

# Only a Prayer Meeting

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[ 0 : 00 ] But if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. Now, the book of Acts, Acts chapter 1.

Acts chapter 1. And if we read again from verse 13. Acts chapter 1.

And verse 13.

Verse 14.

Because we've had many of them over the years where it's an obvious opportunity to invite family and friends and neighbors and work colleagues to come to church with you.

[ 1 : 43 ] And of course, you can invite anyone to come to church with you at any time throughout the year. It doesn't have to be a back to church Sunday. Because, as you know, as a congregation, we want to be a congregation that loves Jesus and loves people.

We want people in our community to come to church. We want people in our community to worship God. We want people in our community to hear the Word of God being preached and proclaimed. Because our Bible reminds us that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. But we also want people in our congregation to pray.

To pray for the people in our congregation. To pray for our community. And to pray even for our country. And further afield. That's why we're having a back to prayer meeting Wednesday.

Sad to say that the prayer meeting has become the most neglected meeting in our congregation's calendar. You look at our congregation's calendar. There are many activities that go on in our congregation.

[ 2 : 49 ] And yet, all of them are nothing. All of them are nothing without the prayer meeting. All of them are nothing without the prayer meeting. And in many ways, that's what we see here in the opening chapter of the Book of Acts.

Because in this passage, we're reminded here, right at the beginning of the Book of Acts, right at the beginning of the early church, we see the purpose of prayer and the priority of prayer.

The purpose of prayer and the priority of prayer. There are two headings this morning. So first of all, we see the purpose of prayer. It says there in verse 14, All these, with one accord, were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the woman and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brother.

Over the past month, different people have asked me the same question. And the question is, if God knows everything, why pray?

If God knows everything, then why pray? If God knows everything, that's everything that's going to happen, everything we're going to do, even everything we're going to say. If God knows absolutely everything, then why pray?

[ 4 : 04 ] And it's a great question. What's the point of prayer? What's the purpose of prayer?

Because if God knows what we're going to ask before we ask it, if God knows what's going to happen before it happens, and if God has already decided and determined what is going to happen, because he's sovereign and supreme and superior over all things, then what's the point and what's the purpose of praying at all?

It's a great question. And the remarkable thing is that prayer is not for God's benefit. Prayer is for our benefit.

Prayer is not for God's benefit, because he knows what we're going to say before we say it. Prayer is actually for our benefit, because prayer teaches us dependence. Prayer teaches us dependence upon God.

You know, much to our disbelief and much to our disappointment as human beings, we are not like God. We are not omnipotent. We're not omniscient.

We're not omnipresent. We're not all-powerful. We're not all-knowing. And we're not in all places at all times. We're not in control of our lives, which is why we can't live independent from the Lord. [ 5 : 22 ] We can't live isolated from the Lord. No, we need to depend upon the Lord. That's what the Bible teaches us. From beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible teaches us we need to depend upon the Lord.

And we depend upon the Lord in prayer. And, you know, we need to pray like little children. It's always amazing to hear little children praying. But we need to pray like little children. In fact, Jesus said that we need to become like little children in order to enter the kingdom of God. That's not to say that we're to be naive or gullible or innocent or immature in order to be saved or even to pray. Rather, the quality which Jesus, he always said it, he said it time and time again in the New Testament, the quality that Jesus found in children that he recommends to us as adults is dependency.

Dependency. Because we're to depend upon the Lord in prayer. We're to depend upon the Lord in prayer. Because, as you know, a little child is completely dependent.

[ 6 : 34 ] So, little Everly. We'll just use her as an example. Ali won't mind. Little Everly, she's completely dependent upon her parents for everything.

Absolutely everything. She can't cook for herself. She can't feed herself. She can't wash herself. She can't dress herself. She can't care for herself. She can't do anything for herself. All she can do is throw her arms wide open and cry to her parents for help.

And that's what our Bible teaches us. Our Bible teaches us, first and foremost, about salvation. That the way that you become a Christian isn't by doing enough or being good enough or being worthy enough to be saved by the Lord.

No, the way we become a Christian. And you know, my unconverted friend, listen to what I'm saying. The way you become a Christian is by earnestly and wholeheartedly praying to the Lord for mercy.

The way you become a Christian is by earnestly and wholeheartedly praying to the Lord for mercy. And my Christian friend, the way you live as a Christian, the way you live as a Christian is by earnestly and wholeheartedly depending upon the Lord in prayer.

[ 7 : 45 ] And this is why the Bible teaches us about prayer in so many places. And the Bible teaches us about the purpose of prayer. That like little children, like little children, we're to recognize and realize we can't do it ourselves.

We are not big enough or strong enough. We are not able to do it ourselves, which is why we need to look upwards and depend upon our Father in heaven by praying to Him.

We need to look to Him. And the thing is, I think this is the devil's greatest ploy, to stop us praying. He tells us that our Father in heaven doesn't want to hear us.

But our Father in heaven, He loves to hear our prayers. And He longs to hear our prayers. Just like little children. We love to hear their voice.

We love to hear them speak. We miss them when they don't speak to us. And that's what our heavenly Father is like. He loves and longs to hear our prayers.

[ 8 : 53 ] Whether our prayers are private prayers, or personal prayers about our situations and circumstances going on at home, or even public prayers, our Father in heaven loves and longs to hear us pray.

So do you pray? Have you ever prayed? Or do you just pray when it's an emergency? Some of us are like that.

But you know, we lose out when we are lazy and lethargic in prayer. We lose out when we are lazy and lethargic in prayer. Because when we depend upon ourselves and our own strength, and our own situations, when we depend upon ourselves and all our plans, rather than depending upon our heavenly Father in prayer, we actually lose out.

And we lose out because private prayer at home, or public prayer at the prayer meeting, they are what we call a means of grace. A means of grace.

They are the means by which God conveys grace to us, or shows us how gracious He is. They are the means by which we grow in grace, and grow ultimately in godliness.

[ 10 : 07 ] In fact, it was my good friend J.C. Ryle who said that the means of grace, there are five of them, the means of grace are prayer, reading the Bible, worship, the sacraments, and the Sabbath.

The means of grace are prayer, reading the Bible, worship, the sacraments, and the Sabbath. But even though Ryle, he listed prayer as the first one, prayer is, because for him, prayer was a priority. And even though he listed that as the first means of grace, the sad reality, and even the solemn reality, is that whether private or whether public, prayer is actually the first means of grace we often neglect.

And out of all five, prayer is usually the first means of grace that we neglect to our detriment. And yet we all know that prayer is not only important, it's integral.

It's integral for our growth in grace. It's integral for our growth in godliness. You know, is that not why we teach our children? I'm sure you've all heard of the children's song.

[11:16] Read your Bible, pray every day, and you'll grow, grow, grow. Don't read your Bible. Forget to pray, and you'll shrink, shrink, shrink.

And so whether private or public prayer, it's a means of grace. It's how we grow in grace. It's how we grow in godliness. And our Father in heaven, He loves and longs to hear us pray.

But we lose out. We lose out when we are lazy and when we are lethargic in prayer. But you know, lethargy and laziness of prayer, by the private prayer or public prayer at the prayer meeting, it's certainly an issue.

It's an issue in our 21st century culture. And it's been an issue for a while, but it's not an isolated issue just within our own congregation. It's actually an island issue. Many of my colleagues, they're saying the same thing about prayer and prayer meeting attendance.

They're saying that it's an issue. But it's not an isolated issue. It's not even just an island issue.

When you go further afield, you see that this issue of prayer and the prayer meeting, it's an issue that has actually recurred and reappeared again and again throughout the history of the Christian church.

[12:34] And one notable person who was never afraid to preach about the importance of prayer and the integral nature of the prayer meeting was Spurgeon.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, a man who was bold. He was regarded in his day as the prince of preachers. He preached in London to a full capacity church each Lord's Day where there was about 6,000 people in front of him.

But whenever Spurgeon was asked about the secret to, you could say, the success of his preaching ministry, he always replied by saying, my people pray for me. My people pray for me.

He didn't talk about his eloquence or his theological prowess. No, he said, my people pray for me.

Spurgeon regarded the prayer meeting as the engine room of the church. And whenever someone asked about the engine room of the church and wanted to see the engine room of the church, Spurgeon would take them downstairs to the basement, to a little room at the back of the church where he would open the door and you'd see members of his congregation on their knees praying. And Spurgeon emphasized that the prayer meeting is the powerhouse of the church. Nothing else can get done without prayer. And Spurgeon explained that if the engine room is out of action, then everything else grinds to a halt because we cannot expect blessing if we don't ask.

[14:01] We cannot expect blessing if we don't ask. And you know, it was actually from his experience of the Lord's blessing upon his ministry that Spurgeon wrote a brilliant book.

And it's a book I read a number of years ago and I dip into it now and again. It's a book called Only a Prayer Meeting. What a great title. Only a Prayer Meeting. He writes the book in order to attempt to address the lethargy and the laziness of Christians.

And he also wants to confront and even challenge any who consider the most important gathering in the week as only. Only a prayer meeting.

This is what Spurgeon wrote. How can we expect blessing if we are too idle to ask for it? How can we look for a Pentecost if we never meet with one accord in one place to wait upon the Lord?

Brethren, says Spurgeon, we will never see much change for the better in our churches until the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians.

[15:12] We will never see much change for the better in our churches until the prayer meeting occupies a higher place in the esteem of Christians. but you know, Spurgeon, he could speak about this subject and he affirmed the priority of the prayer meeting not only from encountering and experiencing the Lord's blessing upon his ministry.

Spurgeon could say all this because he knew that there was evidence to back it all up in Scripture. Which brings us to consider secondly the priority of prayer.

So the purpose of prayer we are to depend upon the Lord and then secondly the priority of prayer. The priority of prayer look at verse 14 again all these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the woman and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brother.

Now as you know the book of Acts it's the sequel to the story of the gospel. In fact the book of Acts is part two of Luke's gospel because Luke he wrote both the gospel of Luke and this book the book of Acts.

In Luke's gospel we're told that Jesus is building his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. But in the book of Acts we're told how Jesus is building his church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

[16:40] Because as you know the gospel of Luke records for us when you read through Luke's gospel you see the life the ministry the death resurrection of Jesus Christ. But it concludes you could say with a cliffhanger which is why we need part two of the drama.

We need the sequel to the story of salvation. We need to know what happened next. We need to know what happened next. Now I don't know about you but whenever I think of Luke's writings he writes Luke and the book of Acts.

Whenever I think of Luke's writings I always think of the BBC TV program A Question of Sport. It's one of my favorite TV programs I was gutted that they cut it I think it was last year or the year before and I love the quiz the round in the quiz that was actually called What Happened Next?

I'm sure you've all remembered it. What Happened Next? They would show this clip of a certain sport and then they would pause it right at this cliffhanger moment and it was left to the teams to work out what actually happened next.

And in many ways that's what Luke does with his gospel. He pauses the story of salvation by concluding his gospel account with a crucial cliffhanger. Jesus is raised from the dead there's two on the road to Emmaus and Jesus reveals himself to them.

[18:04] But then he stops and that's because Luke wants us to read on into part two. He wants us to see the sequel to the story of salvation. So if you've never read Luke's gospel I'd encourage you to read it and then read on into the book of Acts.

See what happens in the story of salvation. Luke wants us to find out what happened next. And as you know the book of Acts begins as we read earlier begins with the ascension of Jesus.

So Jesus he's ascending to heaven to the right hand of his father. Forty days have passed since he was raised from the dead on the first day of the week the first Lord's Day morning when he was raised on that Easter Sunday.

And during that forty day period from the resurrection to the ascension of Jesus we read there that Jesus appeared to many people proving that he was alive and proving that the resurrection was true.

In fact Paul tells us in the New Testament that during this forty day period Jesus appeared to over five hundred people. And what's remarkable is that many of these people who saw Jesus alive they were willing to be put to death.

[19:19] They were willing to die for the good news gospel message that Jesus has risen. Isn't that amazing? They were willing to die for the fact of proclaiming the message that Jesus has risen.

But what I love about the opening chapter of the book of Acts and I always find it so challenging reading it because in the opening chapter of the book of Acts what we see is that the angels are speaking to the apostles and the angels speak to the apostles as Jesus ascends into heaven.

We read there in verse 10 while they were gazing into heaven as Jesus went behold two men stood by them in white robes and said men of Galilee why do you stand looking into heaven?

This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. And don't you just love that?

The message from heaven to the church on earth was stop standing around staring into heaven doing nothing. Stop standing around staring into heaven or staring into space doing nothing.

[20:31] In other words remember your commission. Remember your commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Go into all the world and preach the gospel.

But you know it's the response of the disciples that's remarkable because as you read in the following verses we're told that when they returned to Jerusalem and they go they gather together they don't gather together to organize an evangelistic crusade.

They didn't gather together to advertise revival meetings. They didn't do a tent mission. They didn't stand on the street corners preaching the gospel. They didn't even go door to door around the city streets of Jerusalem.

And they didn't write a development plan or a strategy document known as good and as great and as glorious as all these things are. The first thing the church did before they did anything was that they met together to pray.

They met together to pray. It's the first prayer meeting of the New Testament church. And what we also see in verse 14 is that they devoted themselves to prayer.

[ 21 : 43 ] All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the woman and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers. And so notice there verse 14 key verse.

The first prayer meeting in the New Testament church we're told that it wasn't just the apostles who devoted themselves to prayer. It wasn't just the office bearers of the church who devoted themselves to prayer and were at this prayer meeting.

No their wives were at the prayer meeting. Women were at the prayer meeting. Children were at the prayer meeting. Jesus' mother and also his brothers who had spent so much time in opposition to him they were also at this prayer meeting.

They were all at the prayer meeting because they saw the prayer meeting as a priority. It wasn't a secondary event in the church's calendar. No that was the significant event in the church's calendar.

The prayer meeting was a priority. And the thing about verse 14 is that this wasn't just a one-off prayer meeting where there was a special call to gather together to pray.

[ 22 : 48 ] No the way verse 14 is worded in the original language is that it was a regular prayer meeting. It was a routine prayer meeting. It was part of the church's calendar every single week where they continuously committed themselves to prayer.

They continuously devoted and dedicated themselves to prayer. And you know my friend I come to this verse and I see that we can learn a lot from the example of the early church.

Because we can learn about their devotion to prayer. We can learn about their dedication to the prayer meeting. We can even learn about their desire to petition the Lord in prayer.

We can learn a lot from the example of the early church. And you know if I'm honest and you all know that it's good to be honest if I'm honest I can't understand any Christian who doesn't want to go to the prayer meeting.

I can't understand any Christian who doesn't want to go to the prayer meeting. When I was converted at the age of 18 Sunday wasn't enough. And Sunday should never be enough.

[ 24 : 01 ] Because I wanted to be in the prayer meeting midweek. In Stornoway where I was brought up in the congregation we had a Saturday night prayer meeting which I loved going to because it was the best way to prepare for the Lord's Day.

And yes I always found the Saturday night prayer meeting terrifying. There was only about 20 people that went. And you knew as a young person a young man you're going to be put up to pray. But I went.

And I went because I was always taught. And I think it's so important to be taught and to be reminded. I was taught as a young Christian that the prayer meeting should be your priority. The prayer meeting should be your priority.

So I can't understand any Christian who doesn't want to go to the prayer meeting. And there was times I went to the prayer meeting in my work clothes. There was times I left my work and went straight to the prayer meeting because I wanted to be in the prayer meeting.

I can't understand any Christian who doesn't want to go to the prayer meeting. I can understand if people have to work. I can understand if you have a young family. I can understand if you're unwell. I can understand if you have circumstances and situations that prevent you from going. I can understand that. Everyone can understand that. But for the life of me, as a Christian, saved by grace, called from darkness to light, I can't understand any Christian who has no devotion to pray, no dedication to the prayer meeting, and no desire to petition the Lord in prayer. We are called as a people to pray.

[ 25 : 34 ] And we'll see more of that this evening when we look at 2 Chronicles 7. And I look and I say to myself, you know, I would seriously question where I'm at spiritually if I didn't want to go to the prayer meeting. Because when I look at the Bible, when I look at the New Testament, which is what our church is based upon, I see that the response to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the call

of the Christian church was that men and women, boys and girls, they devoted themselves. They dedicated themselves because they had this desire to petition the Lord together at the prayer meeting.

They wanted to be together. That's what it says there. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer together with the woman and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. Now, of course, some will excuse themselves and they'll say that they can pray at home. And that's true. You can pray at home. And we should pray at home. Absolutely pray at home. But I don't need to go to the prayer meeting because I'm praying at home. And some will say that to me. Some have said it to me. But do they actually pray at home? Do you actually set aside time to pray? Or are you spending it watching TV? Because prayer is what defines the Christian. And the prayer meeting is what defines the Christian church. Prayer is what defines the Christian. And the prayer meeting is what defines the Christian church. Now, I also want to be clear.

[ 27 : 08 ] The prayer meeting isn't just for Christians. It's not just for church members. Absolutely not. It's for everyone. It's for everyone. It's open to everyone. It's not a private prayer meeting.

It's a public prayer meeting to which everyone is invited. You are invited. Because as the book of Acts shows us, the prayer meeting was the foundation and the focus of the early church. Whatever they did as a church, it was coated and covered in prayer. You read through the book of Acts. We see there chapter 1, the church devoted themselves to the prayer meeting. Before they elected more office bearers, before they elected another apostle to replace Judas Iscariot, they had a prayer meeting. In chapter 2, it was during the prayer meeting that the Holy Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost. In chapter 4, when the church began to be persecuted, they would gather together and lift their voices in prayer at the prayer meeting. In chapter 12, Peter was arrested. And so what does the church do? They don't start making plans. They actually have a prayer meeting. They gather together for prayer. And as the church, you read through the book of Acts, and as the church was established and extended further from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth, the prayer meeting remained a priority. It was always a focus. And so when you read through the book of Acts, it's clear the prayer meeting was the foundation. And the prayer meeting was the focus of the early church because they all knew, as we're being reminded this morning, they knew the purpose of prayer. We can't do it ourselves. We need to depend upon the Lord. And they knew the priority of prayer.

[ 28 : 55 ] We need to meet together to bring it all to the Lord in prayer. So as the early church gathered, we are to gather because we are to know the purpose of prayer and the priority of prayer.

And tonight we're going to think about the petition of prayer and then the power of prayer. And then on Wednesday evening, we'll think more about this important subject, prayer. So come this evening. I'd always love you to come to church at night. Come to the prayer meeting on Wednesday because it's good to gather together to bring all our prayers, all our petitions, all our cares, all our concerns to the Lord in prayer. Because as Spurgeon said, we will never see much change for the better in our churches and in our communities and in our country until the prayer meeting occupies a higher place. Come and let's pray together. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Our Father in heaven, teach us to pray. Help us, we pray, to depend not on ourselves, but to see that we need to come before the Lord in prayer and to cast every care that we have, every worry and every anxiety, to bring it to the footstool of the Lord. And we give thanks even for the privilege of prayer and how often we feel that our words are going no further than the ceiling and yet the assurance that's given to us in the Bible is that the Lord hears and that the Lord answers. And help us then to keep praying, to keep persevering in prayer, to keep praying as we were saying to the children, to pray at any time, anywhere, and to bring it to them. Because the promise of thy word is that call to me and I will answer and show you great and mighty things which you knew not.

So Lord, hear us, we ask. Do in us and for us exceedingly, abundantly, above all, more than we could ask or even think. And so Lord, bless us together, we pray. Bless our fellowship after the service around a cup of tea. Bless that to us and help us always to eat and drink and to do everything to thy glory. Lord, do us good, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

We're going to bring our service to our conclusion this morning. We're going to sing the words of Psalm 66. Psalm 66. It's in the Sing Psalms version on page 84 of the Blue Psalm book. Psalm 66.

[ 31 : 45 ] Psalm 66. We're singing from verse 16 down to the verse mark 20.

Again, all of our Psalms, as I said this morning, they focus upon the theme of prayer. The Psalm says there in verse 16, Come all who fear our God, I'll tell what he has done. I cried out to him with my mouth, his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin, the Lord would not have heard. But surely when I prayed to him, God listened to my word. For ever God be praised, who hears me from above, he has not turned away my prayer, or kept from me his love. So we'll sing these verses in conclusion of Psalm 66, and we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise.

Come all who fear our God, I'll tell what he has done. I cried out to him with my mouth, His praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin, the Lord would not have heard. But surely when I prayed to him, God listened to my word. Forever God be praised, who hears me from above.

He has not turned away my prayer, or kept from me his love.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Whatia?

[ 34 : 49 ] A Mohane ritual? Foi por favor. Am■ com. Amos com. Amados com.

Amos. Amos com. Amos com.