

The Church at Prayer

James Duncan, preaching with great unction and power, was asked what was the secret of such powerful preaching. “The secret,” he said, was “thirteen hours of consecutive prayer.”

When asked the secret of his spiritual power, **Charles Spurgeon** said:

“Knee work! Knee work!”

Livingston of Shotts, on two different occasions, preached with such power that in each service 500 were converted. Both sermons were preceded by a night of prayer.

Charles Finney, after spending a day in the woods in prayer and fasting, preached that night to a phenomenally irreligious congregation. The sermon was accompanied by such divine power that the whole congregation, except one man, fell prostrate upon the floor, and voiced their agony under conviction of sin, in such loud outcries that the preacher was forced to stop.

Of “**Uncle**” **John Vassar**, of the Tract Society, his pastor said: “He absolutely prayed day and night—prayed about everything, prayed for almost everything, prayed with almost everybody he met. “He prayed when he went out and when he came in. He prayed before every religious service, and then prayed all the way through it. I have occupied the same room with him night after night and rarely went to sleep without hearing him in prayer, or awoke without finding him in prayer.”

Acts 1: 12 – 14

1) Private prayer – the life of the believer

- Matthew 6: 5 – 6 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
- The church at prayer does not start in the church or at the gathering of the church but when each believer comes to God in private personal prayer
 - We will only be in the church what we are in private
 - If we are worshipers at home in private we will be worshipers in the church
 - If we are intercessors at home in private we will be intercessors in the church.
 - If we are not people of prayer in private we can do the right things in church where others will consider us to be worshipers or prayers but is that who and what we really are?
- It is in personal prayer that we hear God’s voice for ourselves without the influence of others
 - It is in private that you ask God what your personal purpose is in your life and in the church
 - When you have heard from God personally then you have something to bring to the church.
 - The church will become a church of purposeful people knowing what God expects of them and willing to do put that into practise.
 - We hear from God and bring something of value from Him for the edification and building up of the body of Christ
 - When we aren’t people of prayer in our personal lives we come to church, not to give, but for what we can get out of it.
 - We rely on the worship team to have good worship whereas a worshiper in private will look to God in church and worship Him regardless of the quality of the worship leading.
 - A person of prayer comes with a good attitude having already dealt with his attitude before God in private
- Let us follow the examples of Jesus who withdrew from the crowds and even His disciples to pray personally and privately

2) Corporate prayer – the life of the church

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

- We proceed now to declare that it demands prayer-leadership to hold the Church to God's aims, and to fit it for God's uses. Prayer-leadership preserves the spirituality of the Church, just as prayerless leaders make for unspiritual conditions.... This present world's general attitude retires prayer to insignificance and obscurity. By it, salvation and eternal life are put in the background. It cannot be too often affirmed, therefore, that the prime need of the Church is not men of money nor men of brains, but men of prayer. Leaders in the realm of religious activity are to be judged by their praying habits, and not by their money or social position. Those who must be placed in the forefront of the Church's business, must be, first of all, men who know how to pray. E.M. Bounds
- The first church joined together constantly in prayer (Acts 1: 14)
 - Some other ways to describe the way this was originally written are:
 - They were earnest towards prayer, they persevered in prayer, they were constantly diligent in prayer.
 - They prayed in one accord – one mind i.e. they were united in purpose in their prayers
 - To worship or pray earnestly
 - Prayers of petition, requests and supplication
 - They all joined together along with the women
 - In Judaism the women would not pray with the men in public. They were kept separate.
 - The church is a demonstration of complete unity of all believers in prayer. There is no segregation in prayer
 - In Acts 2: 42 we see that the church devoted themselves to, amongst other things, prayer.
- The church did not sit around waiting for direction and the fulfilment of promises – they waited in prayer.
 - They waited expectantly. How often do we pray without really expecting God to answer?
 - They prayed for new leadership – new structure
 - Acts 1: 24 Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry

3) Empowering prayer

- Acts 4: 23 – 31
- After Peter and John were released by the Sanhedrin and told the church what had happened they all raised their voices together in prayer.
 - In prayer they acknowledged the sovereignty of God over all things (v.28)
 - They asked for boldness to preach the word of God (v.29)
 - They pleaded with God to stretch out His hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Jesus (v.30)
 - We will only get what we ask for.
 - Acknowledging the sovereignty of God does not mean that we just leave everything in His hands with a fatalistic attitude.
- God answered their prayers and filled them with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God boldly
 - They also performed many signs and wonders among the people (Acts 5: 12)
- The key here is desiring to see people come to faith in Christ and the boldness and signs and wonders are merely a means to that end.
 - Acts 5: 14 Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number
 - The empowering prayer is for God to be exalted as the work of the kingdom is demonstrated in boldness and power.
- It is only by being a people of prayer that we will witness the power of the kingdom in our midst and through us.