

**Why (the) Prayers Matter
5/14/2017**

Acts 2:42-

**And they devoted themselves
to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

“Devoted to the prayers.”

1. Devoted to the public prayers,
as good Jews, devoted to the Temple prayers (3:1)
2. Devoted to praying together
like the 120 were doing in Acts 1:13-14-
And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James.

¹⁴ All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

Prayer was one of the four pillars
of practice and devotion for those earliest Christians.
And you know what?
I do believe that those folks were on to something.

At least 17x in the book of Acts, folks are praying.

1:24; And they prayed and said, “You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen

to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.”

4:24–31; When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said...

6:4-6; But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles,
and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

9:40 But Peter put them all outside,
and knelt down and prayed;
and turning to the body he said, “Tabitha, arise.”
And she opened her eyes,
and when she saw Peter she sat up.

In the story about Peter’s vision and the household of Cornelius, Peter had gone up on the roof to pray.

(10:2, 4, 9, 31; 11:5)

12:5- So Peter was kept in prison,
but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.

13:3- Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets
and teachers- Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger,

Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

14:23; And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

16:25; About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, ²⁶ and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken.

22:17; “When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’

28:8 It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him.

1. They prayed for healing.
2. They prayed for safety and deliverance.
3. They prayed for boldness and courage.
4. They prayed when discernment was needed
for leadership selection.

5. They prayed early, and often. It was their habit.
It is what they were devoted to.

Jesus was recognized
by Cleopas and his traveling companion
on the road to Emmaus
when he took bread, broke it and blessed it.

How are YOU recognized? Is it by your prayer life?

1. When do you pray? Is it YOUR habit?
2. Are YOU devoted... to prayer?

Prayer matters. I don't know "how" prayer works,
but I know THAT it works,
but works to accomplish what?

It "works" to be a communication link
between our hearts and God.

1. God never promised to always give us what we want.
It would be a negligent,
over-indulgent parent who did that.
2. God doesn't want prayer
to always be a shopping list, either.
3. Prayer is two-way communication,
and communion, between us and God.
4. We speak, God listens.
God speaks, and we listen.

The ways of the Spirit are different
from the ways of the physical universe,
but it is the physical universe that we are most familiar with.

And it seems that Jesus, in his prayer life, prayed as we do,
on occasion, out loud,
 but perhaps at other times within his own heart and mind.

And the Heavenly Father,
 on 3 occasions in Jesus' earthly ministry,
 answered him out loud,
 (baptism, Mt of Transfiguration,
 Final week in Jerusalem, Jn. 12)
 where others could hear Him speak,
 but probably more often,
 God spoke to Jesus in his inner spirit.

Sometimes the answer is a clear yes, an affirmation.
 Other times, it is a clear "no,"
 like when Jesus asked if there was any way
 to avoid the cross.

1. Prayer is not a demand.
2. Prayer is not rubbing the magic lamp
 and hoping for the genie,
3. Prayer is not manipulative.
4. Prayer is a discipline, and a way of life.

And so in Luke 11:1, we read
 Now Jesus was praying in a certain place,
 and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him,
 "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."

WE see YOU pray, Jesus.
 There MUST be something to this prayer business.
 John taught HIS disciples. You can surely teach US.

² And he said to them, “When you pray, say:
 “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.”
³ Give us each day our daily bread,
⁴ and forgive us our sins,
 for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
 And lead us not into temptation.”

Now, a few important questions,
 for those of us who want to be devoted to “the prayers.”

1. Is this the way you learned the “Lord’s Prayer?”
2. Where in the letters or the Book of Acts, do we read
 of the early church reciting this exact prayer,
 which already is different from
 the exact prayer we read in Matthew 6,
 which is **STILL** different from the way
 that most of us learned it?

What’s the point?

Maybe it’s not the exact words that are important.

Perhaps it’s the type of prayer, the simplicity of the prayer,
 the things Jesus includes in the prayer, that are important.

Better yet, let’s let Jesus provide his own commentary
 to the point he is trying to make through this prayer.

Nothing wrong with memorizing this prayer,
 reciting this prayer,
 as long as it doesn’t become a brainless recitation,
 a magical incantation.

⁵ And he said to them,
 “Which of you who has a friend
 will go to him at midnight and say to him,
 ‘Friend, lend me three loaves,
 for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey,
 and I have nothing to set before him’;

⁷ and he will answer from within,
‘Do not bother me; the door is now shut,
and my children are with me in bed.
I cannot get up and give you anything’?

(Parents, you all know what that’s like.
“Do you have any idea what we went through
to wrestle these kids into bed tonight?
No way we’re going through all that tonight. Go away.
Come back tomorrow, when everybody is awake.”)

⁸ I tell you,
though he will not get up and give him anything
because he is his friend,
yet because of his impudence (shameless persistence),
he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

⁹ And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you;
seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

¹⁰ For everyone who asks receives,
and the one who seeks finds,
and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

¹¹ What father among you, if his son asks for a fish,
will instead of a fish give him a serpent;
or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

¹³ If you then, who are evil,
know how to give good gifts to your children,
how much more will the heavenly Father
give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

What’s the best gift of all?

What do kids want more than just about any other gift,
 until they reach the age where they no longer believe
 they can get their parent's attention?

They want their parent to be "fully present" for them,
 to have their parents' undivided attention.

And that, no, better than that,
 is what Jesus says the Father offers us
 when we ask in prayer.

¹³ If you then, who are evil,
 know how to give good gifts to your children,
 how much more will the heavenly Father
 give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

God, who has a universe to run,
 still gives his undivided attention to HIS children,
 in the form of the Holy Spirit that indwells them.

Everywhere that we go, God goes. His Spirit indwells us.
 Constant guidance, constant encouragement and comfort.

Constant empowerment.

THAT's what the earliest Christians received
 when they devoted themselves to prayer.

And that's what WE can receive
 when we devote OURSELVES to prayer.

Prayer is checking in with God,
 spending time with God,
 not always asking God or telling God.

When was the last time you

- 1. Watched a sunset with God?**
- 2. Cried at an inspirational movie...with God?**
- 3. Cried yourself to sleep...with God?**
- 4. Struggled with temptation...with God?**
- 5. Felt abandoned, betrayed, left out, mistreated...
with God?**

(It changes things, doesn't it?)

**Prayer is how we walk with God today,
like we COULD have walked with Him in the Garden,
if not for sin and disobedience.**

Sometimes Nancy just wants to talk.

She wants to know I am listening.

- 1. She doesn't want or need advice.**
- 2. She doesn't want an argument.**

**She just wants to know that
something that is important to her
is important enough to me to pay attention to her.**

**I think God wants to listen to us,
to know what is on our hearts.
And if we just prattle on, He's OK with that,
because WE are important to Him.**

Prayer IS a discipline, but it's NOT a duty. It's a privilege.

...amen?

Acts 2:42- “the Prayers”

References to “prayer” are frequent both in the summary statements and the narrative of Acts (in addition to 2:42, see 1:14, 24; 4:24–31; 6:4, 6; 9:40; 10:2, 4, 9, 31; 11:5; 12:5; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 22:17; 28:8). Just as Luke has set up in Luke-Acts the parallelism between the Spirit’s work in relation to Jesus and the Spirit’s work in the church, so he also sets up the parallelism between prayer in the life of Jesus and prayer in the life of the church. His use here of both the definite article and the plural in “the prayers” (*tais proseuchais*) suggest formal prayers, probably both Jewish and Christian. The earliest believers not only viewed the old forms as filled with new content, but also in their enthusiasm they fashioned new vehicles for their praise. In addition, it is not difficult to envision the earliest believers using extemporaneous prayers built on past models—such as Mary’s *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55), Zechariah’s Song of Praise (Luke 1:67–79), or Simeon’s *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:28–32).¹

Table fellowship denoted intimacy, and discussions or even lectures at meals were common. Given the topic of discussion recommended by Jewish pietists and what this text says about teaching and prayer (possibly including participation in the temple prayers—3:1), early Christian fellowship undoubtedly centered more on intimate worship, sharing and learning the Scriptures than its modern Western counterpart tends to do.²

The last element is given in its plural form in the Greek text. They devoted themselves to “the prayers.” Since the believers continued to make the temple central to their gatherings, it is not surprising that they continued to recognize the times for prayer.³

The prayers (*ταῖς προσευχαῖς* [*tais proseuchais*]). Services where they prayed as in 1:14, in the temple (Acts 3:1), in their homes (4:23).⁴

and to *the prayers*. [“The plural indicates the great variety, some being new or distinct from written forms, others being derived from the Jewish liturgy.” (Meyer). Alford explains thus: “The appointed times of prayer; see ver. 46—not excluding prayer among themselves, etc.”⁵

The fourth and final element of their life together, another expression of their fellowship, was “the prayers” (RSV). The presence of the article in the Greek text before prayers has led some interpreters to see this as a reference to their keeping the formal prayer hours of Judaism in the

¹ Longenecker, R. N. (1981). [The Acts of the Apostles](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts* (Vol. 9, p. 290). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

² Keener, C. S. (1993). [The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament](#) (Ac 2:42). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³ Gaertner, D. (1995). [Acts](#) (Ac 2:41–47). Joplin, MO: College Press.

⁴ Robertson, A. T. (1933). [Word Pictures in the New Testament](#) (Ac 2:42). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

⁵ Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Gotthard, V. L., Gerok, C., & Schaeffer, C. F. (2008). [A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Acts](#) (pp. 56–57). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

temple. They may well have done so to some extent, for their faithfulness in attending temple worship is noted in 2:46 and 3:1. The reference, however, is probably much broader and involves primarily their sharing in prayer together in their private house worship.⁶

They adhered “to the prayers,” i. e., to the worship in their own gatherings, 4:24, etc., and to the stated devotions in the Temple, 3:1, etc. It seems that this word is used to designate the entire service or worship and not merely the praying. We thus see how Luke first pairs teaching and the fellowship it involves and secondly the Sacrament and the worship which parallels it.

Here we have a brief description of the religious life of the first Christian congregation. All the essentials are present and are in proper order and harmony. The church has always felt that this is a model. One wishes that Luke had said more. Where did this large congregation assemble, for it grew tremendously (4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7)? Many think of the halls of the Temple. But this was scarcely the case. The one thing certain is that no difficulty was encountered regarding a meeting place. Were these “prayer meetings” in the modern sense of that term? We shall see that only on special occasions were gatherings for the purpose of praying held. The dominating feature is the teaching (Word) and the Sacrament.⁷

⁶ Polhill, J. B. (1992). [Acts](#) (Vol. 26, pp. 119–120). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁷ Lenski, R. C. H. (1961). [The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles](#) (p. 117). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.