

The Church

Prayed Up

Last Sunday we talked about the church grown up. I think several of us had to act like grownups this past week and congratulations for getting the job done! This morning I want to continue this series by looking at the importance of prayer in the life of the church. If we are going to accomplish all God has for us to do in this world, if we are going to not merely survive but thrive, we will have to be a church that is prayed up! Prayer must be at the heart of every believer and every church!

Bro. McQueen used to say, “You can run a bank without money easier than you can run a church without prayer.” I’m going to spend the next few minutes telling you something that most of you will agree with: We need to pray. Yes, we need to pray. But why? What is prayer really? What does prayer consist of? Exactly why should we pray? Does prayer really make any difference? What specifically should we pray for? Let’s see if we can answer some of these questions.

What is prayer? Webster’s dictionary defines prayer as “any spiritual communion with God.” I suppose that’s a pretty good definition. I think prayer might be better defined as simply **“Any communion with God.”** Prayer is talking with God, not simply talking to God, but with God. Prayer is one of the ways we grow in our relationship with God, just as we grow in any relationship by communicating with the other person. I get to know you by talking with you and I get to know God by spending time with him in prayer, talking with him.

What does prayer consist of? Is it just asking God for stuff? If we look at what we call the Lord’s prayer, the model pray Jesus prayed, we see that prayer is worship, acknowledging God and his sovereignty in our lives. It is a means of bringing our desires into alignment with his desire for our life. It is praying for his will to be done and perhaps discovering his will in the process of praying. (Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.) It is about making our requests known to God. (Give us this day our daily bread.) Prayer is about acknowledging our dependence upon God. That’s at the heart of the very act of praying. We are coming to God because we believe he exists, he is there and is somehow involved in our lives. Prayer is asking for and receiving his forgiveness, his daily mercy, his transforming grace (Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.) Prayer is asking for God’s guidance and wisdom and discernment. (Lead us not into temptation but

deliver us from evil.) Prayer is giving thanks, surrendering all things into his providential care and keeping. (For thine is the kingdom and the glory and the power forever.)

The apostle Paul instructed us **“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 4:6-7.** Paul makes it clear that presenting our requests to God is to be a part of our daily prayer. We don't worry, we pray!

Worship, thanksgiving, petition, request, confession, submission and surrender, the opening of our heart and mind to listen for God's instruction, direction, and peace. All of this is part of prayer.

Does prayer really make any difference? Before I answer that question, let me ask this: **Why pray?** Out of all the answers to that question I believe the primary answer, the most important answer is simply this: **Because Jesus prayed.**

The gospels record a dozen or so prayers of Jesus along with parables and teachings he shared on the matter of prayer. He followed the normal Jewish practice of praying three times a day. He went to the synagogue and to the temple at times of prayer. The gospels mention five times he went alone to pray privately. Before the major events of his life, Jesus prayed. He spent the night in prayer before choosing the twelve disciples to be with him. He was on a high mountain praying, anticipating his final journey to Jerusalem to face crucifixion when the transfiguration took place. He prayed at the Last Supper and in the garden of Gethsemane before his arrest and crucifixion. Jesus prayed in times of trouble and testing. He prayed for healing and provision for others, he prayed even for those that persecuted and crucified him. He prayed for his disciples, for his followers, even for us in his high priestly prayer recorded in John 17. Why pray? Because Jesus prayed and if he thought it important it must be important for us.

Philip Yancey in his book *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* wrote, **“After surveying Jesus' practice of prayer, I realize that his example does answer one important question about prayer: Does it matter? When doubts creep in and I wonder whether prayer is a sanctified form of talking to myself, I remind myself that the Son of God, who had spoken worlds into being and sustains all that exists, felt a compelling need to pray. He prayed as if it made a difference, as if the time he devoted to prayer mattered every bit as much as the time he devoted to caring for people.”** ... Philip Yancey

Why pray? Because Jesus prayed. But does prayer really make a difference? Jesus thought so and that's good enough for me! Based on Jesus' belief about the necessity of prayer, we must conclude prayer makes a difference.

Why pray? Because the bible indicates God has chosen to work through our prayer and not without our prayer. Jesus taught us to pray. He said we ought to pray so we wouldn't faint or give up. The bible tells us we don't have because we didn't ask. Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. Will any of that happen if we don't ask, seek and knock? I don't know. Perhaps at times it will, but from the examples given in Scripture it seems this is how God chooses to operate. This is how God accomplishes his will and purpose on earth. He speaks his will, his plan, but then we are to pray in agreement, we are to work in tandem, working out his will and his way in prayer, through prayer.

It seems He waits for us to pray. George Wood said, **“We cannot suppose that God will do for us without prayer what he has promised to do only through prayer.”**...**George O. Wood** God allows us to partner with what he is doing in the earth and instructs us to pray, to ask, to involve ourselves in what he is doing. As we pray and make our requests known to God, we are making ourselves and our heart's desires known to God as well. Something powerful and transformative happens when we pray. Yes, prayer makes a difference! Archbishop William Temple said, “When I pray, coincidences happen, when I don't, they don't.”

Why do we pray? Because Jesus prayed and taught us to pray. Because God has chosen prayer as a means of accomplishing his will on earth. Prayer makes a difference. It's why we pray as individuals. It's why the church through the centuries has recognized the value and importance of prayer as one of the primary spiritual disciplines of the Christian. We must pray. But not only as individuals, but collectively as the church, we must pray. I will say it again, if the church is going to not merely survive but thrive, we must be a prayed up church.

Why must the church pray? Because the church was born in prayer! If you look at the book of Acts where the birth of the church and its subsequent growth is recorded, you will find prayer on every page, in every event. In Acts 1 as the disciples await the promise of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Luke says, **“They all joined together constantly in prayer...” Acts 1:14** It was a pattern followed throughout the life of the early church. They were praying in the upper room when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them and they were

baptized in the Holy Spirit and spoke with tongues, giving praise to God (praying) in languages they didn't even know! 3,000 people were saved on the day of Pentecost. That's church growth! And what did these thousands of new converts do? **"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."** Acts 2:42 This is what the church did. This is what the church must do. Pray! Devote yourselves to the teaching of God's word, to fellowship, to breaking of bread and to prayer.

When persecution came and Peter and John were arrested, the church met together and what did they do? They had a prayer meeting! Peter and John told them the authorities had ordered them not to preach in the name of Jesus any longer under threat of prison. What was the response of the church? **"When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God."** Acts 4:24. They could have complained, worried, signed petitions or organized protests against the Sanhedrin, but instead they did what the church knew to do. They prayed. And what was the result? Nothing changed as far as the threat against them, but the bible says, **"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 4:31. Circumstances didn't change, but the church changed because of prayer. With new anointing and boldness they proclaimed the word of God. We need to pray because we need to speak with boldness the word of God. We need to pray until the place is shaken.

I can go on. Prayer was at the heart of everything the New Testament church did. They chose deacons at the Holy Spirit's direction and prayed over them in Acts 6. They prayed for Samaritans to be baptized in the Holy Spirit in the midst of a great revival in Acts 8. Peter was praying when he received the vision that instructed him to go to the house of the Roman Centurion Cornelius and that prayer and Peter's obedience would open the gospel to the gentile world. Peter was miraculously delivered from prison by an angel because the bible says "the church was earnestly praying to God for him." Acts 12:5. The missionary undertaking of the New Testament began because the church was fasting and praying and the Holy Spirit told them to send Paul and Barnabas to these other parts of the world (Acts 13:2). We could go on.

The church prayed and miracles happened. The church prayed and direction came. The church prayed and the gospel advanced. The church prayed and finances came, people sold property and brought it to the leaders, needs were met. The church was born in prayer, it grew by prayer, it was sustained with prayer and prayer is still the key for us. The church of 2018

must be a church of prayer. If we are going to make it. If we are going to win our world, if we are going to be a voice of influence, if we are going to be speak truth and bring light to a dark world, we must be a prayed up church. If we want to see miracles, we have to pray. If we want to see the financial needs met, we have to pray. Let's make CAG a prayed up church!

What should we pray for? I told you the first Sunday of January I was praying for wisdom, discernment, anointing, clarity and courage. Wisdom to know what to do, discernment to know when and how to do what the Lord tells us, anointing to carry out his instructions, clarity to stay on track and courage to act. Let me suggest a few things to add to the list.

Pray bold prayers. Why not? I quoted earlier from Philippians 4 where Paul tells us, "in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests to God." Philippians 4:6. "In everything." I think that means we can pray not only in every circumstance but about every situation. What's the point of prayer if we aren't believing God for the impossible? Pray bold prayers. If we don't have because we don't ask, let's ask! Ask God to give us the nations. Ask God to bring peace to Jerusalem. Ask God to heal that terminally sick loved one. Ask God to reverse the effects of Alzheimers. Ask God to save your lost son or daughter. Ask God for deliverance from hopelessness and addiction. Pray bold prayers. Who knows what God may do when his church prays. Similar to praying bold prayers...

Pray your heart's desire. Some people try to muzzle their prayers. "I don't know if I should ask this. It might sound selfish." Don't be afraid to ask. The Psalmist said to "**Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.**" **Psalm 37:4.** If the desires of your heart are pleasing to God, go ahead and ask. The bible tells of barren women praying for children, soldiers and kings praying for victory in battle, people praying for rain for their fields, praying for loved ones to be healed, for themselves to be healed. It's okay for you to pray for yourself, your needs, your family, even for the desires of your heart.

If we are going to be a prayed up church, I think we need to... **Pray for a manifestation of God's holy presence.** Pray for an unprecedented move of God. Pray for revival. Pray that God will pour his Holy Spirit and his power upon us. I don't know what all he wants to do in and through us, his church, but I have to believe there is more for us. He has more for us to experience, more for us to do, more lives for us to impact, more territory for us to claim for the kingdom's sake. We can't do any of that without God's presence, God's power, God's anointing and that won't happen if we aren't praying! There have been prophecies and visions and dreams

about this church that have yet to be fulfilled. I don't know God's timing and I don't have to know, all I have to do is pray and ask, "God, fulfill your plans for us. Release your anointing and your blessing and your power upon us and let us accomplish all you have declared for us to do in this season."

Pray for workers and strength to serve. One of the specific things Jesus said to pray for was workers, laborers. **"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into his harvest field." Luke 10:2** The harvest, meaning those who don't yet know Jesus as Savior and Lord, was a priority for Jesus and for the Father. This is why he came, to give his life as a ransom for sinners, to call sinners, and that includes all of us, to repentance, to save us and claim us as his own. The harvest was and is a priority.

Jesus said this concerning the workers just after he sent out 72 people to go and announce in the surrounding villages that the kingdom of God was at hand. It was time. "We are going to need more workers, more people willing to go and to serve than we can recruit right now. So this is going to be an ongoing need and an ongoing prayer." But why pray for this? God already knows. You said it was a priority with him. Why ask? Because once again we are called on to partner with God. Once again we need to be continually aware of the need and if we see the need and we are praying about the need, it just might be that we will recognize we are in fact part of the answer to our own prayer. As we said last week, "We're who we've been waiting on."

Pray the Lord to send workers and when you pray that every day, you just might see yourself as the answer to your prayer. It is part of what happens in a prayed up church. We get prayed up and the next thing you know, we get suited up, saying, "Here I am Lord. Send me!"

We need to pray. I don't like to just preach sermons about prayer and not give time to pray, but that's all we can do today. Hear this word. Would you accept the challenge and the call to be part of a prayed up church? If so, like we said last Sunday, that won't happen unless you pray! Pray boldly. Pray continuously. Pray with faith and with expectation. Pray and keep on praying and let's see what God will do!

"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 4:6-7