



the
book
of **ACTS**

My House Shall Be Called a House of Prayer

Meditations on Prayer
from the Book of Acts

By Dr. Larry Stout

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This booklet was put together with two goals in mind. First, the aim is to demonstrate how prayer was indispensable in the establishment, growth, and expansion of the church. Second, it is to inspire us as the church to reclaim the source of power we have available to us as we continue the work of extending the glory of God, by making disciples through the gospel.

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Prayer is a request to a magnificent God to act on behalf of his people.

The Disciples Dilemma

Imagine being one of those original disciples at the time described in the book of Acts. You barely have time to stop and think about all the events that have cascaded in the past couple of months; Jesus arrest, trial, crucifixion, and then his resurrection from the dead.

You then had a reunion with Jesus for forty days, but it was undoubtedly unlike anything like the past three years! The resurrected One walked you and your fellow disciples through the Old Testament and showed you again and again and again how these texts related to His life and work that you had been witnessing the past three years.

As euphoric as this must have been, those disciples also realized that this was going to end sometime soon. It must have been bitter sweet to be sitting at the feet of the resurrected Savior, soaking up the treasures of God's Holy Word from the very one who WAS the Word — and yet at the same time knowing this would not last. Jesus was telling them that he was departing back to His Father but would still be with his disciples. How was that going to happen, they must have wondered.

The answer was prayer. During Jesus' ministry on earth, he was continually seeking His heavenly Father in prayer. Jesus had given these disciples the ability to preach and even heal in his name, but they realized that something was still missing. This is why they asked him to teach them how to pray. The first prayer book, *Lord, Teach Us to Pray*, was designed for individuals and small groups to engage in the Lord's prayer to pray more biblical personal prayers to the Lord. It was designed to teach us how to pray.

Many, many Christians struggle in this area, and to grow in our faith in Christ very much depends on growing in our prayer life.

Yet, on the other side of this coin is the very desire itself to pray. It is one thing to know HOW to pray, it is another to WANT to pray. Worship, preaching, fellowship, evangelism — all are important and necessary for the church, but Jesus stated in Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17, and Luke 19:46 that His house would be a house of prayer.

The church that was born out of those first disciples did not begin in a synagogue or even some particularly significant landmark like the Mount of

Olives or even at Golgotha. No, it began in a large room in Jerusalem that hosted 120 followers of the risen Christ who gathered together for one purpose — and that purpose was prayer.

The prayer meeting's participants were formed around Jesus' eleven disciples. In his commentary on Acts, the distinguished theologian Kenneth Gangel noted that, "The outstanding thing about these men is that they were not outstanding." He hit the mark, for those disciples featured fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot — there was not a theologian in the bunch.

But (and this is a big But), they knew Jesus. They had followed Jesus. And now, they were ready to continue to follow him, but they had no idea what that meant. He had ascended to the Father, and now they were on their own. And yet... they knew they were NOT on their own. He made a promise to them that we read at the end of Matthew's gospel that he would NEVER leave them or abandon them. Thus, they knew that they still had their Savior with them. Hence, they realize to find wisdom, courage, direction and all their needs — it would be on their knees.

Our House of Prayer

Like all of Scripture, the book of Acts is given to us for our instruction, and not just to supply us with information. We have the same mandate as those first disciples, and that was to take the gospel to all the world. The driving force for this mission must come from the Lord Himself, and that is why every church should be house of prayer. In the book of Acts there are thirty specific references to prayer, which certainly indicates that they understood how much they needed to depend on God's help in the overwhelming task that had been given to them.

In this guide, each of these references to prayer in the book of Acts is highlighted and explained. Through these examples in the early church, we should be encouraged and energized to be as diligent in prayer as they were for the issues, problems, opportunities, threats, joys, sorrows, sufferings, wisdom, guidance, and everything else that a fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ experiences as it seeks to grow in Christ together.

Prayer makes the difference between a church that is vibrant and alive, breathing the joy and power that Jesus promised His church, and a stale, functionally operational but lifeless institution that

survives through manmade management. An old Wesleyan Methodist pastor by the name of Samuel Chadwick who had a true zeal for the church once said, *“Satan dreads nothing but prayer. His one concern is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, he mocks our wisdom, but he trembles when we pray.”*

Would that we would have that spirit-directed, gospel-energized, Heavenly Father-loving focus on prayer that carried the church for two millenniums. May we be the workers that roll up our sleeves and grab the tools that the Lord puts in our hands to build His church by His design. And may we do so in humility and faith as we draw near to the throne room in heaven — His House of Prayer.

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How to use this Prayer book:

Each of these passages has a corresponding meditation related to it. At the end there is a “prayer starter.” As it sounds, this is to help you to come before the Lord and then begin to pray for other areas and needs as they come to mind.

A popular acronym for prayer that fits this study quite well is the ACTS sequence [Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication (Requests)].

After reading the narrative, take a moment and begin to pray in **adoration** by recognizing how good, great, gracious, and glorious our Lord God is to us. After this, **confess** before Him your weaknesses and failings. Then begin to **thank** the Lord for his unfailing mercy and grace. Now having prepared your heart — bring before your Father your **requests**. Take all your burdens, worries, and concerns to Him, knowing that He hears those encumbrances of your heart and wants to give you a peace that passes your understanding by acknowledging that the Lord heard your prayers. Our great hope is that every prayer God hears, God answers.

#1 - United Prayer

Acts 1:14. *They all were continually united in prayer, along with the women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.*

The disciples were probably stunned.

Imagine the situation — they had just returned from the Mount of Olives after watching Jesus ascend into Heaven and being told by two men in white clothes (obviously angels) that they would again see Jesus when he comes back.

They walked back to Jerusalem to the rather large room that they had been using as their headquarters. There were the eleven original disciples, as Judas Iscariot had committed suicide. But there were a number of others who had followed Jesus, including a number of women.

They could have sat around and shared Jesus stories or conducted a planning session on what should we do next, but this is not what they did. *“They all were continually united in prayer...”* (1:14)

They knew that they needed prayer more than anything else in this time of waiting for the next page to turn in the drama that they were experiencing.

In our day and age, it is likewise true that we need to immerse the work and direction of the church in prayer. The challenges are daunting and resistance to gospel truth has never been as strong in our country today.

Just as Jehoshaphat prayed in 2 Chronicles 20:12, "*We are powerless before this vast number that comes to fight against us. We do not know what to do, but we look to you.*"

PRAYER STARTER...

Oh Lord,
our Help and Strength in time of need,
we need direction for our church, just as the early church did. May we not just think about what we must do, or talk about what we must do, but may we be as the early church, we would PRAY about what we should do.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. He hears our hearts, so simply pour out your heart to Him.)

#2 - Guidance Prayer

Acts 1:24. Then they *prayed*, “You, Lord, know everyone’s hearts; show which of these two you have chosen.”

The disciples knew that their Lord knew hearts.

The Psalmist stated, “If we had forgotten the name of our God and spread out our hands to a foreign god, wouldn’t God have found this out, since he knows the secrets of the heart?” (Psalm 44:20-21, CSB).

The disciples were going to witness a glaring example of how the Lord knew hearts when a man named Ananias, along with his wife Sapphira, attempted to lie to the Holy Spirit in Acts 5. (Spoiler alert: they did not live to tell about it). But those first Jesus’ followers counted on the Lord’s knowledge of the heart for a very different reason.

Peter’s talk to the 120 in the Upper Room in Acts 1:16-22 was a quick review of Judas’ demise, and an appeal to the Psalms 69:25 & Psalms 108:8 as justification to replace him. The disciples realized that the design that Jesus had established (twelve disciples) should be preserved. We learn that there were a number of

'wannabe' disciples that followed Jesus, and thus they decided to narrow it down to two men who had followed from the time of Jesus' baptism by John up to the time of the resurrection.

There is no indication that Jesus had told them this was necessary, but it had been the pattern they were used to and thus, they wanted to preserve it. Truth be told, we never hear of the twelfth disciple, Matthias, ever again in the book of Acts or the rest of the Bible for that matter. Whether it was necessary or not was not an issue, but rather this is a situation that they came to through prayer. They needed the Lord's wisdom to make a decision and they PRAYED for that direction.

PRAYER STARTER...

Precious Lord Jesus,
we find ourselves often in the dark as we walk through this building project of your house of prayer. Quiet our anxious hearts to hear your voice to guide us to do what is right and true according to your Word.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Remember, he hears our hearts, so simply pour out your heart to Him.)

#3 - Discipline of Prayer

Acts 2:42. “ They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to *prayer*.”

The disciples had three disciplines that they were devoted to. These should be a focus for every body of believers.

They first were devoted to teachings, particularly those that came from those who heard it from Jesus. Today, we are blessed in the same way through the Scriptures, God’s holy Word.

They also were also devoted to fellowship, which is the Greek word, “koinonia.” This was holy, covenantal fellowship that implied a deep, close-knit participation which included worship and the elements of communion (‘breaking of bread.’)

The third discipline was prayer. Scripture is the food that we take in, fellowship is how we live it out, and prayer is how we look up to our Lord God for our everything necessary for life and godliness.

Philemon 1:6 shows this integration beautifully,

"I pray that your participation in the faith may become effective through knowing every good thing that is in us for the glory of Christ."

The word "disciple" has the same root as the word "discipline." A true disciple of Jesus Christ is not just one who has made a confession of faith but one who has made a life-changing decision to follow Jesus. The early church understood this and it changed the world.

PRAYER STARTER...

Our Lord Jesus,
forgive us for being "devoted" to things of this world more than the things that produce holiness and godliness. We know that none of us has it all together, but together as we worship as you directed us and focus on your Word and your mercy to us, we find strength beyond ourselves.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Remember, he hears our hearts, so simply pour out your heart to Him.)

#4 - Diligent Prayer

Acts 3:1. *“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple for the time of **prayer** at three in the afternoon.”*

Peter and John prayed as they knew how — following the practices of a good Jew.

It was not a requirement but a customary practice for the devout to pray three times a day within specific time ranges; *shacharit* (morning prayer), *mincha* (afternoon prayer), and *ma'ariy* (evening prayer).

It is worth noting the context of this event. The conclusion of the previous chapter of Acts highlighted that “day by day” this new emerging group of Jesus followers were meeting in the Temple grounds and their numbers were literally growing day by day.

Yet Peter and John recognized the importance of prayer, and it was customary to pray in mid-afternoon and they went to the temple for just such a purpose. Their focus was to pray, but that same mindset prepared them to recognize that the Lord had divinely orchestrated them to perform the first healing in their ministry.

We read in [Luke 5:17-26](#) how Jesus began his Galilean ministry by healing a lame man. Thus, Peter's command to the man "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk" signified more than just a healing. Rather, it was affirming that Peter and John were living out the same calling, empowered by the same Holy Spirit to do the same works and even greater than Jesus himself (see [John 14:12](#)).

Would this have happened had they not gone to the Temple to pray? Probably, but it was undoubtedly their heart toward prayer that prepared them for what they must have known would have a dangerous act — healing on the Temple grounds "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" just weeks after the Jewish leaders had Jesus crucified. Yet this healing would begin a series of events that would literally change the world.

PRAYER STARTER...

Heavenly Father, we do not know what today will bring. Your holy word tells us to be ever alert in our hearts with all perseverance, in season and out. As we seek your help to walk circumspectly today, we ask for your strength should we be tested in the time of trial.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Remember, he hears our hearts, so simply pour out your heart to Him.)

#5 - Adversity Prayer

*Acts 4:23-24. "After they were released, they went to their own people and reported everything the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they **raised their voices together to God...**"*

Acts 4 is a blueprint on how to deal with adversity.

It has the longest prayer in the book of Acts and is a blueprint on how to deal with hardship and distress. First, their prayer began, *"Master, you are the one who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea, and everything in them."* (v.24) Just as Jesus taught his disciples to begin *"Our Father in heaven....,"* we need to fix in our hearts and minds that we are appealing to the One in which nothing is impossible.

Second, they looked to the Scriptures for help (v.25-27). When we pray God's Word, we know we are praying according to His will. They were not just grabbing a Scripture, but rather directed by the Holy Spirit for a specific passage that spoke directly to their situation.

Third, they acknowledged that God was sovereign. They noted that the events they were experiencing were *"predestined to take place."* (v.28). It should comfort us

greatly in the knowledge that nothing is taking the Lord by surprise.

Finally, they asked the Lord that they “*may speak your word with all boldness, which you stretch your hand for healing, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.*” (v.30). They did not ask for protection from trouble — but faith to continue the work they have been given to do.

Unlike us, they did not know what would happen next. They were swimming in (and maybe even walking on) uncharted waters. But they had the assurance that they had the Lord on their side, and that confident faith is what gave them the courage to face the challenges ahead.

PRAYER STARTER...

Heavenly Father, may our church face adversity with the same attitude of the early church, in faithfulness and boldness in trusting your glorious goodness, mercy and love. Let us not fear the problem but have a holy fear of you, dear God — a reverential respect of your holiness. May we look to you in all we do.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#6 - Ground-Shaking Prayer

Acts 4:31, *“When they had **prayed**, the place where they were assembled was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God boldly.”*

Sometimes there is an immediate result to prayer.

The results of the ‘adversity prayer’ noted in the last lesson was probably not what these followers of Jesus were expecting. Some describe this as a ‘Second Pentecost’ because of the similarities to the phenomena in Acts 2. What it probably represents is a ‘booster shot’ to assure the apostles that they are exactly on the right track in fulfilling their mandate in Acts 1:8 to be witnesses of Jesus resurrection to the the outermost parts of the earth.

The prayer that we examined in the last lesson demonstrates that these disciples were not as focused on their problems as much as focused on their mission. As noted in the last lesson, in many ways it was a model prayer.

One commentator noted that their prayer *“begins by addressing God as Lord and King, expresses confidence*

in his will and actions, exhibits faith and hope in their current situation, and ends with bringing requests to God. The prayer exhibits a theological flow: God is Sovereign Lord, and as such he has always kept his word continuing to show himself faithful among his people, therefore they can trust him fully to provide for them.”¹

Sometimes the Lord shakes us up to get us moving in the right direction. In this case, our Heavenly Father was affirming to them they were going in the right direction, and that they had the power of the Holy Spirit with them on the journey.

PRAYER STARTER...

Our great and powerful Lord God, we have been given a mighty mission that you did not promise would be easy. May we use these trials and troubles for an opportunity to place our full faith and hope on you. To the glory of your Name ...

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

¹ James M. Hamilton Jr. and Brian J. Vickers, *John–Acts*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. IX, ESV Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 377.

#7 - Ministry Prayer

Acts 6:4 *“But we will devote ourselves to **prayer** and to the ministry of the word.”*

Elizabeth Elliott allegedly once said once said, **“Prayer lays hold of God's plan and becomes the link between his will and its accomplishment on earth.”**²

The early church were not sure what God's plan was to be. They were Jews who knew the obligations that went with their faith, but now under the new covenant initiated by Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, they understood that things were changing. In Acts 6, the Greek-speaking Jews had issues with their Hebrew Christian brothers over how widows were being treated.

This might not seem so serious to us, but it represented a larger problem for the twelve apostles. They knew that mercy ministries were important, but they also knew how critical it was to preach the gospel. They were the ones who had

²The exact source for this quote could not be verified.

been an eye-witness to Jesus' ministry, and thus, they were uniquely the ones to teach the truth of the new faith.

They initiated the office of deacon made up of *“seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom”* (6:3) to conduct the mercy ministry toward the widows which would enable them to *“devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”*

Notice that prayer was highlighted first. The word “devote” in our translation is a little weak compared to Greek word that is used here.

Proskartereō means "to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty – 'to devote oneself to, to keep on, to persist in.'³ They knew that all ministry had to be bathed in intense, persistent, 'devoted' prayer.

PRAYER STARTER...

Dear Heavenly Father, forgive us for doing our work for you without drawing on your strength, your leading, your comfort, your direction. May we be ever mindful that apart from you we can do

³Strong's Greek: 4342. Προσκαρτερέω (Proskartereō) -- to Attend Constantly," accessed November 29, 2023, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4342.htm>.

nothing, and especially those things that are for your purposes and for your glory.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#8 - Commissioning Prayer

*Acts 6:6 "They had them stand before the apostles, who **prayed** and laid their hands on them."*

Eugene Peterson once stated, "The most important thing a pastor does is stand in the pulpit every Sunday and say, 'Let us worship God.'"

If you would ask a dozen different pastors what their job was in the church they would probably give you a laundry list of activities; preaching, teaching, leading, counseling, managing, helping, witnessing, and so on. When the church was being founded among those first disciples, the leadership recognized that they had two primary duties that they must prioritize — prayer and ministering the Word of God.

This was a very critical time for the church. Remember, Peter and John had already been detained by the same Sanhedrin that had condemned Jesus to death. Their emphasis on prayer and Scripture was because these were the bedrock disciplines that they could not do without.

Yet, they also recognizes that there were other needs in the church that were also critical.

To emphasize that these were not secondary areas, they created a new office know as deacons. They were designed as the apostles extra hands. As they were ordaining them, they first prayed. This kind of intense devoted prayer is necessary for deacons as well as elders because all those ministry activities for deacons are likewise fraught with challenges and difficulties.

Prayer is acknowledging that this work is divine work — it is participating in the building project that Jesus himself promised, that HE would build His church. This example should be etched into our hearts.

PRAYER STARTER...

Dear Lord God, we ask for your blessing upon those who lead in the offices of our church. May they be devoted to prayer. We pray that all who serve would acknowledge that it is your grace that enables them to serve...

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#9 - Ground-Breaking Prayer

Acts 8:15 *“After they went down there, they **prayed** for them so that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit because he had not yet come down on any of them.”*

Old traditions often die hard.

It is almost impossible for us to understand the deep division between God’s chosen people, the Jews, who lived in Judea, and those from Samaria who practiced a syncretistic religion.

The woman at the well who tried to debate with Jesus about where and how to worship is an example of this (John 4:1-46). Yet, even though these people were half-breed Jews at best, when Jesus gave the commission to his disciples in Acts 1:8, he specified that Samaria should be the first place where they were to go after Jerusalem and Judea, and then the outermost parts of the earth.

If we read the Scriptures honestly, it is easy to see that the apostles were not hot on this idea.

We read in Acts 8:1 that right after the martyrdom of Stephen, *“a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the land of Judea and Samaria.”* It was up to one of the deacons, Philip, that was willing to go to a city in Samaria and proclaim the Messiah to them. (8:5). God blessed his ministry and it was apparent that they received the gospel. The apostles finally realized it was time to move beyond Jerusalem. *“The apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.”* (v.14).

This brings us to our ‘ground-breaking’ prayer in v.15. Breaking new ground is never easy, which is why it must be covered in prayer.

PRAYER STARTER...

O Dear Lord God, may we never take a step outside of your providence. May we bathe every action, every purpose done in your name in prayer. For your name and for your glory we pray...

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#10 - Repentance Prayer

Acts 8:22 *“Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and **pray** to the Lord that, if possible, your heart’s intent may be forgiven.”*

Repentance is not a popular term in our world today.

Yet even a quick look at the Scriptures shows up how essential it is. The first message of John the Baptist (Matt 3:2), Jesus (Matt 4:17), and Peter (Acts 2:38) illustrated that an attitude of repentance is the essential foundation for receiving the gospel.

The event in Acts 8 was what we would call a revival, and like all revivals, there are distractions and counterfeits. Such was a man named Simon and in some translations called Simon Magus, meaning Simon the Magician. He believed that anything could be bought with money (doesn’t that sound familiar?), but Peter made it clear that this is an abomination. Peter told him, “May your silver be destroyed with you...”

Yet even to this apostate magician, “poisoned by bitterness and bound by wickedness,” (v.23), even for him was hope of salvation. The key to open this door was having faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, and acknowledging repentance through prayer.

Repentance is essential to acknowledging our faith in Christ, and the way we communicate this repentance to the Lord is through prayer. John Piper wrote, *“Prayer is the open admission that without Christ we can do nothing. And prayer is the turning away from ourselves to God in the confidence that He will provide the help we need.”*⁴

PRAYER STARTER...

Heavenly Father, may we always remember that we are sinners, saved by the grace shown to us through the sacrificial blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. Be merciful to us, we pray ...

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

⁴ “We Can Do Nothing,” *Desiring God* (blog), October 11, 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-can-do-nothing>.

#11 - Intercessory Prayer

Acts 8:24 *“Pray to the Lord for me,” Simon replied, “so that nothing you have said may happen to me.”*

God may answer our prayers in ways we never imagined.

In the late 1980s, I met a man in the Ukraine who had worked for the KGB. One of his jobs was to burn confiscated Bibles. It was illegal to have Bibles in the Soviet Union and if they were discovered, they were quickly destroyed. This man was routinely doing his job when one of the Bibles fell open at his feet and there on the page was a list of names, including his own! It turned out that this Bible had belonged to his own grandmother, and the list was those that she prayed for daily. The man was so overwhelmed by this divine coincidence, he repented and asked Jesus to save him.

Simon was likewise a man who had no interest in salvation until he saw the power of God with his

own eyes. Yet this man was weak, and he knew he was weak. ‘

In Mark 9, there is a story of a father who had a terribly tormented young son, and he asked Jesus “if you can” to help him. Jesus countered with the statement, “‘If you can’? Everything is possible for the one who believes.” Immediately the father of the boy cried out, “I do believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:23-24)

Intercessory prayer is our way of helping those who we know are close to the Kingdom of God, but for some reason cannot make that last step. The Lord is looking for intercessors like this. Ezekiel 22:30, *“I searched for a man among them who would repair the wall and stand in the gap before me on behalf of the land so that I might not destroy it, but I found no one.”*

PRAYER STARTER...

Precious Lord Jesus, today we pray particularly for _____ who is close to repentance but has not done so. We intercede for this one in your wonderful, precious, merciful name ...

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#12 - Answered Prayer

*Acts 9:11 "Get up and go to the street called Straight,"
the Lord said to him (Ananias), to the house of Judas,
and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul,
since he is **praying** there."*

Remembering the backstory of Scripture helps us to appreciate what we are reading.

This man, Ananias, was a Christian living in Damascus. He undoubtedly heard that there was this radical Pharisee by the name of Saul of Tarsus who was arresting and imprisoning Christians and in some cases, even having them executed. And now the Lord was giving him a mission to go lay hands on this evil man to receive his sight.

It is no surprise that Ananias was less than enthusiastic about this errand that the Lord had outlined for him. After all, it was very possible that his name was on the list of Christians that Saul was going to arrest. He told the Lord as much, "Lord,"

Ananias answered, "I have heard from many people about this man, how much harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

And he has authority here from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." (Acts 9:13-14).

The Lord answered Ananias, *"Go, for this man is my chosen instrument to take my name to Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."* (9:15-16) What the Lord was essentially telling Ananias was that he was the answer to Saul's prayers — a very unlikely answer to be sure — but just as Saul was God's 'chosen instrument,' so was Ananias.

PRAYER STARTER...

Dear Heavenly Father, we know that every prayer that you hear, you answer. May we learn to trust you in this regard, even when your answers may be completely different than anything we could imagine. In your faithful name we pray ...

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#13 - Healing Prayer

Acts 9:40 Peter sent them all out of the room. He knelt down, **prayed**, and turning toward the body said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up.

Miracles are as extraordinary as they are rare.

A woman named Tabitha (also known by her Greek name, Dorcas) lived in the coastal city of Joppa and was obviously very much loved because she was known for “*always doing good and helping the poor*” (Acts 9:36). When she died, the believers in Joppa were filled with sadness. They laid the body in an upper room and sent for Peter, who was at the time in the nearby town of Lydda (v. 37–38).

Peter came at once and met with the disciples in Joppa, who showed him the clothing that Dorcas had made for the widows there (v.39). We do not know what was going through Peter’s mind at this point, but there were essentially two options. He could have comforted these mourners with the reassurance that Tabitha was now with the Lord Jesus, or he could possibly do what Jesus had done with Lazarus and the official Jairus’ daughter — raise her from the dead.

Peter sent them all out of the room and prayed, possibly asking what the Lord wanted done. Then *“turning toward the dead woman, he said, ‘Tabitha, get up.’ She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet”* (vs 40–41). The overjoyed believers received their friend, and the news spread quickly throughout the city. *“Many people believed in the Lord”* as a result (v.42).

We should pray for healing, but we also need to recognize that it is the Lord who chooses how and when He heals. Nothing is impossible with God.

PRAYER STARTER...

Precious Lord God, we humbly come before you and ask that you help us to direct our prayers toward you will and purpose, especially for those who are suffering. Not our will, but yours be done. Give us peace that when we unburden our heart to you, you do hear our prayers and will answer them, whatever the outcome. To you be the glory, for ever and ever...

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Specifically, ask the Lord to heal those that you know that are currently suffering with physical or mental issues.)

#14 - Faithful Prayer

*Acts 10:2 He was a devout man and feared God along with his whole household. He did many charitable deeds for the Jewish people and always **prayed** to God.*

The Holiness Movement Methodist pastor Edwin Harvey allegedly wrote, “**A day without prayer is a day without blessing, and a life without prayer is a life without power.**”⁵

God used a praying man to initiate a great leap in the growth of the church. We had earlier seen in Lesson #3 how Peter and John faithfully prayed daily at the ‘time of prayer’ in the afternoon and we see this commitment to prayer again from a devout man who feared God who was also very charitable to the Jewish people. What made this man quite unique was that he was also a Roman centurion.

We need to recognize how challenging all these encounters were to the early church. Granted that Jesus encountered a God-fearing Roman centurion in Matthew 8 as well as ministering to a Samaritan woman and a Canaanite woman, but he clearly emphasized that

⁵The exact source of this quote could not be verified.

his mission in the statement, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* (Matthew 15:24).

But the mission of the New Testament church was to take the gospel to the outermost parts of the earth, which included their archenemies, Roman soldiers. This man was devout, feared God, and even did charitable deeds for the Jewish people but it was doubtful that he was circumcised or observed the Jewish rituals. He had a hunger for God, and thus he prayed.

The results, as we will see in the next lesson, are nothing but astounding.

PRAYER STARTER...

Dear Heavenly Father, as we come to you in prayer, we acknowledge that we are imperfect. We are not as faithful as we should be in seeking you in prayer. We ask your forgiveness, and ask for your encouragement to hunger and thirst after righteousness which begins with bowing before your great majesty. May we become faithful pray-ers.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Particularly repent of any hinderances that you know are preventing you from being more faithful in your prayer life.)

#15 - Astonishing Prayer

Acts 10:4 *Staring at him in awe, he said, "What is it, Lord?"
The angel told him, "Your **prayers** and your acts of charity
have ascended as a memorial offering before God.*

This is one of the most beautiful acknowledgement to a prayer in the entire Bible.

It is noteworthy that it was not just the prayers but the centurion's acts of charity that backed up his sincerity to seek God's face. It is also worth noting that the reference to a memorial offering before God is the same as those that are referenced in the book of Leviticus, "a pleasing aroma to the Lord."

What could be more comforting than knowing that your prayers are heard by God? We may not have an angel confirm this to us, but we have God's Word. It would seem to us that when an angel shows up, the matter is settled! And yet, the message of the angel was that his answers were not going to come from this angelic being but rather from a disciple of Jesus.

And here is the true beauty of prayer. Just as the Lord was working on Cornelius' heart, He was also working on Peter's heart as well.

The prayers of a Roman centurion were going to be a gateway to expanding the gospel to the gentiles. Think about this for a moment — the fact that we have come to know Christ as our Lord and Savior can be tracked back to this man's prayers!

Cornelius' prayers were getting answered in a far, far better way than he could ever have imagined. Could not the same thing be happening from our prayers as well?

PRAYER STARTER...

O Wonderful, Gracious God, we are in awe of how you choose to take our prayers and do exceedingly abundantly beyond all we could ask or think in answering those prayers. We know that we may not even see the impact in our lifetime, but we know that as we come to you in faith, you work wonders.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Be willing to be bold in your prayers. What are areas that God and God alone can bring about?)

#16 - Preparation Prayer

*Acts 10:9 The next day, as they were traveling and nearing the city, Peter went up to **pray** on the roof about noon.*

Jesus' commission to the disciples to go to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria was one thing, but going to "the outermost parts of the world" to spread the gospel meant sharing the gospel with Gentiles, and that was especially a tough nut for the Apostle Peter to chew on, nevertheless swallow.

Yet Peter was meant to be the forerunner, and the Lord was going to have give him quite a shove for him to get out of his comfort zone of Jewish people. In Acts 1-5 we see Peter in Jerusalem, in Acts 8 he is in Samaria, (technically not Jewish but not quite Gentiles, either). In Acts 9 he is at Lydda and Joppa, which were considered Judea. Up to this time, none of the cities that Peter has gone to were technically Gentile cities. The Lord is going to have to give Peter a healthy push to get him to cross that line.

And He does so through Peter's prayers. He is heading to the city of Caesarea which is obviously named after Caesar and is also headquarters of the 10th Roman Legion.

Even though this city was in Judea, the city was essentially half Jewish and half Gentile, accommodating for the Roman officials and soldiers with their families. History also records that it was the home of Pontius Pilate. Peter knew that this was undoubtedly going to be the most challenging place he had yet ministered at, and thus he sought the Lord's help through prayer.

He went up on roof of the place he was staying (probably for privacy) and yet did so at noon, arguably the hottest time of the day. It spoke of Peter's intensity for the situation he was facing. Peter's example to us is clear — when the chips are down, start looking up!

PRAYER STARTER...

We praise you, Lord Jesus, that you promised us that you would never leave us or abandon us. We especially need this confidence during those times when we find ourselves in uncharted places, yet it is where you have placed us. Give us that peace that passes our understanding as we seek your face in prayer.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#17 - Connection Prayer

Acts 10:30-31 Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this hour, at three in the afternoon, I was **praying** in my house. Just then a man in dazzling clothing stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, your **prayer** has been heard, and your acts of charity have been remembered in God’s sight.’”

The tenth chapter of Acts demonstrates God’s tremendous mercy as it describes the incredible lengths it took to get Peter to acknowledge that, indeed, Gentiles were to be included into His kingdom.

It started with motivating him to pray on a hot rooftop in a blazing sun. Then the Lord gives him a vision that implies he is to eat non-kosher food which leaves Peter “greatly perplexed.” After this, the Holy Spirit tells Peter that he has sent three men to take him somewhere, and don’t ask any questions about it.

When Peter went with them and met the Roman centurion Cornelius, he was surprised to be invited to a ‘large gathering of people,’ who also happened to be Gentiles. Peter quickly notes that “You know it’s forbidden for a Jewish man to association or visit a foreigner” (v.28), but also acknowledges that the Lord has sent him so... here he is.

Now it is Cornelius' turn, and he relates his encounter with the 'man in dazzling clothing' that announced that his prayers had been heard. He remarks it was the three in the afternoon, which would have been three hours after Peter had prayed.

As the Lord was preparing Peter's heart for the work he had to do to spread the gospel, the Lord was preparing a God-fearing gentile named Cornelius to receive the blessing of the gospel.

PRAYER STARTER...

Only you, Precious Lord, could use a Roman soldier to spread the gospel when it was Roman soldiers who put you on the cross. Yet even at the cross, a soldier acknowledged you were the Son of God. We marvel at your mercy, dear Lord, and rejoice in receiving this mercy.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Ask the Lord to stretch you and strengthened you toward areas that you know you are called [e.g. troublesome co-workers or family members] but have neglected or avoided.)

#18- Surprising Prayer

Acts 11:5 *“I was in the town of Joppa **praying**, and I saw, in a trance, an object that resembled a large sheet coming down, being lowered by its four corners from heaven, and it came to me.”*

The event of Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit, clearly demonstrating that they were also included in the Kingdom of God, must have had a tremendous impact on Peter.

Thus he was the best spokesperson to present this new pathway of the gospel for his fellow Jews. He was being criticized by the circumcision party (11:2) who felt Paul had crossed a line. Paul decided to walk them through it step by step (Acts 11:4).

Paul sympathized with his fellow Jews who were offended that he had met and ate with uncircumcised people, but he noted that while he was still speaking (Acts 10:44) that the Holy Spirit poured down on those people. From this, Peter boldly acknowledged that they were equal to Jews who had received Christ as Savior, and thus commanded that they be all baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (10:48).

The early church was still trying to determine how much of the old covenant law was still valid in light of the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus life, death, and resurrection. Apparently this 'circumcision party' was an influential group that felt that the practice of circumcision was still a deal-breaker. Peter faced them when he returned to Jerusalem, and his defense began by noting that his actions were prefaced by his prayers.

Peter gave a straight-forward account of what happened and concluded, *"If then, God gave them the same gift that he also gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, how could I possibly hinder God?"* (11:17).

They became silent...and then they glorified God.

PRAYER STARTER...

Dear Lord Jesus, you often answer our prayers in ways that we never imagined, sometimes even with suffering. But we know ultimately it is all for our good, and thus we thank you and praise you for your everlasting lovingkindness.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#19- Fervent Prayer

Acts 12:5 *So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was **praying** fervently to God for him.*

Many who read the book of Acts focus on the signs and wonders experienced by the early church, but it is also a story of their suffering and trials.

The end of chapter 11 and the beginning of chapter 12 are a great example of this. A prophecy was made that they should expect a worldwide famine, almost the worst thing imaginable for those people. But they had more recent troubles, as King Herod "*violently attacked some who belonged to the church.*" (12:1). In the midst of this came a real shocker, "*and he executed James, John's brother, with the sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter too.*" (12:2-3)

This must have shocked the church, as Peter, James, and John were the three most important disciples of Jesus. With James' death and Peter's arrest, there must have been great despair throughout the church.

Think from their perspective — What was going to happen next? What were they supposed to DO next?

What would have been most troubling was that their leadership was not there to show them what they were supposed to do. The despair that they must have felt would have been palpable.

No one had answers — but they knew the one who had those answers — the Lord God Almighty. And so they joined together to pray, and pray fervently.

Fervent prayer is not panic prayer, or desperate prayer, but passionate, intense, sincere prayer. It is prayer that pours out everything because there is nowhere else to go.

PRAYER STARTER...

O Dear Jesus, our Great Shepherd, there are times when we are truly shaken. There are times when we are sincerely confused and conflicted. There are times when everything seems lost. Show us in these gripping moments of discouragement and fear that you are still on the throne, you are the King of Kings, and that we can trust you for the days ahead.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#20 - Answered Prayer

Acts 12:12 *As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was called Mark, where many had assembled and were **praying**.*

As we saw in the previous lesson, the church was in the desperate straits — their response was to pray. And God answered them!

Peter was set free by an angel and walked him out of the prison. When he was out on the street, the angel disappeared. *“When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod’s grasp and from all that the Jewish people expected.”* (Acts 12:11)

Notice especially those last few words, “all that the Jewish people expected.” Peter realized how desperate and despondent the Christian church must be at that time.

Meanwhile,, these followers of Jesus had been praying at the house of Mary, the mother of John, also known as Mark. There were “many” assembled together to pray at that house, and they had no idea that their prayers had already been answered.

The irony was that when Peter knocked at the door, a servant named Rhoda came to answer and was so shocked when she heard Peter's voice, instead of opening the door to let him in, she dashed to tell the others what has happened.

They were praying, and irony continued in that they told Rhoda she was out of her mind, and that she had probably seen an angel. But Peter's persistent knocking finally got a response, and with great joy they realized that the Lord had, indeed, answered their prayers.

PRAYER STARTER...

O Dear Jesus, our Great Shepherd, there are times when we are truly shaken. Like Jehoshaphat who prayed to you in his distress and proclaimed, "We do not know what to do, but we look to you," (2 Chronicles 20:9,12). We may not receive the answer we desire or even expect, but we know that you do hear and answer our prayers according to your divine providence.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#21 - Commission Prayer

*Acts 13:2-3 As 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.' Then after they had fasted, **prayed**, and laid hands on them, they sent them off.*

It should be obvious by now that the early church did not have a guidebook to tell them what to do next.

They had the overall mission given to them in Jesus' words in Acts 1:6, so they knew that eventually they were to go "to the ends of the earth." But how was that to happen?

The answers came to them by seeking God's will. In Acts 13, we are taken to the church at Antioch, which was the first identifiable church that would not be from Jerusalem, Judea, or Samaria. It was in present-day Syria, almost 300 miles from Jerusalem. The first verse of Acts 13 describes the leadership of this church as five men identified as prophets and teachers. They were quite diverse, including at least one and possibly two from Africa and another who served in Herod's household.

As this passage shows, they found their direction from worship, fasting, and prayer. This is the first time that the word 'fasting' is used in the book of Acts and it will come up one more time in the next lesson. In both of these situations, fasting appeared to be an integral component in the charging and sending off of those who were being ordained for church leadership.

What is notable in this passage is that it was *after* they heard the Holy Spirit identify Barnabas and Saul that they *again* prayed, fasted, and laid hands on these two men. Prayer fuels every aspect of work for the Lord.

PRAYER STARTER...

O Heavenly Father, may we never take for granted your blessing, your direction, your protection, and love for us. May we always seek your grace in any and every endeavor, no matter how clearly we see the path before us. We especially pray for wisdom and godly counsel for our church leaders. They are on the front lines and they need your shelter and strength.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Seek to pray specifically for particular elders, home group leaders, ministry coordinators, etc. that the Lord may give you a burden for.)

#22 - Church Planting Prayer

Acts 14:21-23 After they had preached the gospel in that town and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch, strengthening the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith and by telling them, “It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” When they had appointed elders for them in every church and **prayed** with fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

In the 20th century, the focus in the evangelical community was church growth. In the 21st century, it shifted in the direction of church planting.

In both, the emphasis was to spread the good news of the gospel. Truth be told, it is easier to grow an established church than it is to plant a new one. Yet, what we have seen in these past twenty years or so has been the impact these new churches are making around in the United States and throughout the world. The young pastors that are leading these young churches are planting roots that are growing in areas that had been spiritually dry areas.

Paul and Barnabas were practicing church planting and it was killing them — literally! They were continually

being harassed and persecuted, even to the point that in Lystra (a city in what would be in central Turkey today), *“Some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and when they won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead. After the disciples gathered around him, he got up and went into the town. The next day he left with Barnabas for Derbe.”* (14:19-20). All in day’s work, right?

Despite the persecution, Paul told the disciples, *“It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”* (v.22). And with that, they appointed elders for every church, and committed them for their work with prayer and fasting. Paul and Barnabas knew that if the church is going to be birthed, it needed to be established and girded up in prayer.

PRAYER STARTER...

O Gracious Father, you have called us to take the good news of the gospel into the whole world, and yet for disciples to grow they need to be joined together into a church body. We pray today for church planting that would truly represent the kingdom of God for the glory of God.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Pray especially for our missionaries around the world who are continually facing danger for the sake of gospel and the church.)

#23 - A Place for Prayer

Acts 16:13 *On the Sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we expected to find a place of **prayer**. We sat down and spoke to the women gathered there."*

World history is literally going to change because of what Paul is now doing.

Acts 16 describes many important events. It starts by introducing Timothy, a young man who would be instrumental for the growth of the New Testament church. Then there is an account of Paul's redirection several times until he and his companions found themselves on the coast of the Aegean Sea at a seaport named Troas. It was there that Paul had a vision of a man pleading for them to "cross over to Macedonia and help us!" As visions go in the Bible, this one was quite simple, yet it was also one of the most important, because this brought about Paul's directional change from Asia to Europe.

In our minds, it would seem that having been led by the Holy Spirit to this country, they would hit the ground running. Yet staying in Philippi for several days, it appears nothing was happening.

Then came the Sabbath. Paul and the others went outside the city gate by the river. Why there?

They were obedient to the 'Macedonia call.' But just showing up was not enough. They were looking for a place to pray. In fact, the Scripture says they "expected" to find a place of prayer — they needed a quiet, still place that they could get on their knees and seek the will and direction from the Lord for the work they had been divinely called to do.

PRAYER STARTER...

Precious Father in Heaven, forgive us for taking matters into our own hands without seeking your guidance, your wisdom, your direction in our life's decisions and actions. May we be like Paul and his companions, and find that 'place of prayer' and seek you diligently.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Seek to find a place that place of privacy where you can pour out your heart to God. *"But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."* (Matthew 6:6, CSB)

#24 - Disrupted Prayer

Acts 16:16 Once, as we were on our way to **prayer**, a slave girl met us who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She made a large profit for her owners by fortune-telling.

In many discussions with Christians on their prayer life, the subject of disruptions often comes up.

Isn't it funny how prayer time suddenly gets thrown a curve by a crying baby, a phone ringing, a kettle whistling, or a hundred other possible intrusions? Isn't it amazing how many things pop into our heads that suddenly need to be taken care of just at the moment we sit down to pray?

Sadly, the same thing even happens in prayer groups. An individual wants to give an unending account of a situation before the group can pray about it. Or another prays and prays and prays causing a numbing effect on those waiting their turn to pray next.

Satan is a master distractor, and what Paul and Silas experienced was a slave girl who began to follow them as they were going to pray.

She had a demonic spirit through which she predicted the future, which also provided a nice profit for the the owners of this fortune teller.

She was stating the truth about Paul and Silas, but it was not to God's glory but rather promoting her trade. (Something to think about in relation to present day charismatic 'prophets.')

Paul endured it for "many days" but was getting more and more annoyed. He finally turned to her and cast out her evil spirit. Amazingly, as we will see in the next lesson, this act would be a major catalyst to the spread of the gospel in this region of the world. On your way to prayer, be prepared for God to use you in ways you never imagined.

PRAYER STARTER...

Dear Lord God, may we approach your throne in prayer knowing that you are able to do exceeding abundantly above all we could ask or think. May we recognize the difference between the work of the Enemy who wishes to distract us, and your leading to serve in a necessary way at that moment. Open our hearts and minds to receive the answers we do not expect.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.

#25 - Deliverance Prayer

Acts 16:25 *About midnight Paul and Silas were **praying** and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.*

Something very, very special was going on in that awful jail cell.

Picture what happened before this midnight praise session. Paul and Silas have been stripped of their clothes, severely beaten with rods (much worse than whips), they were thrown into the “inner prison” with their feet secured in stocks. Yet, after all this, they were worshiping and were not doing it quietly as the other prisoners were able to listen.

Perhaps it went back to that “Macedonian Call.” In Acts 16:9 it says, “Paul had a vision in which a *Macedonian man* was standing and pleading with him, “Cross over to Macedonia and help us!” What follows was the account of Lydia’s conversion and the deliverance of the slave girl — both women.

The first Macedonian man mentioned in the narrative is the jailor guarding Paul and Silas.

Could it have been that when they were brought into prison, Paul recognized the jailor as the man in his vision? Would that not inspire worship and praise? Or perhaps it was simply their faith and trust that the Lord, knowing that He would hear their prayers, that ignited their worship and praise.

The psalms of David are instructive for deliverance prayer. David was often in danger, and cried out to the Lord for help, but at the same time always examined his own heart in the process. Like Paul and Silas, David knew he was called to do what he was to do, and he also realized that he needed the Lord's continual help to enable him to do it. That we would recognize this simple truth as well.

PRAYER STARTER...

O Great Lord God, praise you for hearing our cries for mercy as well as deliverance. May we trust your providence, knowing that you are aware of our plights and problems, strains and struggles of life. With this confidence, may we sing songs of praise even in the darkest night.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#26 - Blessing Prayer

Acts 20:27, 36 Now from Miletus, he sent to Ephesus and summoned the elders of the church.... After he said this, he knelt down and **prayed** with all of them” .

By this time in the story of Acts, Paul is more than an apostle who started churches, he also was gifted in knowing how to strengthen these churches and help them to grow.

The key was leadership. Paul's instruction in his letters to Timothy and Titus is an excellent example of his wisdom and guidance. Echos of those letters is seen in the passage in Acts 20, where Paul gives a testimony of his own faithfulness in ministry, a word of encouragement to these fledgling church leaders, as well as a stiff warning that there is trouble awaiting down the road.

Paul's life was an example for them to follow, *“I consider my life of no value to myself; my purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace.”* (v.24).

Probably the hardest thing he had to tell them was that after three years of fellowship together, this would be the last time they would ever see each other again. Yet, it is noteworthy that the last thing he wanted to do with these men was pray with them.

We do not have an account of what Paul prayed, outside of the fact that there was not a dry eye in the house when he was finished. His prayer was probably asking the Lord to seal their hearts with the very things that he had just given to them.

This is what it means to bless others.

PRAYER STARTER...

Precious Lord Jesus, you told us that in you we may have peace. You told us we would have suffering in this world, but we should be courageous, for you have conquered the world. May we receive these promises and echo them back to the throne, for you gave us a blessing that those who mourn shall be comforted.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#27 - Comforting Prayer

Acts 21:5-6 When our time had come to an end, we left to continue our journey, while all of them, with their wives and children, accompanied us out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach to **pray**, we said farewell to one another and boarded the ship, and they returned home.

In the immortal words often attributed to Dr. Seuss, “Don’t cry because it’s over. Smile because it happened.”⁶

Paul is wrapping up his farewell tour on his journey back to Jerusalem, each stop undoubtedly getting harder and harder because of the realization that this was goodbye for good. What also had to be weighing heavily on Paul and his companions was the realization that in returning to Jerusalem, they would face severe troubles there.

At this point in the story he has stopped at the city of Tyre, a coastal city which is in present day Lebanon. The city had a sordid past, as Jesus used Tyre as an example of an unrepentant city in Matthew 11:21-22.

⁶The exact source of this quote could not be verified.

Yet he also healed a demon-possessed daughter of a Canaanite woman from Tyre in Matthew 15:21-28. Jesus commented that this woman had “great faith.”

Paul would spend an entire week at Tyre on his last journey. Unlike the farewell at Ephesus which was just for the church elders, this one appeared to include the entire church, even including the wives and children. It would seem Paul would want to give some grand words of farewell, but no, what we read is they got down on their knees and prayed. Amidst their sorry in separation, they were joined together in prayer.

PRAYER STARTER...

O Great Lord God, there are times when our hearts are filled with sorrow and uncertainty about what happens next. We know that when we don't know which way to go, we have that comfort that comes from knowing that you are the Way.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

#28 - Life-Changing Prayer

Acts 22:17-18 After I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him telling me, 'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'

Paul's return to Jerusalem was so wild that it became a riot.

A group of Jews from the province Asia (today's Turkey), were falsely accusing Paul of bringing Gentiles into the Temple. They grabbed him with the intention of killing him when the Roman commander of a regiment was summoned to deal with this disturbance.

By this time, Paul was somewhat used to this kind of response, so he knew what to do. He spoke to the commander in Greek (which surprised him), gave his credentials (as a Jewish citizen of Tarsus and a Roman citizen), and petitioned him to speak to the mob. The commander gave his permission.

Paul stood in front of them and in Aramaic, gave his testimony of being transformed from a prosecutor of Jesus's followers to becoming one of them.

He recounted the Damascus Road encounter with the Risen Christ and his visit from Ananias who prayed for healing of his blindness from that encounter with the Lord.

Paul then shared a story that is only mentioned here — praying in the Temple that resulted in a warning that his life was in danger. This was followed by Paul's unique calling which was to take the gospel to Gentiles.

Like many other aspects of Paul's ministry, this life-changing, world-changing event came to him through prayer.

PRAYER STARTER...

O Great Lord God, when we come before you in prayer, may we be prepared for answers that are exceeding above all we could ask or think. Prevent us from limiting what you can do by our unbelief or doubts, dear Lord. Help us to expect unexpected things 'above all that we ask or think.'

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally. Be willing to pray boldly — as Jesus said in Matthew 7:11, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him.")

#29 - Desperation Prayer

Acts 27:29 Then, fearing we might run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and **prayed** for daylight to come.

There is an old adage that there are no atheists in the foxholes.

When your life is on the line, you suddenly begin to think about things that you never saw any point to think about before ... things like what happens when you die!

Paul is on a ship as a prisoner and there is a fierce storm that seemed like it was going to crash the ship. This section in the book of Acts gives a somewhat long account of all the efforts the sailors were going through for two dreadful weeks to keep the ship afloat.

Desperate men take desperate measures, and it seemed that resorting to prayer in this particular situation was a sign of this desperation. Yet, in the very next verse, the account reads that some of these same sailors attempted to escape on their own using the skiff and leaving the others behind.

This account is noteworthy because it reminds us that not all prayer IS prayer. A good example of this was when Jesus told a parable in Luke 18 about a tax collector and a pharisee. The tax collector prayed a simple yet from-the-heart prayer, *“God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”* The pharisee prayed with self-righteousness, and Jesus said he was praying to himself.

This also describes these sailors. They were looking for a quick fix to get out of a terrible situation. Prayer is not like a genie in a bottle, rub it and you get your answer. Billy Graham said it best, *“True prayer is a way of life, not just for use in cases of emergency. Make it a habit, and when the need arises you will be in practice.”*⁷

PRAYER STARTER...

O Great Lord God, all things are possible with you. May we demonstrate that we do love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength by our confidence in seeking you in prayer no matter how desperate the situation we face may be.

(Continue this prayer as the Holy Spirit directs you personally.)

⁷Billy Graham Library, “10 Quotes from Billy Graham on Prayer - The Billy Graham Library Blog,” The Billy Graham Library, March 5, 2019, <https://billygrahamlibrary.org/blog-10-quotes-from-billy-graham-on-prayer/>.

#30 - Ministry Prayer

*Acts 28:7-8 Now in the area around that place was an estate belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us hospitably for three days. Publius's father was in bed suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went to him, and **praying** and laying his hands on him, he healed him."*

Martin Luther wrote, "**None can believe how powerful prayer is, and what it is able to effect, but those who have learned it by experience. It is a great matter when in extreme need to take hold on prayer.**"⁸

Prayer was essential to Paul. The last stop on this long and dangerous journey that Paul has experienced on his way to Rome is the island of Malta. This was an 'unscheduled' stop as they were shipwrecked just off the island. Paul and his companions were treated with "extraordinary kindness" by the people of Malta (28:2), and were amazed that Paul survived a snake bite that should have killed him (v.3-6). In fact, they were so amazed that they thought he was a god.

⁸Martin Luther and Alexander Chalmers, *The Table Talk of Martin Luther: New Edition, to Which Is Added, The Life of Martin Luther, with Additions from Michelet and Audin*, ed. William Hazlitt, trans. William Hazlitt, New Edition. (London: H. G. Bohn, 1857), 155.

Providentially, they were nearby to the “leading man of the island,” a man named Publius. He treated Paul and his companions compassionately for three days.

Publius’ father was quite sick, and Paul went to him, prayed for him, laid hands on him, and as a result, saw the man healed.

This is the last reference of prayer in the book of Acts, and also the last healing. The book of Acts closes with Paul finally in Rome, staying for two whole years still in custody, but living in his own rented house, welcoming all who visited, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hinderance. (28:30-31)

Throughout the book of Acts, the gospel has been spread throughout the Middle East and the Mediterranean Sea region, and it was prayer that fueled this work. May we also take that same gospel to our world, likewise propelled with the wings of prayer.

PRAYER STARTER...

O Great Lord God, may we take the example of the early church and show that same diligence and confidence with sincere and faithfulness in prayer. With this confidence, let us make our prayers our highest priority and greatest delight.

In Jesus precious, holy name —
Amen.

PRAYER IS —

“Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God has promised, or according to His Word, for the good of the church, with submission in faith to the will of God.”⁹

⁹John Bunyan, *Prayer* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 13.

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