

Introduction:

Regrettably few churches today know or truly believe in the power of God or the importance of prayer. I recognize that is a very strong statement. Yet I believe it is true. I will repeat it for you. Regrettably few churches today know or truly believe in the power of God. Regrettably few churches today know or truly believe in the importance of prayer. Allow me to demonstrate my reason for believing this statement. I have visited numerous congregations and I am certain that you have as well. In general, would you not agree that most congregations devote more time to making announcements than to praying? I can remember a variety of conversations I have had with Christians about corporate prayer. I have been told that the first prayer is to be an “opening prayer.” It should not be long but should simply open the service and ask God’s blessing on our worship. Of course, the prayers during the Lord’s Supper and contribution should not wander about hitting every topic; they should just focus on the Supper and the collection. Finally, the closing prayer is supposed to be just that—a closing prayer. It should not take much time. It should thank God for the time of worship, ask Him to bless us as we leave and then send us on our way. In all of this, I am told we are to keep in mind the elderly and the families with small children, not to mention our television trained attention spans that cannot follow along with lengthy prayers. I have heard all of this said. Regrettably, I have said some of it. Then it occurred to me, now that we have whittled down our usual prayer times in the corporate worship, when does the congregation ever pray together just to be devoted to prayer?

Acts 11:21 expresses exactly why the Antioch church had success—“The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” We will only have success in the Lord’s work to the extent that the Lord’s hand is with us. The Lord’s hand will only be with us to the extent that we pray. Remember, our God can do exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think (**Ephesians 3:20**). But that means we better think and ask. We often say, as we look back at the New Testament churches, that we can be what they were and accomplish what they accomplished, if we simply do what they did. What did they do? They prayed. So must we. From **Acts** we learn if our leaders are given to prayer and the congregation continues steadfastly in prayer, then God will work through us and our prayers.

Discussion:

- I. Leaders must be given to prayer.
 - A. *Prioritize Prayer.* Picture the scene of **Acts 6:1**. Satan had planted the seeds for division. Whether through intent or accidental oversight, native Hebrew widows were being cared for but Hellenistic widows were not. These widows had no means of support. If the church did not take care of them, they went hungry. The Hellenists brought a complaint to the apostles about this apparent racial divide. Look at the apostles’ answer in **Acts 6:2-4**. The paraphrase is, “Pick some men from the congregation to deal with this. We do not have time. We are too busy praying and ministering the word.” Whoa! Can you imagine what would happen if our leaders said they did not have time to make sure our widows were fed because they had so much praying to do? That is the kind of priority the apostles placed on prayer. Leaders, what kind of priority do you place on prayer? Are there things you just can’t do because you have to pray instead? Or does it work the other way around, are you doing so much that you rarely have time to pray? Make prayer a priority.
 - B. *Pray Daily.* In **Acts 3:1**, the text says, “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.” When Luke called this the hour of prayer, I have no doubt he was making reference to Jewish custom. However, by so designating the ninth hour, he implied a major point about leaders and prayer. These men had prayers scheduled daily. Prayer was not something they waited for Sunday to do. It was not something they occasionally did whenever they met together. They prayed daily.

- C. *Pray With Other Leaders.* Another interesting aspect of **Acts 3:1** is that Peter and John, both apostles, were going to pray together. I have no doubt that each of the leaders of this congregation spends time praying. My question is how much time do we spend praying together? Peter and John clearly had a habit of prayer and of praying together. Do we?
 - D. *Praying For Every Aspect of the Work.* When the Christians needed boldness to teach in the face of persecution, the apostles prayed (**Acts 4:23-30**). When the men were appointed to help serve the widows in **Acts 6:6**, the apostles prayed. When Paul and Barnabas were separated out to go on their missionary journey, the church's leaders prayed (**Acts 13:3**). Prayer was how the early churches' leaders faced every problem and started every work. How much time do we spend as leaders of the church praying regarding the work we are doing? Do we pray for our Bible classes? Do we pray for our Gospel meetings? Do we pray for our regular assemblies? Do we pray for our evangelism?
 - E. *Praying Whenever Together.* In **Acts 20**, Paul met with the Ephesian elders. They had not gathered specifically to pray. They had gathered because Paul was passing near by and they wanted to see him again. Before they departed in **Acts 20:36** they prayed together. What a great prayer example of church leaders. How many times do leaders get together? Perhaps we get together for business meetings or just for supper. When we get together do we take the time to pray? I mean really pray, not just an obligatory open and close the meeting prayer. I mean devoting ourselves to prayer because we are together with other church leaders. This needs to become a habit if the congregation will be devoted to prayer.
- II. Congregations must continue steadfastly in prayer.
- A. *Prioritize Prayer.* We have already noted that our leaders must have a prayer priority. But they do not do our praying for us. According to **Acts 2:42**, the Jerusalem church continued steadfastly in prayer. Prayer must be a priority in this congregation. I fear that even our own teaching throughout the years has demonstrated our lack of devotion to prayer. How many sermons have been preached on the work of the local congregation? How many times have we said and heard that our work is to evangelize, to edify and to provide benevolence for the saints? How many times have we overlooked prayer as the work of the church? We must not overlook prayer. We must view it as our greatest work. We should begin every aspect of our work with prayer. We should carry on with prayer. We should conclude it with prayer.
 - B. *Pray Congregationally.* We should pray together as a congregation. In **Acts 1:14-15**, before the day of Pentecost, the 120 believers continued with one accord in prayer. Combining **Acts 2:42** and **46**, we learn that the Jerusalem church also prayed together as a congregation. When it is all said and done over a week long period how much time do you think we as a congregation spend praying together? Do you think we get 30 minutes? 25? 20? Do you think we might get even 15 minutes? Would that rank us with Jerusalem as continuing steadfastly in prayer? What would any one of us do if one of our corporate prayers lasted for more than 5 minutes? I know what I have done in the past and I regret it. I have spent a good deal of the prayer wondering when the guy would get done, letting my mind wander to my sermon, my kids, my lunch. Then on the way home complained about old brother so-and-so who always takes up part of my preaching time with his prayers. I am not saying that all of our corporate prayers need to be long. But I do think we need to pray more as a congregation. Perhaps, we should extend our concept of assembly from one hour to an hour and a half and add in a few more prayers. Maybe we should take at least one service a month and devote it to praying. Whatever we do, we need to make sure we pray together as a congregation.
 - C. *Pray Individually.* In **Acts 16:25**, Paul and Silas were imprisoned. What were they doing? Praying. While we need to pray together as a congregation, we must also make sure we pray as individual members of the congregation. We must never think that our prayer lives are covered because we prayed in our assemblies. **1 Thessalonians 5:17** says we must pray without ceasing. It must be our constant and continual habit. But in this lesson, we are not just talking about our personal prayer lives. We are talking about our prayer lives as members of this congregation. As individuals, we need to pray for the work of this congregation. We need to pray for our Bible classes, our worship assemblies, our forms of evangelism and outreach. We need to pray for our elders. We need to pray for our deacons. We need to pray for our evangelist. We

need to pray for our Bible class teachers. We need to pray for the husbands in this congregation. We need to pray for the wives in this congregation. We need to pray for the parents in this congregation. We need to pray for the grandparents in this congregation. We need to pray for the children in this congregation. We need to pray for everything that impacts this congregation and its members. Take out the directory and work your way through it page by page and pray for every member of the congregation. When you know specific needs, mention them. When you do not, pray for those needs we all have—wisdom, knowledge, guidance, courage, strength, etc. But whatever you do—Pray! Do not tell everyone what you are doing; just pray (**Matthew 6:5-6**).

- D. *Pray from House to House*. One of the most often overlooked forums for prayer is in small groups. Christians getting together to pray in one another's homes. In **Acts 2:47**, the Jerusalem Christians gathered from house to house praising God. In **Acts 12:12**, Mary, the mother of John Mark, had a group of Christians in her home praying for Peter. This prayer is amazing because the implications of the text are that this was a late night, perhaps all night, session of prayer. James had already been executed and it looked like Peter would be next. They had prayed all week and still Peter was scheduled to be executed the following morning. Therefore, Christians gathered in groups to pray. How often do we get together with other Christians to pray? Do we pray with each other any more than just a quick mealtime blessing when we get together to do that all important work of eating? Some people will have Bible studies in their homes. Others will have singings. Perhaps we should start having prayings, in which we get a small group together just to pray. Perhaps we should take time whenever we are together with Christians to pray for a few minutes, for one another and for the congregation in which we jointly participate. Whatever we do, we need to spend time praying with one another.

III. The Father will respond to our prayers.

- A. Because the Christians were devoted to praying and praising God, **Acts 2:47** says the Lord was adding daily to the church. Do you think the prayers of the early Christians had anything to do with this? I think it certainly did.
- B. Because the Christians prayed, God strengthened and emboldened the early Christians to proclaim His word (**Acts 4:31**). Do not get so bogged down in the miraculous demonstration God gave them. God does not have to perform a miracle to embolden us. God is with us when we pray and God will strengthen us when we pray.
- C. When the apostles appointed the seven men to take care of the widows in Jerusalem, they prayed (**Acts 6:6-7**). The text immediately says, "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem." The church was faced with possible division, but because prayer was the backbone of their work, God granted them multiplication.
- D. **Acts 12:5** specifically explains that the church was praying for Peter. What happened? In **vss. 7-10**, the angel of the Lord brought Peter deliverance. What joy the disciples experienced because they prayed.

Conclusion:

Remember one of our key passages—**Ephesians 3:20-21**. God can do exceedingly, abundantly, above all we ask or think by the power working through us. God will do beyond all we ask or think. But we must ask. When God's people pray, God works. We must ask the very difficult question. As a congregation, have we been devoted to prayer? If we have, then we must not grow weary but maintain our vigilance. If, however, we have not, what must we do to be devoted to prayer? Where do we need to grow? Let's grow there. Let's glorify God by devoting ourselves to prayer.