

Unexpected Things About Prayer

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References: Acts 1, Luke 11:1; Acts 1:23-26; Acts 1:13-14; Acts 12:5; Joel 2:16; Luke 6:12-13; Acts 3:1-8; Acts 4:4; Daniel 6:10; Acts 2:42; Acts 16:25; Acts 27:35; Acts 20:36; Acts 21:5; Acts 20:32

Introduction

I'm headed downstairs, so good to be with you. This morning, I would like us to consider something on the subject of prayer, and I want us to consider it from the book of Acts. So take your Bibles, turn to Acts 1, and I'm going to just go over a few things this morning. I frankly learned a little when I was studying in Acts 1 about prayer, and frankly, it was somewhat unexpected. So I thought, well, that's interesting. I've read Acts a lot, and I've read about prayer a lot. That's unexpected. So I thought, well, I wonder if there's anything else that might be unexpected as I read. And so I started to study prayer, and I ran across many things that were to me unexpected. So I'm not really sure what to call this sermon, but from my perspective, it's unexpected things about prayer that I learned from the book of Acts. And you'll say, "Oh, I already knew that part," but you'll hopefully learn something as well. What is not unexpected will be a reminder to you and that will be of benefit.

Lord, teach us to pray. So, I hardly know where to begin. This is not an exhaustive study. It's just some thoughts that came to me. I've got them in some sort of order, and I may not stick with the order, but you'll learn a little bit, hopefully, about prayer.

The Choice of Matthias

So, let's go to Acts chapter 1 and verse—we'll pick it up in verse 24, but I better tell you the story first. After the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead, the question was, who is going to take Judas' place? Judas. So they decided—Peter said, "We've got to decide somebody who could take Judas' place." So they ended up with two suggestions, men who traveled with them from the very early days. It wasn't just the 12 disciples, by the way, who traveled with the Lord. Many other men did; many women did. There was a large entourage traveled with the Lord for those three years. And so verse 23 says, they appointed two who could be Judas' successors: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

So here you are. You've got 11 disciples. They are senior disciples. And they've got to—they've got to appoint somebody else. The question is, how are they going to do it? What is the most common answer of our day? Well, they take a vote. That's right. And who best to vote on that subject? Can you think of any 11 people who would be more qualified to vote on that subject than those? And the answer is no, you can't think of any better. And so you would assume that they would just vote. But verse 24 says, "And they prayed."

[Acts 1:23-26 NKJV]

²³ And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen ²⁵ to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." ²⁶ And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

And I said, "Harold, that is **most unexpected**." I think they just simply would have voted. They were able. They knew those men. They'd been with those men for three years, remember. They knew them inside and out. They should have just voted. That's the simple logic of our day. The answer is no, they didn't just simply vote. They prayed. And then after they prayed, they cast their lots. What's meant by that? Well, it isn't that they prayed and then voted. It's that they prayed and then they somehow cast lots. I'm not sure what the mechanism was, but the answer was left entirely up to the Lord.

How are the great decisions in life made? Well, not just because wise men say this is the way we ought to go. How do you do things in the assembly? Well, you get the best men in the assembly together and they vote on it. No. How are things done in most churches? They get the congregation together and they vote on it. And sometimes they have to say, "Excuse me, sir, but you've just been voted out of office." How is it done in scripture? You pray. And then you leave the decision entirely up to the Lord. And I say, "Harold, you could learn a lot from that."

The Presence of Women in Prayer

When you go over to verse 14—just back to verse 14. Who was there when this all happened? Verse 13:

[Acts 1:13-14 NKJV]

¹³ And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. ¹⁴ These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

How many were there? Well, quite a few. Who were there? Well, the disciples were there. And then the others who had traveled with the disciples. And then the women were there. So the question is, is it important for women to go to prayer meeting? **Yes.** The women don't pray audibly in prayer meeting. Yes, but the question is, do the women pray in prayer meeting? And the answer is, of course they do. Is it important that they pray in prayer meeting? Yes. Is it important that they be at the prayer meeting? Yes. At the very first prayer meeting we read about in the book of Acts, the women were there. Women, don't assume that because your voice isn't audibly heard in prayer that your prayer is not important.

I just thought of a couple of other stories. You remember that there was a prayer in Acts chapter 12. Peter was in prison. The day before, James had been killed. And Peter was still in prison. They decided to pray. Where did they pray? Well, they went to John Mark's mother's house.

[Acts 12:5 NKJV]

Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

Who was at the prayer meeting? Well, Rhoda, among others. Is it important for women to pray? Yes. What happened on that occasion? Well, Peter came along and knocked on the door. And Rhoda ran to the door, listened to Peter, and ran back in and said, "Peter's there." And they all said, "No, he isn't." Would you pray if you didn't really believe that you were going to get an answer? Yeah. Would you pray when you were together with others? Yeah. It's interesting. In the story of chapter 12 in Peter, the prayer was a collective prayer meeting. They didn't pray alone. No. Peter's in prison, what are you gonna do? You get on the telephone, phone everybody in the assembly and you say, "Pray, Peter's in prison." That's really good. What did they do instead? They all got together to pray.

There was a prophet whose name was Joel. And he looked ahead; he could see the tragedy that was gonna befall the nation, both Israel and Judah, and they would be carried captive. And he said, "This is terrible." What does he say? He says, "Get all the people together to pray." Who? Well, all the men and all the women and all the children and all the babies. That's Joel, that's not Acts, but the concept is there.

[Joel 2:16 NKJV]

Gather the people,
Sanctify the congregation,
Assemble the elders,
Gather the children and nursing babes;
Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber,
And the bride from her dressing room.

People get together to pray. What a wonderful thing. More on that as we go along.

The Pattern of the Lord Jesus

Why did they, by the way, why did they pray before they appointed Matthias to be the 12th disciple? Turn in your Bibles just to help us here. Luke chapter 6. Is it important to pray? Luke chapter 6, verse 12:

[Luke 6:12-13 NKJV]

¹² Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. ¹³ And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:

When was the last time you continued all night in prayer to God? Well, most of you say, "I fell asleep. I started out, I maybe even prayed for five minutes before I went to sleep." Jesus continued. He was outside. He continued all night in prayer to God. What happened next? Verse 13: When it was day, he called unto him his disciples, and of them he chose 12, whom he named apostles: Simon, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, and the rest.

Why do you think the disciples decided they should pray before they appointed Matthias as the 12th disciple? Because the Lord Jesus had prayed all night long before he appointed his disciples. Is prayer important? Answer: **Yes**.

The Hour of Prayer

Well, chapter 3 now. Back to Acts. Acts chapter 3. And I'm just giving you illustrations from the examples of prayer. There's no particular logic to it all other than great principles for us to learn about prayer. Chapter 3 and verse 1:

[Acts 3:1-8 NKJV]

¹ Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. ² And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; ³ who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. ⁴ And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." ⁵ So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. ⁸ So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God.

Was that a big deal? Yeah, that was a big deal. Did it have big impact? Yeah, it did have big impact. We won't take time to go through the details; it's in the chapter. After this, there were about 5,000 men who had trusted the Lord.

[Acts 4:4 NKJV]

However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.

Two thousand people had trusted the Lord in Acts chapter 2. Now, here's Acts chapter 3. 5,000—and the word is men, which probably means 5,000 men plus women and children, probably 10,000 or 12,000 trusted the Lord that day. Was that a big answer to prayer? Yeah, it was a big answer to prayer. When did it take place? It took place at the hour of prayer.

What was meant by the hour of prayer? Well, a lot of things happened at the hour of prayer in Scripture, but it was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. And the nation got together to pray. Daniel thought it was important:

[Daniel 6:10 NKJV]

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.

He prayed toward Jerusalem three times a day, probably at the hour of prayer in the morning and the hour of prayer in the afternoon. Is the hour of prayer important?

So how many Christians do you think were praying at the hour of prayer on this particular afternoon that Peter and John had the privilege of raising the lame man to health and strength? Well, we don't know. But probably there were a lot of people at the hour of prayer because it was the hour of prayer. And there were thousands of people who got converted that day. So there must have been a lot of people at the hour of prayer if there were thousands of people who got converted.

So how many Christians do you think were praying? Well, quite a few. Do you think anybody else was praying at that time? Well, I think there were some non-Christians who were there who were praying. And they probably said, "Lord, we don't know what's going on. We've heard that Jesus rose from the dead. He was a good man, but we don't know what, what, what." And they're asking their questions. And they were probably praying. And God gave them some answers.

So who gets credit for praying that there would be that miracle? Just Peter and John? Well, no, no. Peter and John and the other disciples, they would have got credit for that miracle. Anybody else? Well, yeah, yeah, I guess all those who went to the hour of prayer and said, "Lord, we don't know what's going on. Jesus has gone to heaven. People are getting saved. They're coming to us for wisdom. We don't know what to say. Lord, we've come at the hour of prayer to the temple today. And we've come to pray and to preach and to tell these people who want to get saved how to get saved." Do they get credit for the miracle that happened that day, for praying about the miracle that happened that day? And the answer is, of course. Any others? Well, what about those who went to the hour of prayer the day before? They pray and they said, "Lord, would you please do something? We don't know what's happening,

but Lord, You told us to pray here. We are and we pray," and it didn't happen that day. Their prayer was answered the next day. What about all those who prayed in the hour of prayer before that? Did the Lord answer their prayer? Yeah.

So here's a man, the lame man, lame probably for 40 years from birth, and he is miraculously healed. Peter and John say, "Lord, this is wonderful. Thanks for answering our prayers." And the other disciples say, "Lord, this is wonderful. Thanks for answering our prayers." And all those who are in the upper room in chapter 1 say, "Thank you, Lord. This is wonderful. You've answered our prayers." And all those who were there the day said, "Lord, this is wonderful. Thank you, you've answered our prayers." The thousands of them! And all those who'd prayed in all the hours of prayer before that said, "Praise the Lord, thank you for answering our prayers." Did you notice what kind of a prayer meeting that was? It was a collective prayer meeting. You don't have to go to the temple to pray. Why would you go to the temple to pray? You'd go to the temple to pray with others who are praying. Collective prayer meetings are absolutely wonderful and absolutely marvelous.

Collective and Public Prayer

Chapter two, you remember this verse, chapter two, verse 42. I probably refer to it more than almost any other verse in scripture.

[Acts 2:42 NKJV]

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

How did they continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine? Well, I think when the apostles were preaching, they went to listen. And when others were preaching, they checked them out to make sure that they were preaching what the apostles had been preaching. Continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine is probably collective, is it not? They continued steadfastly in the apostles' fellowship. Is that an isolation, an individual activity, or is that a collective corporate activity? A fellowship means fellows together. So that's collective. Breaking of bread. Is that a private activity or is it a public activity? And we come together to break bread. Prayer, is that private or public? Well, it would be public, wouldn't it? They continue steadfastly in the apostles' prayer.

Is it important to pray? You go, "Yes." Is it important to pray collectively with your brethren? And the answer is **yes**. For some reason, we often say, "I've got to get a prayer life, I've got to

pray." How did you learn to pray? Well, it's very simple. You'll learn to pray by listening to somebody else pray. And you say, "I can pray, I can pray like them." How do I learn to pray? Well, I have to pray. I went to bed at night, and then when I went to bed, my mother and father got down on their knees with me and we prayed. How did I learn to pray? Well, I learned to pray at lunchtime and breakfast time and supper time, because we always pray before meals. And so when I was eight years old, nine years old, I went to Russell's house for dinner. And Russell's mother said, "All right, we're going to have dinner. Harold, you give thanks for the food." What did I do? I gave thanks for the food. How did I know to do that? Well, I did a lot of public prayer meetings where thanks for the food was given. How did we learn to pray? We learned to pray not privately. We learned to pray publicly. Amazing.

Acts chapter 16. You remember the story of Acts chapter 16, Paul and Silas end up in prison.

[Acts 16:25 NKJV]

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

So, what were they doing at midnight? Well, they were singing. La-di-da-di, I'm not sure what hymn they sang. But I think a lot of people woke up and said, "That's the first time I've ever been wakened up by a hymn singing in prison." What else did they hear? Thank you. Did they hear Paul and Silas praying? I believe so. Paul and Silas didn't just sing. I think Paul and Silas in the middle of the night prayed. They could have preached. They didn't do that. They prayed for the men who were around. I think they prayed for the jailer who said, "What on earth is going on here?" And then an earthquake came and he realized that this was no simple.

Over in chapter 27, there was a big problem. They were on the ship and the ship was going down and there wasn't much they were going to be able to do about it. They were in a terrible storm that had lasted for two weeks. And Paul said, "I want you to be of good courage. God spoke to me. He said nobody's gonna die. So we're going to eat some food. We all should eat now." And so Paul prayed.

[Acts 27:35 NKJV]

And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat.

275 people were listening. Value in corporate prayer? Yeah. Value in public prayer? Yeah. Why do we get together every Tuesday night? To pray. Why don't we exist—let's all stay home and say, "Between the hours of quarter to eight and 8:15, we're all going to pray at home quietly." Why don't we do that? Because that's not God's way. God's way is we get together for corporate prayer. The vast majority of the times we read about prayer in the book of Acts, we read about corporate prayer, collective prayer.

Is it encouraging to pray in a big group or a small group? And the answer is yes, encouraging to pray in a big group and encouraging to pray in a small group. We don't always advertise it; we should maybe more, but some brethren get together every spring. I think maybe last week was when they did it. This year in Florida, I'm not sure. They get together to pray. I had the privilege of being at the first of those. It was nationwide prayer meetings. I think we were in, I don't know, somewhere in the Midwest. And there were about 100 of us got together, and we prayed for a week. We got together Monday afternoon. We left Friday morning. We prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed all week. Well, not all week. We prayed for an hour in the morning or an hour in the afternoon or three or four hours a day. We thought it was praying all week. It wasn't. We were kidding ourselves. It was better than nothing.

I was so moved by the whole thing. I think the last public prayer I made at that conference was, "Lord, would you be gracious to us? Because you're going to bless in such a marvelous way as a result of this prayer meeting. Some of us are going to get swelled heads. We might even think that we're a big deal." Is it possible that we could have been together praying for that week and God not answer our prayers? That's not possible. I told you what my mother said. I was complaining about something, and her answer was very simple. She said, "God will bless you, my son. **He is not deaf.**" That's why we pray. Absolutely amazing. Paul and Silas prayed in the middle of the night.

The Posture of Prayer and Commendation

Paul, chapter 20 and verse 36. I guess we better turn there. Chapter 20, verse 36. The story is Paul on his way back to Jerusalem, calling the Ephesian elders to him, telling them that they would never see his face again. He was going to go to heaven.

[Acts 20:36 NKJV]

And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

Why did he kneel when he prayed? Is that necessary? Well, no. But he did kneel when they prayed. Actually, I believe it's in chapter 21.

[Acts 21:5 NKJV]

When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed.

Paul is, I believe, in Sidon or Tarsus. And he goes out with the saints to the ship, and they get to the seashore. The whole congregation get there, down on their knees on the seashore. And everybody else who was there that day sunbathing looked over and said, "What is going on? Look at all those people. They're all on their knees."

Last week, Hong spoke to us from China. She said, "You know, a lot of the Christians here in China, they kneel every time they pray." Is that mandatory? No. Would it be a good thing? Yep. In the book of Acts, they knelt very often when they prayed.

So why do you pray? Chapter 20, we've got our Bibles open at chapter 20. Paul has been speaking to the elders in Ephesus. And they prayed; it's been wonderful. And this is what he says in verse 32:

[Acts 20:32 NKJV]

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Is that a good reason to pray? Here's Paul, and he's leaving them. And he said, "What else can I do? I taught you from house to house. I taught you everything I knew. But this is one thing I can do for you. Now, I'm going to commend you to God. I'm going to commend you to the word of his grace. I'm going to commend you to the one who is able to build you up. I'm going to commend you to the one who will sanctify you and give you an inheritance." I just think that's an absolutely marvelous verse. How much does God love us? He loves us so much that a prayer from Paul could have such delightful impact on those for whom he was praying.

So if you were living in the days of Paul, and Paul said, "Excuse me, but I'd like to pray for you," what would you say? I think you'd say, "Well, you go right ahead. I'd like that very much. Would you pray for me?" you'd probably say to Paul. As a matter of fact, who else would you rather have pray for you? Well, I guess you'd like that. "Yeah, I'll pray for you."

I said to myself one day, I said, "Harold, who ever prayed for you?" Then I thought a while and I said, "Well, I actually had two Sunday school teachers who became missionaries. They prayed for me." I said, "Well, Harold, I wonder, do you think that had any impact on you?" Imagine having two missionaries pray for you! How often did they pray for me? Well, actually quite often. So I did something that I—I did it. I'm not sure how or why, but I said, "Harold, were those the only missionaries who ever prayed for you?" So I started to think and I thought with a pencil and paper in my hand. And I wrote down the number of missionaries who I think prayed for me specifically by name. And then I said, "Well, they maybe weren't missionaries, but they were full-time workers for God. How many prayed for you, Harold?" And I tried to list all those who I had a pretty good idea prayed for me personally, publicly, personally by name. How many names do you think I had on my list? I think I had 30 names on my list. I've known a lot of men of God in my life. I've known a lot of wonderful women of God in my life. I think I've been on the prayer list of 30 outstanding servants of God.

So you just think for a minute now, what do you think I'd be like if none of them had prayed for me? Certainly wouldn't be where I am today. How many men and women of God have prayed for you? Do you think it made a difference? **Yes.** Here's my next question: how many have you prayed for? Do you think it's going to make a difference? Of course it is. And if Paul had been there, you'd have gone to the prayer meeting with him just so that when he prayed for everybody at the prayer meeting, he'd be praying for you.

Conclusion

Well, those are a few thoughts from the book of Acts. Why do we have prayer meetings? Because they're biblical. They're the command of God. They are the source of God's grace and blessing and strength for us all. Come to prayer meeting and pray.

Lord, we want to thank you for the truth of God. And we marvel. How could it be that the God of heaven would give the time of day to a little request from someone like me? We want to thank you that you answer prayer. Paul says, "I commend you to the God and the word of his grace." Amen. He's able to build us up and to present us an inheritance with all who are sanctified. Hallelujah, Lord, it's marvelous. We pray, Lord, that we will not only be the beneficiaries of prayer, but we will pray privately, collectively, audibly, that you will hear our

prayers and bless us because you promised that you will. I meet your thanks in Jesus' name, pray for your blessing. Amen.