

PRAYER

Week 4 | Ancient | Acts 2:42

Acts 2:42-47

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Deeper Dive

The book of Acts begins with Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit, as promised by Jesus before He ascended to heaven. Soon after, we see thousands coming to faith in Jesus, and the birth of the early Christian Church. Acts 2:42-47 describes the Spiritual Practices adopted by followers of Jesus, as this early body of Christ forms into what we know as the modern church.

Day 1 - Devoted to Prayer

Have you ever felt intimidated to pray, especially out loud in front of others? Maybe someone asks you to bless the meal, or asks for prayer in a small group and you immediately freeze and try to recall all those smart “religious” words you’ve heard Pastors say. You might feel that you need to bow your head, close your eyes and fold your hands a certain way, and don’t forget the “Amen” at the end. While some of these things are good, they actually have more to do with tradition than with actual prayer. You don’t have to kneel or bow your head, you don’t even have to close your eyes, and you don’t need to start with “Dear Heavenly Father” or end with an “Amen”. Prayer is so much more than traditions and memorized “churchy” verbiage.

The word “prayer” in Acts 2 is the Greek word “proseuchai”. While there are several Greek words we translate to prayer in English. This is the most common word used for prayer in the New Testament. This word for prayer is the more direct and casual form of prayer, literally meaning “direct communication with God”. There are some more formal Greek words used for prayer, and some words that refer to more urgent prayers. However, the form of the word in Acts 2, that we are called to be devoted to, refers to this common everyday direct connection with God. In 1 Thess 5:16-17 the scripture uses this same word for prayer when it says “Rejoice always, **pray continually**, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”. Again, this same word for prayer is used in Romans 12:12 when it says “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, **be constant in prayer**.”. The words devoted, continually and constant are so much more than praying once a day, before a meal, at bedtime, or some type of formal memorized verbiage. We are called to be devoted to close personal communication with God **continually**. This is an all day long, anytime and anywhere, continual closeness with God both listening and surrendering your thoughts to Him.

Daily Reflections:

- Does prayer intimidate you? Do you feel that you need a dedicated time and place in order to pray? What would it look like to let your formal prayer traditions go, and freely connect with God throughout your day?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Acts 9:9-19** ~For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Day 2 - Prayer Restores Our Sight

Oddly enough, one of the MVP's of the early church, had at one point persecuted and killed those who followed Jesus. In Acts 9 verses 1-9 it says that Saul, who later becomes Paul, was traveling on the road to Damascus. He was basically on his way to kill more Christians. Suddenly, he was struck by a bright light and Jesus came to him in a vision. This is where we pick up the scriptures in the Deeper Dive section for today in verse 9. Saul was blinded by the bright light, and was staying at a house in Damascus praying. We might wonder if God would answer the prayers of someone that was murdering His followers. The answer in this case is, "Yes!". It says that God not only heard him, but he used this prayer in His great plan to open Saul's eyes. In the end, Saul's sight was restored along with His faith. Both his literal and figurative eyes were opened, Saul was baptized, and he immediately began to follow Jesus.

How many times have you prayed for something and felt like God didn't answer? Maybe you are still praying for something and wondering if God hears you? It's important to ask ourselves in those moments, is God trying to restore something in me? Do my eyes need to be opened before God can move and work in my life? Is there sin, or wrong direction, in my life that I need to surrender in order to turn my heart in the right direction?

One of the many reasons that devotion to prayer is important is the restoration we receive from being in direct communication with God. We often need His Spirit to shine on the areas of our lives that need change. Allowing His light, and ultimately His restoration to change us is an important part of becoming spiritually mature in our faith. In scripture spiritual maturity is often referred to as going from drinking milk, like a baby, to solid food, like an adult. In 1 Peter 2:2 it says, "Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation." Of course, milk is easy to digest and given to babies instantly when they need it. This is what we may need when we first begin to explore our faith. However, we shouldn't desire to remain as a baby. As adults we often have to wait for our food to be prepared, toiled over, preserved, cut, eaten, and then digested in order to receive the nourishment. Spiritually mature food isn't easy or quick, however, it is necessary for solid growth. While we may not always enjoy having our eyes opened, or having a light shined on our sinful places, it is necessary to grow in our faith. We need this constant devotion to prayer for this very reason.

Daily Reflections:

- Is it possible that God is trying to restore your heart to align with His? Take time today to spend time in prayer asking God to remove any scales from your eyes. What are the things that might be keeping you from seeing what He is trying to do in your life?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Acts 12: 5-12**~So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen." When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

Week 4: Prayer

Day 3 - Prayer is Powerful (especially in a group)

How many times do we say "oh well, all we can do is pray about it"? If we are honest, don't we really mean that we've done all we can in our own foreseeable power and we've kind of given up on anything good happening in the situation? It's almost like a "Hail Mary" at the end of a game. Of course, this isn't the way we are supposed to view our prayers. Prayer isn't a last ditch effort, or the "thoughts and prayers" that we might flippantly throw towards a tragic situation. Prayer is powerful! Prayer is literally communicating with God. This is where faith and prayer go hand in hand. Knowing and believing in the one you are connecting with makes that connection extremely powerful. This is the kind of prayer we are called to be devoted to as a church family in Acts 2.

Take a look at the Deeper Dive section for today. Peter had been placed in prison and is preparing to be executed. While he was there it says the church was gathered together "earnestly" praying for him. The Greek word used in these verses is Ektenos which literally means "to stretch out one's hand". They were praying with such an intensity that it was like stretching out their hands to God for help in their prayers. The early church had faith, they knew who they were communicating with, and their prayers were aligned with the Will of God. This is the recipe for some powerful prayers!!

As we have discussed this week, praying on our own is absolutely a necessary part of growing in our faith. However, praying as a church or as a small group is equally as important to our spiritual maturity and growth. In Matthew 18:19-20 it says, "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." Of course, this doesn't mean that God is not present when we pray on our own. However, it does express the importance and power of praying in unity with fellow believers. Praying together we can encourage each other, pray for each other, and support each other in our faith journey. This is the type of prayer that Acts 2 was talking about being devoted to. The devotion to prayer was in the context of a church group. There is power in what you are praying for, and also in the growth that you will experience through it. Not only did the individual church members grow in faith, but their church grew as a collective group as well.

Daily Reflections:

- Have you ever been the recipient of powerful group prayers, or have you ever experienced the power of a group prayer for someone else? How did God move in that situation?
- Do you regularly practice being devoted to praying in a group? If not, what are the barriers to this spiritual practice in your life? Pray and ask God to help you to overcome those in this New Year.

Deeper Dive

Take time today to read these stories in scripture:

- **1 Samuel 1:10-11** : Hannah prays in anguish for a son.
- **1 Samuel 2:1-2** : Hannah praises God for answered prayer.
- **Daniel 6** : Daniel prays consistently even in adversity.
- **Jonah 2** : Jonah repents and asks God for deliverance.
- **Acts 4: 23-31** : the believers pray and receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

Also consider the way that Jesus asks us to pray in this parable. Jesus tells us not to give up, but to be persistent in prayer, just like the widow, crying out day & night.

- **Luke 18: 1-8** ~In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night?"

Day 4 - Prayer Changes Things

Throughout the Bible we can read examples of a simple prayer changing the trajectory of a life, a nation, and even at times the course of history. As we discussed on Day 2, prayer is powerful because God is powerful. When we align our prayers with the Will of God, even seemingly small prayers can have the power to change big God-sized things. When we remain devoted to prayer like the early church in Acts 2, God can use us in mighty and miraculous ways.

1. **Hannah's Prayer for Provision** - In 1 Samuel, Hannah prays for a son. She promises that if God would bless her with a son that she will dedicate him to the Lord's service. Soon after, Samuel was born. She did exactly as she was promised, and Samuel became known as a prophet, priest, and judge. This small prayer to be blessed with a son led to one of the greatest prophets in Israel and the anointing of both Saul and David as kings.
2. **Daniel's Prayers of Defiant Consistency** - In Daniel 6, the King decreed that anyone praying to God would be killed. Despite this decree, Daniel was faithful and continued to pray daily. Once the King found out, Daniel was thrown into a den of lions. However, God protected Daniel and he wasn't harmed. When the King saw the protection God miraculously gave Daniel, he worshiped the Lord. These seemingly small daily prayers led to the King of Persia worshipping the Lord, AND decreeing the whole nation to worship God as well!
3. **Jonah's Prayer for Deliverance** - In Jonah 2, while inside the belly of a fish, Jonah repents and prays for rescue. Even in his sin and disobedience, God hears Jonah and answers his prayers. Jonah's small prayer for rescue leads to the entire city of Nineveh being saved from destruction.
4. **Peter & John's Prayer for Protection** - In Acts 4, Peter and John pray with the group of believers for protection from the religious leaders that had threatened them for speaking about Jesus. This simple prayer of protection causes the ground to literally shake and for those in attendance to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, both growing the church and the individuals present in their faith.

Daily Reflections:

- When you read these simple & personal prayers for protection, consistency, deliverance and provision, which can you relate to most in your life? How could surrendering these basic needs in your life to God in prayer lead to more?
- Have you ever had a time where God miraculously changed more than you had asked for or imagined through a simple prayer?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Romans 8:26** ~ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.
- **Ephesians 6:18** ~ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** ~ Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus
- **Mark 11:24** ~ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.
- **James 5:13-16** ~ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Day 5 - Practicing Devotion to Prayer

When we are truly devoted to prayer we don't just make time to pray, instead we order our lives around it. Of course, you might be asking, how can I do this in the midst of our busy lives filled with work, meetings, kids, school, sports, laundry, trips to Costco, and all the things? While we all need to establish quiet moments to pray and listen to God each day, God is just as present when you whisper a quick prayer in the doctor's office or in the parking lot before a big meeting. You don't need to be in a quiet place all alone to pray. You don't need to use special words or have your eyes closed. Prayer is simply acknowledging God's presence by communicating with Him throughout your day.

As we have learned this week, prayer is something that is equally as important to do on your own as you strengthen your personal relationship with God, as well as, in a group as we all need the encouragement, accountability, and power that comes with praying together in unity with other believers.

1. Establishing a Personal Prayer Rhythm ~

- Set an alarm on your phone that reminds you to pray throughout the day.
- Carry a prayer object in your pocket that will remind you to pray in that moment.
- Writing scripture from this week about prayer on index cards and placing them around your house, in your office, or in your car. When you see them it will remind you to pray.
- Start and end your day with prayer. Make a commitment to pray before your feet hit the floor, and before your head hits the pillow at night.

2. Establishing a Prayer Rhythm with Others ~

- Regularly participating in church services AND being active in a small group is the BEST way to develop a rhythm of unifying group prayer with other believers in your life.
- Plan a regular time to pray as a family. Either before dinner, in the car line before school, or before bed, plan a time that works best for you.
- During your trip to the grocery, at work, or while waiting for your kid's activities, take off the headphones and notice those around you. When others share their struggles, instead of "giving advice" ask if you can pray for them. You'll be surprised how the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say and how powerful that prayer of "two or more" gathered will be.