

THE CHURCH AT PRAYER (1)

Devoted to Prayer

A. Introduction

1. Acts 2:42 is one of the most challenging verses in the whole Bible.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." (Acts 2:42)

The early church was devoted.

They were focused, determined, dedicated, driven, single-minded, and whole-hearted towards praying.

...and to prayer.

2. Are we a local church which is devoted to prayer?

"In 1866 Spurgeon instituted daily prayer meetings at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London at 7 in the morning and again 7.30 each evening."

"At seven, we shall hold a prayer meeting, at which we trust you will make a point of being present yourself, and it will greatly cheer us if you will bring a party of friends with you. It would be a hopeful beginning if the house could be filled at this meeting by ourselves, just as on former occasions it has been filled by the United Churches. As perhaps your friends will be more willing to come if assured of getting in, we shall issue tickets, which you can obtain on application at the close of the usual services." (Sword & Trowel, February 1866)

"Five young college students were spending a Sunday in London, so they went to hear the famed C.H. Spurgeon preach. While waiting for the doors to open, the students were greeted by a man who asked, "Gentlemen, let me show you around. Would you like to see the heating plant of this church?" They were not particularly interested, for it was a hot day in July. But they didn't want to offend the stranger, so they consented. The young men were taken down a stairway, a door was quietly opened, and their guide whispered, "This is our heating plant." Surprised the students saw 700 people bowed in prayer, seeking a blessing on the service that was soon to begin in the auditorium above. Softly closing the door, the gentlemen then introduced himself. It was none other than Charles Spurgeon."

The aim of this series is not to make us feel depressed or guilty that we are not devoted to prayer when compared to the early church or a large church in Victorian Britain.

The aim of this series is to say to us, "Keep going!"

"Now he told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not give up." (Luke 18:1)

After the encouragements in our prayer life as a local church over the last 18 months there is a danger, we might lose momentum, and the devotion to prayer which we have had.

Our devotedness to prayer needs to be stirred up.

3. Remember that to pray is an incredible privilege.

We can speak to the Father who loves us, cares for us, is concerned for us, wants what is best for us, knows what we need, and who loves to hear us tell Him about our joys and struggles and fears and...

We can speak to the God who hears and answers.

"This is the confidence we have before him: If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked of him." (1 John 5:14-15)

4. What does it mean to be a church devoted to prayer?

B. Individuals who are devoted to praying privately

1. Following Jesus' words.

"But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Matthew 6:6)

2. Following Jesus' example.

"After dismissing the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. Well into the night, he was there alone." (Matthew 14:23)

"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he got up, went out, and made his way to a deserted place; and there he was praying." (Mark 1:35)

3. How do we show that we are devoted to praying privately?

Closet prayer – daily prayer.

Constant prayer – prayer throughout the day.

4. Are you devoted to praying privately?

C. Individuals who are devoted to praying together.

1. Following the commands to the church.

"Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:19-20)

"Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:18)

"Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

2. Following the example of the church.

i) The people of Israel prayed together.

"After a long time, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned because of their difficult labour, they cried out, and their cry for help because of the difficult labour ascended to God." (Exodus 2:23)

"The people believed, and when they heard that the LORD had paid attention to them and that he had seen their misery, they knelt low and worshiped." (Exodus 4:31)

"Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD. They said: I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted; he has thrown the horse and its rider into the sea." (Exodus 15:1)

"Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the entire congregation of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. He said: LORD God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below, who keeps the gracious covenant with your servants who walk before you with all their heart. You have kept what you promised to your servant, my father David. You spoke directly to him and you fulfilled your promise by your power as it is today." (1 Kings 8:22-24)

"I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. I will boast in the LORD; the humble will hear and be glad. Proclaim the LORD's greatness with me; let us exalt his name together." (Psalm 34:1-3)

ii) The first Christians prayed together.

"Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem—a Sabbath day's journey away. When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers." (Acts 1:12-14)

"When the day of Pentecost had arrived, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like that of a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were staying. They saw tongues like flames of fire that separated and rested on each one of them. Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them." (Acts 2:1-4)

"After they were released, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together to God and said, "Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them... When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly." (Acts 4:23-24, 31)

"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was praying fervently to God for him... As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was called Mark, where many had assembled and were praying." (Acts 12:5, 12)

"Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, a close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after they had fasted, prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them off." (Acts 13:1-3)

"On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there. A God-fearing woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, was listening. The Lord opened her heart to respond to what Paul was saying. After she and her household were baptized, she urged us, "If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us." (Acts 16:13-15)

"About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the jail were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains came loose." (Acts 16:25-26)

"After he said this, he knelt down and prayed with all of them." (Acts 20:36)

"When our time had come to an end, we left to continue our journey, while all of them, with their wives and children, accompanied us out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach to pray." (Acts 21:5)

iii) The church has for most of its history prayed together.

It is likely that there were two distinct types of services in the early church. The public gathering for worship and instruction, and a prayer meeting.

At the time of the Reformation and the years that followed, churches often held daily services every morning and evening – Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.

A lot of the revivals that have taken place in church history began in prayer meetings.

3. How do we show that we are devoted to praying together?

Informal prayer with others:

With your family – at breakfast, at dinner, at bedtime.

With your friends – when you say goodbye.

With people in need – on the spot.

With a prayer group – prayer partner, prayer triplets, prayer group.

Formal prayer with others:

When we gather to worship.

When we gather to pray.

4. Are you devoted to praying with others?

Would you be assumed dead if you missed a prayer meeting?

James Spurgeon writing about a member of his church in Croydon, Mrs W, in *Sword & Trowel* in 1884:
"I was sure she was dead, for if she had been alive she would have been certain to have been at the prayer meeting."