.** Here's a promise you can count on...

**Romans 10:13... for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."**

## SEEKING THE FACE OF GOD IN PRAYER

Today, we're going to ask the Lord to show us who He, the Head of the church, wants to serve on the Pastor Search Team.

**INSTRUCTIONS**—As you consider who to nominate, keep this in mind. Church members who are 18 years old and older can serve on the Pastor Search Team. This includes deacons. However, ministerial staff (Pastors and Directors) and their spouses are not eligible to serve on the PST.

- **If you are physically able, will you turn around and get on your knees.**
- **You can come to the altar if you prefer to pray here.**
- **Or you can simply sit in your seat and pray.**

I'm going to give you specific, biblical prayer requests so we can all *pray in agreement* as the early church did.

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**1 John 1:9... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Ask the Lord to convict you of any sin that is grieving and quenching the indwelling Holy Spirit.

**Matthew 6:33... "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."**

Ask the Lord to remove selfish desires and to help us seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.

**Romans 12:1–2... Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship.* 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.**

Ask the Lord to renew our minds and to lock us into the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

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**Proverbs 3:5–6... Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.**

Ask the Lord to help us trust Him with all our heart and to not lean on our own understanding.

**1 Corinthians 1:10... Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.**

Ask the Lord to create and maintain supernatural unity in the Body of Christ here at CFBC.

**Acts 1:24–25... And they prayed and said, "You, Lord, who know the hearts of all men, show which one of these two You have chosen 25 to occupy this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."**

Ask the Lord to lead us to nominate those whom He desires to serve on the Pastor Search Team.

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**Colossians 1:9... For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.**

Ask the Lord to give the deacon screening committee (Ed Reed, Gil Gunn, Chris Flood, Jerry Horn, and Matt Payne) the knowledge of His will with all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

**Matthew 7:7... "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."**

Ask the Lord to place the 9 people He wants to serve on the Pastor Search Team along with the 2 alternates.

**Colossians 3:17... Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.**

Ask the Lord to fill us with gratitude for accomplishing His will through us today!

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