

“THE CHURCH ON PURPOSE”

“On Purpose In Prayer”

Scripture Reading – Acts, 4:23-31

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord”, they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One’.

“Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

‘Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.’





1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV

THE CHURCH ON PURPOSE is based on the example of the Early Christian Church.

‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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 favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.’

Acts, 2:42-47, NIV

In Acts, 2:40-47, we read of the purposes God desires for his Church:

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|---|---------------------|----------------------|
|  | <u>EVANGELISM</u> | (Acts, 2:40-41) |
|  | <u>DISCIPLESHIP</u> | (Acts, 2:42) |
|  | <u>FELLOWSHIP</u> | (Acts, 2:42, 44, 46) |
|  | <u>PRAYER</u> | (Acts, 2:42) |

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MINISTRY

WORSHIP

(Acts, 2:45)

(Acts, 2:42, 46-47)

In this series, we consider this amazing summary of the Early Christian Church.

When they actively engaged in EVANGELISM, DISCIPLESHIP, FELLOWSHIP, MINISTRY, and WORSHIP, what was the result? **‘THE LORD ADDED TO THEIR NUMBER DAILY THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED’.**

If we do as they did, can our same Lord add to our number “THOSE WHO ARE BEING SAVED”?

“ON PURPOSE IN PRAYER”

The Church exists to reach people for Jesus and to teach those who respond how to become like Jesus and to live like Jesus. The Church exists to care for people's needs in the name of Jesus through the acts of its members in faithful ministry and service. All this activity must be underpinned by the foundation of faithful prayer by members of the Church...

‘They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.’

Acts, 2:42-43, NIV

‘The call to prayer was the battle cry of the early congregation: it rallied the troops. These people understood the power of prayer. They actively and consistently included prayer in their services, in their events, their meetings and their personal ministries.’

George Barna

This is the one important ingredient we must not miss... PRAYER!

‘At Pentecost they prayed for ten days and preached for ten minutes and three thousand people were saved. We reverse it. We pray for ten minutes and preach for ten days and call it a revival. But, of course, we do not have the same kind of results.’

“SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION”, International Mission Board Statement

‘The word PRAYER’ has become an ‘adjective’ to modify another word... such as ‘prayer chains’, ‘prayer rooms’, ‘prayer requests’, ‘prayer calendars’, ‘prayer partner’, or ‘prayer bracelet’. PRAYER is not an activity that requires a room, a calendar, a partner, or a bracelet. It is not something that can only be done in tandem with a worship service, a bible study, or a meal. PRAYER is an activity that ought to be engaged, all by itself, as an all-consuming, all-out passion, and the top priority of every believer.’

Zeke Moore

Prayer, power, and results seem to be firmly related.

It seems that a praying Church is a powerful Church. One of the key ingredients of the Early Christian Church that may be lacking in many modern churches is the act of prayer.

Let us consider what we can learn from the example of the Early Christian Church...

1. THEY PRAYED TOGETHER CONSTANTLY

‘They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.’

Acts, 1:14, NIV

After spending forty days in the company of the Resurrected Jesus, the disciples saw him ascend into heaven. Then what? As they gazed into the skies, angels came and questioned them. As they returned to Jerusalem, what did they do? They prayed and waited for God to fulfil his promise.

Paul reminds us that prayer helps us not to worry.

‘The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.’

Philippians 4:5b-7, NIV

Imagine never worrying about anything.

It seems like an impossibility! We all have worries on the job, in our homes, at school. But Paul's advice is to turn our worries into prayers. He is effectively saying: *‘If you want to worry less, then pray more. Whenever you start to worry, stop and pray’.*

The Early Christian Church had a passion for prayer.

‘Could it be that the Church today is weak and powerless at times because we do not pray together more often and in one accord? The affections of the heart and the attention of the mind must be captive in the realm of prayer to be empowered for the work of evangelism, discipleship, and ministry... and to have love for fellowship and worship.’

Robert AuBuchon

Far too often, our prayers are general and unspecific.

How often do we pray that God will bless someone? What does that mean? How will we know if God has truly answered our prayer if we are not more specific about what we pray for? Unspecific general prayers allow us the opportunity to say that any event has answered our prayers. We could even claim that our prayers are answered although we have not really prayed for that particular person or situation.

‘In the average church we hear the same prayers repeated each Sunday, year in and year out, with, one would suspect, not the remotest expectation that they will be answered. It is enough, it seems, that they have been uttered. The familiar phrase, the religious tone, the emotionally loaded words have their superficial and temporary effect, but the worshipper is no nearer to God, no better morally and no surer of heaven than he was before.’

A W Tozer

I am praying, blessed Saviour, and my constant prayer shall be

For a perfect consecration that shall make me more like thee.

Fanny Crosby, SASB 584:3

2. THEY PRAYED TO INFLUENCE DECISIONS

‘Then they prayed, “Lord, show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs”.’

Acts, 1:24-25, NIV

The Church, 120 strong, met together to consider Judas' successor.

The choice of replacement came down to two men – Joseph and Matthias – both of whom had impeccable qualifications. Both were godly men, so who should be chosen? The Church decided to pray. Rather than have a choice made from man's desires, favour or intellect, they wanted to be led by God.

As a Church, we make decisions that have impact inside and out.

How are we to decide what to do?

Surely, we should follow the example of the Early Christian Church:



DECISIONS MUST BE BIBLE BASED... Peter quoted from the Psalms.



EXAMINE THE ALTERNATIVES... Get facts first hand and consider what is important.



PRAY FOR WISDOM AND GUIDANCE... Allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal God's will.

‘If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.’

James, 1:5-8, NIV

The decisions of the Church should be based upon the wisdom and guidance of God rather than the whims and notions of men and women.

3 THEY PRAYED UNTIL SOMETHING HAPPENED

‘When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.’






Acts, 2:1-4, NIV

Was the Church at prayer on the Day of Pentecost?

They were certainly all together in one place, but prayer is not specifically mentioned.

Surely, the Holy Spirit came in power to a Church waiting in expecting prayer for something to happen. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit came to the Church in response to prayer.

Consider the events that led up to one supernatural outpouring...

-  Peter and John were threatened not to speak the name of Jesus (Acts, 4:18, 21)
-  They returned to the Church to discuss the threats (Acts, 4:23)
-  As a natural response, they raised their voices in prayer together (Acts, 4:24)
-  They prayed for God to work supernaturally (Acts, 4:29-30)
-  As a result, the building shook, the Holy Spirit infilled all those present, and they all spoke the Word of God with boldness (Acts, 4:31)

The simple prayer the Church made was answered with dramatic results.

'Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus. After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.'

Acts, 4:29-31, NIV

They did not ask for protection; they asked for power.

They did not ask for fire from heaven to destroy the enemy; but for power from heaven to preach the Word of God and heal the sick. Their great desire was for boldness in the face of opposition. The emphasis was on the hand of God at work in the life of the church, not the hand of man at work for God. Believing prayer releases God's power and enables God's hand to move.

'God's answer was to shake the place where they were meeting and to fill the people once again with the Spirit of God. This gave them the boldness they needed to continue to serve God in spite of official opposition. This was not a "SECOND PENTECOST" because there cannot be another Pentecost. It was a new filling of the Spirit to equip the believers to serve the Lord and minister to the people. This new fullness of the Spirit also created a deeper unity among the people and a greater desire to sacrifice and share. They enjoyed "GREAT POWER" and "GREAT GRACE", which ought to be the hallmarks of a "GREAT CHURCH".'

Warren W Wiersbe

The irony of prayer is evident.

God knows our needs, and the needs of the Church, but we must still ask. God is ready to answer, but we must patiently persist. Sometimes, we do not have simply because we did not ask.

'PUSH PRAYING' IS 'PRAYING UNTIL SOMETHING HAPPENS'

Consider I Thessalonians, 5:17...

CEV: 'Never stop praying'... KJV: 'Pray without ceasing'... Msg: 'Pray all the time'... NIV: 'Pray continually'... NLT: 'Keep on praying'.

Paul emphasises that persistency in prayer is necessary.

This is an instruction that follows on from the teaching of Jesus...

'Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up'

Luke, 18:1, NIV

'To persist in prayer and not give up does not mean endless repetition or painfully long prayer sessions. Constant prayer means keeping our requests continually before God as we live for him day by day, believing he will answer. When we live by faith, we are not to give up. God may delay answering, but his delays always have good reasons. As we persist in prayer, we grow in character, faith, and hope.'

"LIFE APPLICATION BIBLE", Study Notes

Jesus makes a promise about persistent prayer.

'Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened".'

Matthew, 7:7-8, NIV

Note the increase in the desperation: ASKING... SEEKING... KNOCKING...

Jesus tells us to persist in pursuing God. People often give up after a few half-hearted efforts and conclude that God cannot be found. But knowing God takes faith, focus, and follow-through, and Jesus assures us that we will be rewarded. Do not give up in your efforts to seek God. Continue to ask him for more knowledge, patience, wisdom, love, and understanding, believing that he will graciously give them to you.

Someone described this verse as 'THE ASCENDING SCALE OF URGENCY'.

The fact that Jesus moved from 'ASKING' to 'SEEKING' implies that there will be times when our prayers are not immediately answered. If prayer is not answered after 'ASKING', then make 'SEEKING' God's face a life-sentence. When we 'SEEK' God's face, we want to be aware of his presence and his approval. Generally speaking, if you can see God's face, he approves of you. Whereas, the hiding of God's face implies that there is something wrong – and that can be a very worrying experience. Eventually, we may have to move on from 'SEEKING' to 'KNOCKING'. When we are knocking on the doors of heaven, our prayers are somewhat desperate and urgent because the situation may be frantic or grave. We must ensure that we persevere.

The members of the Early Christian Church were 'DEVOTED TO PRAYER'.

They loved prayer. They were loyal in their prayers. They were committed to prayer – over a long period of time, and God answered their prayers and honoured the Church. Is it possible that if we are as devoted to PRAYER and engaged in EVANGELISM, DISCIPLESHIP, FELLOWSHIP, MINISTRY, and WORSHIP, like they were; that we too will be mightily blessed by God?

Imagine what God can do in and through us if we are as devoted as the First Christians were.

May that same grace inspire today to live for Christ, the life and way.

To this purpose, let us live so we might be able to say, "Prayer? We did that 'On Purpose'!"