

# LIFE CHANGING PRAYER

## *The Church that Prays Together*

Prayer is the link between heaven and earth!

In his book, *Something Happens When Churches Pray*, Warren Wiersbe writes, “the history of the church is a record of the conflict between closed minds and open doors. As you read the history of the church beginning in the book of Acts, you find that wherever God had praying people there were open doors.” A link between Peter and Cornelius came about because of their prayers. In *Acts 10* Cornelius, a God-fearing praying man who did not know the message of Jesus, was told by an angel that someone was coming to him. Anyone, anywhere who seeks God will be given the light needed to know the Savior. God used His servant Peter who knew the full message of Jesus to bring God’s Word to Cornelius. **Romans 10:13 (ESV)** <sup>13</sup> For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

The first church meeting in the book of Acts was a prayer meeting. It took place immediately after the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

**Acts 1:12-14 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

These beginners in the first church had it right. As a side note this is the last mention of the mother of Jesus in the New Testament and she is found praying. This small group focused on the fellowship of prayer. Christians have much in common. That is why we have the feeling of being ‘brothers and sisters in Christ.’ We share the same Father. We are indwelt by the same Holy Spirit. We all belong to the same spiritual body of Christ. We all look forward to the same Blessed Hope of Christ’s return. Let’s make sure that we also share in the fellowship of praying together.

Wiersbe writes, “Many Christians use the word ‘fellowship’ to describe sitting across the table from each other, drinking coffee and eating a piece of pie. We can have fellowship in that way but it may not be very deep. The deepest kind of fellowship that we can have as Christians is the fellowship of prayer.” For the Christian, praying is supposed to be like breathing, easier to do than not to do. We even sing, ‘you are the air I breathe.’

Jesus told His children to pray privately. *But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:6)* Paul shared that we should *pray without ceasing, (1 Thessalonians 5:17)* But we should never forget that we also called to pray together.

**Matthew 18:19 (ESV)** <sup>19</sup> *Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.*

Why pray together? Praying together brings added power and praying together also multiplies our joy. In our class when Dave Johnson visited, we experienced shared joy over the healing of a man who was given a new heart and brought back to good health. It was a shared joy because we had often prayed together for him.

Some people are more comfortable ‘praying out loud’ than others. And group praying should never be something that causes people to feel uncomfortable. God hears heart prayers just the same as He hears verbal prayers. Praying together whether aloud or in our hearts will bring power and joy. Praying together also opens up our hearts to the needs of others. And praying together will bring greater glory to God.

Today is the today that we need unity within the family of God just like the early Christians had. We should be *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)*

There is a saying ‘that the church that prays together stays together’. And it is true. You can’t pray sincerely with a person and then in a short period of time be burying them in an avalanche of gossip and slander. When we pray with one another our hearts become tender. We realize how much we mutually need God and how we mutually need to encourage each other. – Jim Cymbala

**Acts 2:42-47 (ESV)** <sup>42</sup> *And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.* <sup>43</sup> *And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.* <sup>44</sup> *And all who believed were together and had all things in common.* <sup>45</sup> *And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.* <sup>46</sup> *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,* <sup>47</sup> *praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

One of the things that is frequently mentioned when studying this passage is the line *all who believed were together and had all things in common*. And the usual focus is upon the early church sharing their earthly goods with one another. I think possibly the focus should be that (1) they shared a hunger for learning from the Apostles’ teaching, (2) they shared a hunger for fellowship with other believers; and (3) they shared a heart for prayer! No wonder they were able to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to their known world.

A miracle is an event which unmistakably involves an immediate and powerful action of God designed to reveal His character or purposes. There are three periods of Bible history that have most miracles. Each was critical for the cause of God and His people – the exodus from Egypt, the Baal crisis in the time of Elijah and Elisha, and the time of Jesus and His Apostles. The miracles testified to the power of God which is greater than false gods.

When the wind and the fire of the Holy Spirit came to earth on Pentecost about 3,000 souls was born again into the family of God. That is a miracle. Still today whenever a person is born into the family of God, IT IS A MIRACLE. Helping to lead lost souls to Christ and eternal salvation is the greatest miracle that a local church can ever be involved in. We may encounter people today who claim to perform miracles. However, every true miracle is from God Himself. Make sure that you notice in verse 47 that it was the Lord who added to their numbers – not the Apostles or the other Jerusalem believers. We plant, we water, God gives the increase.

Have you ever prayed and not recognized  
the answer when it came?

*Acts 12:1-7 (ESV)* <sup>1</sup> About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. <sup>2</sup> He killed James the brother of John with the sword, <sup>3</sup> and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread. <sup>4</sup> And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, delivering him over to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. <sup>5</sup> So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. <sup>6</sup> Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. <sup>7</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, “Get up quickly.” And the chains fell off his hands.

James was the first of the apostles to die and his brother, John, probably was the last to die. There is no earthly explanation why one brother died early in his work for the Lord and the other served until he was an old man. The answer is only found in the sovereign will of God at work in both their lives.

God’s sovereign will is sometimes hidden from us. His will is sovereign meaning that Jehovah God is the Sovereign ruler of the universe who ordains all that happens. There is nothing that occurs outside of God’s sovereign will. We see this truth played out in the life of Joseph. After all the abuse that Joseph experienced due to the actions of his brothers ,years later he explained to them in **Genesis 50:20 (ESV)** <sup>20</sup> *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

God’s children (the righteous) can take comfort that the Lord’s eyes are upon us and His ears hear our prayers. **1 Peter 3:12 (ESV)** <sup>12</sup> *For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”*

Critics would like to believe that Peter got out of prison because of natural methods. Luke related this story as an example to reveal the power of praying together. The church’s prayers were so powerful that Peter walked free out of prison. And in that moment, Peter himself thought he was only dreaming of walking free. If you do not remember the full details, please read **Acts 12:8-11**. Let’s move on to the surprise of those who were praying!

*Acts 12:12-17 (ESV)* <sup>12</sup> ... he [meaning Peter] went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. <sup>13</sup> And when he knocked at the door of the gateway, a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer. <sup>14</sup> Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. <sup>15</sup> They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" <sup>16</sup> But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. <sup>17</sup> But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Tell these things to James and to the brothers." Then he departed and went to another place.

Sometimes it takes a while for us to recognize the miracles that God performs in our lives. But, oh what joy when we recognize that a miracle indeed has taken place and those around us see the proof with us!

Rhoda – you can't help but love her! Peter comes to the door of a house full of people praying for him and his release from prison. Rhoda sees him and leaves him standing outside knocking while she is trying to convince the others that he is really there! There was a common belief among the Jews that every true Israelite had a guardian angel especially assigned to him. It was believed that when that angel appeared in human form, the angel assumed the likeness of the man he protected. That is most likely why they concluded Rhoda had seen Peter's angel at the door.

When it comes to the kingdom, we don't always know as we pray what our answer will be. Rachel Saint one day prayed for the Lord to do whatever it took to reach the Auca Indians in South America for Christ not knowing that it would take the very life of her own brother, Nate Saint, and four other young Christian men. Eventually, Rachel would go herself to live among the Aucas and witness to them about Jesus. Today, the son of Nate Saint lives among the same people who murdered his father. They are now Christians because the Auca Indians saw something they had never seen before – the love of Christ manifested in God's people. How willing are we to pray – Lord, do whatever it takes?

Prayer – our connection to the Almighty Heavenly Father is often the **only** thing we can do for those in distress and at the same time there is nothing better that we can do for our friends and loved ones!

*James 5:16 (ESV)* <sup>16</sup> Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Always remember – that there is power in prayer. Jesus has already given us the power. *Acts 1:8 (ESV)* <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

God's power is released when His church prays.

When churches pray God's hand begins to work. Doors are opened and deliverance takes place because God's people are praying. We often ask concerning problems with our world, why is such and such happening? Chances are, we should stop questioning and start praying. God is listening!