

CONNECTED TOGETHER

Series: Plugged into Prayer

Selected Scriptures from Acts

Chadron Berean Church

In my office I have one electrical outlet. With one outlet obviously you can usually only plug in two devices like a laptop and the church phone. Thankfully my outlet has four but even that's not enough at times for all the gadgets these days. But that's why they make power strips. You can get more done at once. You can plug in several devices at once. Well in this "Plugged In" sermon series we've been talking about reconnecting with God through prayer, but mostly individually. Our theme verse is Matthew 6:6 which teaches us to spend time *alone* with God in prayer. But we should also make it a point to pray *with* each other. So that's kind of the mindset today: more along the lines of a power strip than a single outlet.

To do that we're going to visit the encouraging book of Acts, learning from the nascent (or newborn) church how to pray. And I like to use the term "nascent" or "newborn" church rather than "early church" because most people consider anything before AD 325 as the "early church." But when I say nascent, think of the church while the apostles were still alive, from Acts 2 (May 24, 33) to the death of John in the 90's. Prayer is mentioned 31 times in Acts and in 20 of the 28 chapters. What's interesting is that it is almost always corporate or involving more than one person. Luke, the author, characterizes the nascent church as *a people of prayer*. And today's sermon is going to be a bit different. We aren't going to walk through a text. We're going to fly over a few texts, not getting into the details too much. We want to get an aerial view of what the prayer life of the nascent church was like and learn from their example. So please turn in your Bibles with me to **Acts 1:12-14**.

I. **THE CHURCH CONTINUALLY DEVOTED TO PRAYER. (Acts 1:12-14)**

12 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. 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.

So this is right after Jesus' ascension. Jesus has returned to heaven and He instructs them to wait for the Holy Spirit who will arrive and inaugurate the New Covenant, applying the blessed spiritual aspects of the New Covenant to their lives. They will be sealed with the Spirit and empowered by Him for gospel ministry (1:8). So they return from the Mt. of Olives to the upper room—probably the same upper room where they celebrated Passover the night of Jesus' arrest—and they're just there praying. Acts 1:15 tells us that about 120 of them are with one mind "***continually devoting***

themselves to prayer.” The word “devoting” has the idea of ongoing persistence or persevering in something.¹ So it’s a prayer meeting for who knows how long! I have no doubt that like we read last week in Luke 11:13, they were expectantly praying for this outpouring of the Holy Spirit based on Jesus’ comments and OT prophecy. And it’s during this prayer time that they think, Hey, we need another disciples to replace Judas! So verse 24 says they pray about this and seek God’s guidance in that and Matthias is chosen. The point I want to make is that the church is given wisdom and guidance through prayer here.

The church is wiser through prayer.

There’s a similar situation in **Acts 6:1-7** where some people start to be overlooked in serving meals. There is another need in the church for more leaders. So what they do, is they appoint other godly men so that the apostles can continue to devote themselves to the Word and to prayer. Because of this wise response, the church continues to grow. These are wonderful pictures of a church seeking wise counsel from God and seeking His will together through prayer.

II. THE CHURCH STILL DEVOTED TO PRAYER. (Acts 2:42-47)

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

So this text is describing the internal state of the church for the several weeks or months following the Spirit’s arrival. At this point, it’s still a Jewish church. They’re still in Jerusalem. They’re all in amazement at the things God is doing among them. God is making it unmistakably clear that He is with this new movement called the church by the way He authenticates the apostles and their teaching with signs and wonders. And the picture again is something that I think deep down we all long for—an ideal, healthy, and vibrant community. They’re **learning** together, enjoying each other’s **fellowship, breaking bread** (eating meals and taking communion together) and **praying** together. The word for **fellowship** here is the Greek word *koinonia*. It’s a special word that signifies complete **oneness or doing life together**. At times the word was used to describe the **mutuality** between husband and wife.²

You see this fellowship particularly cared for one another. We talked about this more in our recent study of Acts, but this was not socialism. There were a lot of pilgrims in town for Pentecost who had no place to stay, and people were voluntarily meeting the needs of everyone present. People didn’t want to leave! But the care is no doubt due in part to their praying together. *Everything they*

did was bathed in prayer and it brought them together. And that unity was attractive to outsiders. Prayer has a way of building and fostering unity among churches.

The church is unified through prayer.

You know, when we went through *the Lord's prayer* a few weeks ago, I left out the corporate nature of that prayer because I knew we'd get to it. That prayer is located within the Sermon on the Mount teaching series of Jesus. Well, throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches using singular pronouns. He addresses individuals. But when He starts to talk about prayer, He switches to plural pronouns. It's "*Our Father in heaven... Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil.*" It's a corporate prayer. It's a good reminder we're made to pray together.

As Christians, we don't live in isolation—at least we don't have too. Even if our own family ostracizes us and the world hates us and our friends distance themselves from us, we always have each other. And that's something that will last throughout all of eternity.³ So we lean on God together through prayer, praying for and with each other, being unified as needs become known and are met. Praying together draws us closer together and removes obstacles in our relationships. **To pray for one another is to love our neighbor with the highest charity.** One man said, "He loves me best who loves me in his prayers."⁴ Praying for someone is an expression of Christlike love. **To pray for one another is to be like Jesus,** our High Priest, who bears the names of people before the Father. Prayer is a ministry of the believer-priest, interceding for each other before the throne of God. The third passage we want to visit is **Acts 4:23-31**.

III. THE CHURCH PRAYING WITH ONE ACCORD. (Acts 4:23-31)

As we come to this text, note that persecution has begun. Peter and John were arrested and threatened to never speak or teach in the name of Jesus again.

23 When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. 24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, 25 who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? 26 'The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.' 27 For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. 29 And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, 30 while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.

So again, just another miraculous account with this early church, God confirming His presence with this new movement. When Peter and John are released, they **lift their voices to God in one accord**. No, that doesn't mean they were praying in a Honda. It means they prayed a corporate prayer. And notice how they acknowledge first God's sovereignty in this situation. He's the maker of heaven and earth. They address their Father in heaven. He's the One who predestined Christ's crucifixion to occur. In other words, it wasn't an accident. Having this sovereign trust in God, it comes out in their prayers. They don't pray, "Lord, make the persecution stop" or "keep us safe." There's nothing wrong with that prayer (Lord, protect us from evil), but they acknowledge now that more important than their self-preservation is God's Word being preached. They ask God to, *take note of the threats and to grant them boldness*. It's one of the most powerful prayers in the Bible. And it's a prayer God honored with a holy earthquake. The principle here is that:

The church is bolder through prayer.

They're granted boldness in the face of opposition to keep doing God's will no matter what. It's a good reminder that sometimes opportunity comes with opposition. Whenever I read this portion of Scripture I think of this meme I saw years ago where there are ordinary cats walking into a prayer room but they come out as lions. Prayer makes us bold because we've committing ourselves and our ministry to the Lord. We trust He is with us. Well, our final text is **Acts 13:1-3**.

IV. THE CHURCH WORSHIPPING THROUGH PRAYER. (Acts 13:1-3)

13 Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

So here, the church has expanded. It's now reaching into Gentile territories as a result of God's spontaneous activity. But the church is becoming less spontaneous and more organized and intentional about outreach.⁵ Jerusalem is still the mother church but the Antioch church in Syria is now the missionary hub. Paul and Barnabas have been there for a year at least and they are **still fervent in worship and mission**. The church leaders are quote, "*ministering to the Lord and fasting.*" They're worshipping, singing praises, praying and fasting. It's a time of spiritual focus on the Lord. And it's during this service of worship that they sense God calling Paul and Barnabas to a new work beyond their own church walls and city walls.

I love this because there's so many pastors, church leaders, and Christian organizations out there who settle in and get comfortable. They build a church but forget that we build churches not just to go to for worship but so that people are trained and sent out to plant more churches. There are also pastors who have their engines are idling. Their fire is dim, burning embers. They've lost the urgency. They're just getting by Sunday after Sunday. They're not leading diligently anymore. They've lost the drive and the blessing of following the Lord. These church leaders weren't letting

that happen to them! Fifteen years into the church's mission, they're still fervent in prayer, seeking the Lord and the direction He's calling them. The principle here is that:

The church is mobilized through prayer.

Jesus said to beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers. This passage is a good reminder for us of the nature of ministry. It's always changing. You bring on new people and praise the Lord for that. But then you also see God call people elsewhere. The moment you think you have everything buckled down in a ministry is the moment someone leaves or God calls them somewhere else (as Antioch experience). It's just the way it is, and we should be used to that, especially in a college town like ours with people coming and going. We should also be available, ready to step up and serve. We need new people to step up and serve all the time.

Well, we don't have time to go through all the passages on prayer in Acts, but there are a few more in your notes here if you want to check those out.

- In Acts 7 Stephen prays for the forgiveness of those who are killing him (7:59-60).
- In Acts 8, Peter and John pray for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit (8:14-15).
- In Acts 10, Cornelius, a Gentile, is said to pray continuously to the Lord and God sends the gospel his way (10:1-8). And God gives Peter a vision of salvation for the Gentiles during his noon prayer regimen (10:9-23) breaking his prejudice and limited view of God.
- In Acts 12, the church prays for Peter's deliverance from jail and God answers (12:1-5).
- In Acts 13:1-3, the church fasts and prays for God to multiply His work. Paul and Barnabas appoint elders and commit them to the Lord through prayer (14:23).
- In Acts 16, Paul and Silas pray together in jail and God does His thing again (16:25).
- In Acts 20, Paul kneels with the Ephesian elders on the beach to pray for the church there (20:36).
- In Acts 27, Paul, Luke, and the crew pray together as they fear shipwreck and everyone understands that Paul's God save them in response to his prayer (27:29).

What we see is that all throughout the book of Acts, the church is seen moving forward on its knees as they depend upon God *together*. They experience God together in ways they never would on their own. Prayer is the heartbeat of this newborn church. For them, prayer is an indispensable pillar they could not live without. I read somewhere that be prayerless as a church would be spiritual suicide. To be prayerless is to be powerless. If we don't pray, we're like a power strip that isn't even plugged in. But when a church prays, they are wise, unified, bold, and effective. They stay on task, on mission. We're energized to live out the Christian life self-sacrificially.

So let's learn from them. Let's be known for being a people of prayer. I don't know about you, but I want to be among a people that prays. Again, that doesn't mean we have to be prayer giants with polished prayers. For heaven's sake, that's why God gives us the Holy Spirit—to help us pray when we don't know how! The last thing I want us to take away from this series is that we have to pray perfectly or sound eloquent in our prayers. We won't pray if we think we have to pray perfectly. We can pray like children to a Father who wants to listen. We cry out to Him. We pour

out our hearts as we seek His face. Think again about the disciples in Acts 1. These weren't spiritual giants. They were novices. They were normal people. The elders and the scribes called them are untrained and unlearned men (4:13). Their power to live for Christ and advance the gospel came not through self-determination, skill sets, or spiritual elitism, but through dependence upon God in prayer. They prayed and God answered!

After last week's service, someone came up to me and shared a story about corporate prayer. Story has it that during one Sunday morning worship service a young boy was "acting up." The parents did their best to maintain some sense of order in the pew but were clearly losing the battle. Finally, the father picked the little boy up to leave the worship center and have a "talk" with him. But as the father carried him out of the worship center the little boy was crying out loudly to the whole congregation, "*Pray for me! Pray for me!*" That young man knew the power of corporate prayer. I thought that was pretty good, but it also teaches us some truth. We need each other. We need to pray with and for each other.

That's why we're going to open our doors on Tuesday evening, August 8th. We're going to have an old-fashioned prayer meeting from 7-8pm. We're going to pray for our church as we enter into the fall kickoff with all of these ministries and outreaches in our community. Everyone is welcome.

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 149.

² *Ibid.*, 150.

³ John Onwuchekwa, *Prayer: How Praying Together Shapes the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018),

62.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵ Bock, *Acts*, 437.