

The Power of One Prayer Meeting Acts 1:12-26

12) Then they (those who witnessed Jesus ascension into heaven) returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is near Jerusalem – a Sabbath day’s journey away. 13) When they arrived, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. 14) They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. 15) In those days Peter stood up among the brothers and sisters – the number of people who were together was about a hundred and twenty – and said: 16) *“Brothers and sisters, it was necessary that the Scripture be fulfilled that the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David foretold about Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus. 17) For he was one of our number and shared in this ministry. 18) Now this man acquired a field with his unrighteous wages. He fell headfirst, his body burst open and his intestines spilled out. 19) This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that in their own language that field is called 'Hakeldama' (that is, Field of Blood). 20) For it is written in the Book of Psalms: “Let his dwelling become desolate; let no one live in it; and Let someone else take his position.” 21) Therefore, from among the men who have accompanied us during the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us – 22) beginning from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us – from among these, it is necessary that one become a witness with us of his resurrection. 23) So they proposed two: Joseph, called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. 24) Then they prayed, “You, Lord, know everyone’s hearts; show which of these two you have chosen 25) to take the place in this apostolic ministry that Judas left to go where he belongs.” 26) Then they cast lots for them, and the lot fell to Matthias and he was added to the eleven apostles.*

The Acts of the Apostles narrative begins with Jesus’ last appearance in His resurrected body before His ascent into heaven. Jesus was crucified on Easter Sunday at the end of the Jewish Passover. For 40 days He appeared at least 10 times in His resurrected body to various individuals and groups to prove He was alive. On the 40th day, Jesus ascended into heaven. Acts 2 begins at the Day of Pentecost, the Jewish word for fiftieth. Pentecost marked the Jewish celebration 50 days after Passover. So then, we calculate between the 40 days of appearances and the beginning of Pentecost as a 10-day window. In that ten-day window, 120 believers, followers of Jesus, including Jesus’ Disciples, Jesus’ family, and the

women (probably the wives of the married Disciples and surely the women who accompanied Jesus from Galilee after His resurrection), gathered in an upstairs room for a prayer meeting. This group forms the core of the first-century church. We might refer to them as charter members. From this first recorded prayer meeting, the first-century Christian church is birthed.

When I read the Book of Acts, I must confess my embarrassment. Why does our version of Christianity look so spiritually bland and impotent compared to the first-century Christians? Acts 1 abruptly and quickly parks us in front of the reason – their first meeting together was a prayer meeting. The word **Prayer – *proseuche***, means ***toward God – communication which addresses God***. The first gathered meeting of believers who would birth the church, was a 10-day “toward God” meeting. The upper room prayer meeting challenges us to the core – **Prayer Matters**. We plan – they prayed. We postscript prayer – they prioritized prayer. We focus on earthly, horizontal activity – they focused on heavenly, vertical action.

1. **Prayer Matters because of the Expectancy Effect**. Huddled in their prayer room, these 120 followers of Jesus no doubt recalled and remembered Jesus challenge for them not to leave Jerusalem, but wait for the promised immersion of the Holy Spirit: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* **Acts always connects prayer and power**. The next two recorded prayer meetings in Acts illustrate this connection. The Acts 4 prayer meeting followed Peter and John’s arrest for the healing of the crippled man. The church gathered for a prayer meeting, prayed for boldness, and as recorded in Act 4:31, *“When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken.”* Could First Lafayette use a “good shaking” today? In Acts 12, a prayer meeting is organized to pray for Peter’s deliverance from prison – an impossible situation. When God intervenes to untangle the impossible, these believers react in awe and wonder! What impossibilities at this moment in time need our prayers? Huddled together in their prayer room, the confirmation that Jesus would return (descend) in the same way that He ascended must have burned in their hearts: He’s left us, but He’s coming back for us. **The biblical theology of prayer always connects together expectancy and faith**. Jesus asserted in Mark 11:22 – *“Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, everything you pray and ask for – believe that you have received it and it will be yours.”* Jesus is not advocating physically removing mountains, but just as moving a mountain sustains

an impossible situation, we must pray and never doubt. James 5:13 raised this question: *“Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”*

As we were proposing and planning and praying for the Harvest Day last month, did we believe it? I’ve shared with several of you, that I’ve never experienced an event quite like our Harvest Day offering and what occurred in the weeks before and after. The results are in for September, and the Harvest Day offering together with the giving of tithes and offerings completely, 100% erased and eliminated our budget deficit. I sensed an expectancy these days, and therefore, we ought not be surprised at the results!

2. **Prayer Matters because of the Unity Effect.** The words of verse 14 rise up off the page: *“They were all continually united in prayer.”* Two words connect with prayer. *Proskarterountes* = to be strong, steadfast, and firm toward something. A more literal translation would be “steadfastly continuing.” This word is used often in Acts and other places in the New Testament to define devotion or commitment. Acts 2:42 – *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.”* Acts 2:46 – *“Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple.”* Paul used it in Romans 12:12 – *“Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer”* and Colossians 4:2 – *“Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving.”*

The second word is *Homothumadon* = *with one mind, one accord, in togetherness, unanimously.* Again, used often in Acts and other New Testament texts for unity and togetherness. The Act 4 prayer meeting: *“they raised their voices together to God.”* (Acts 4:24) The Acts 15 church decision: *“we have unanimously decided to select men and send them to you along with our dearly loved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (Acts 15:25-26). Romans 15:6 – *“glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one mind and one voice.”*

The descriptor for these first Christians define **A band of believers “steadfastly continuing to be unanimously united, together with one accord in prayer.”** Unity is the one quality of human bond only genuinely possible among Christian people. Jesus’ last prayer before He went to Calvary included this request for

those He would leave behind: *“May they all be one.”* (John 17:21) Paul pleaded with the Ephesian church to make every effort *“to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”* (Ephesians 4:3) and the Philippian church to be *“united in spirit, intent on one purpose.”* (Philippians 2:2) The most stern warnings to the Corinthians and Roman churches in the New Testament involved division and disunity.

A praying church will be unified and a prayerless church will be divided. It's hard to be divided and at odds with your brother and sister in Christ and at same time be praying together. Praying together in unity harnesses power like a magnifying glass focuses sunlight. Under normal circumstances, light passes to a surface without being focused. But a magnifying glass can focus sunlight, and held steadily on one spot of a dry piece of paper can actually burn a hole in it. Prayer matters because of the unity effect.

3. Prayer Matters because of the Discernment Effect. The final narrative section of Acts 1 explains the process of replacing Judas Iscariot as the 12th Disciple. Luke used Psalm 69:25 and 109:8 as biblical warrant and description for the replacement. Judas used his blood money from leading the temple officials to Jesus to buy a farm. He received his reward – a gory death. Now, the business at hand -- his replacement must be an eyewitness of Jesus' entire ministry. Casting lots identified the method of replacement – a traditional Jewish procedure for making decisions. The assembly selected two candidates who met the qualifications – Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. The lot fell to Matthias – whose name means “gift of God.” (NAC, page 94). Notice their prayer before they made the decision: *“You, Lord, know everyone's hearts; show which of these two you have chosen to take the place in this apostolic ministry that Judas left to go where he belongs.”* An interesting dilemma for us Baptists – they had a prayer meeting before their business meeting. I've moderated many Baptist business meetings where important decisions were made according to majority vote, parliamentary procedure, and personal preference, with little or no prayer included!

In all my years of pastoral ministry, the **One question asked than any other – “How can a person, a ministry, or a church determine and discern God's will?”** It can be a complex answer, involving providential circumstances, ministry experiences, and the wisdom of many counselors. However, none of these ingredients can substitute for prayer – praying for God's wisdom and spiritual discernment. In Acts 13, the Antioch church would discern who should be selected the first missionaries through prayer and fasting.

James 1:5 shouts loudly – *“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God – who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly – and it will be given to him.”* Connect the prayer of the 120 believers with James 1:5, and we can validate the third reason why prayer matters: **We pray to a God who knows everyone’s hearts and who gives wisdom to those who ask for it – generously and ungrudgingly!** When we add to that formula 1 Corinthians 14:33 – *“God is not a God of disorder but of peace”*, and Romans 12:2 – *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”*, how dare we make decisions regarding God’s will ANY OTHER WAY! *Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear! All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!*

If Prayer Matters, we ought to Pray Like it Matters! As we journey through the Book of Acts, examining as a case study the birth and development of the Christian church, one question will always flash before us – What does a healthy church look like? As we conclude Acts 1 and anticipate Acts 2, we have our first answer. A healthy church ought to look like a prayer meeting, because prayer matters.