

## The Church Praying: Corporate Prayer

“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” In studying prayer in Scripture, we discover that it is not just the personal activity of an individual talking to God; prayer is also a corporate activity of God’s people. Nowhere is that more clear than in the book of Acts.

Prayer is pervasive and integral in the life of the early church. In the decision of who should replace Judas the betrayer of Jesus, we are told this about the band of disciples gathered in the upper room: “All of these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). About the fellowship of the church we read, “And they devoted themselves to the Apostle’s teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles” (2:42-43). An all-night prayer meeting for Peter was taking place, when God sent an angel to deliver him from prison (Acts 12:6ff). When the church in Antioch made the world-changing decision to send Paul and Silas out as missionaries, it was after prayer and fasting (13:1-3), and when Paul and Silas appoint elders in the church, they commit them to the LORD with prayer and fasting (14:23). When Paul says his goodbye to the Ephesians elders, he kneels down and “prays with them all” (20:36), and when he says goodbye to the saints in Cyprus on his way to Jerusalem, Luke tells us, “and kneeling down on the beach, we prayed and said farewell to one another” (21:5-6).

Corporate prayer was pervasive and integral in the life of the early church. It was part of their decision making process. It was a regular part of their communal life together. Sometimes long and intense prayers meetings were held for God’s powerful work, deliverance and help. Corporate prayer marked the setting aside of leaders for the church, and was the last act they did when they said goodbye to each

other. Just as prayer was pervasive and integral, not accidental, in the early church, it should be in our church as well.

Prayer should be pervasive and integral in everything we do. It should be part of our Sunday worship. Our community groups should be marked with growing intensity and purpose and passion in prayer. Our elder meetings, men’s gatherings and women’s Bible studies, our youth group gatherings, and all that we do should have prayer as an important part of them.

Why?

The answer is in the eloquent words of Peter Deyneka Sr., the missionary to Russia, “much prayer, much power; little prayer, little power.” In our passage in Acts 4:23-31, the church is being tested. Peter and John have been brought before the religious leaders of Israel, and are being grilled for the healing of a lame beggar (Acts 3). When asked, “by what power or by what name did you do this?” the Holy Spirit fills them and they testify that it is “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom Jesus raised from the dead – by him this man is standing before you... And there is salvation in no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (4:7, 10, 12).

When Peter and John are released, they went to the other disciples and reported what had happened. When they heard of the bold testimony they had made before the religious council, and when they saw God’s deliverance of Peter and John, they enter into a time of corporate prayer, in which they recognize God as the sovereign King who had spoken of this time through King David in Psalm 2:

“Sovereign LORD, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father, David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, ‘Why do the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against his

Anointed.' For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, LORD, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

Corporate prayer is powerful because it calls on God who is the Sovereign King. It is powerful because it remembers that though the whole world stands against God, God's will and Word will prevail. It is powerful because it aligns itself with the advance of the kingdom of God that will prevail against the dying light and strength of man. Corporate prayer is powerful because it is calling on God to accomplish his sovereign, predestined work of grace and healing in the name of Jesus. It is powerful because through corporate prayer the saints are filled with the Holy Spirit, and given courage to speak the Word of God boldly.

Here are these few disciples, weak and insignificant, but in prayer they are courageous and through them God will turn the world upside down. "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (4:31).

One last thing with corporate prayer: it is done in the powerful, holy, authoritative name of Jesus Christ. The name of Jesus binds this community together: not race, gender, political allegiance, economic status or any other identity marker. Our allegiance is to Jesus above every other thing. It is in Jesus Name, by his person and work, that the church is bound together. Christians have boldness to come to God in the name of Jesus. Prayer is powerful not because it is a religious exercise, but because it is an aligning of ourselves with Jesus Christ, the anointed one, the King of kings and Lord of lords, and his predestined purposes in this world.

## **Individual Prayer Guide**

Take time this week to read through the different times of congregational prayer in the book of Acts (see the prayer guide for these passages). Ask the Holy Spirit to illumine your eyes so that you can see the centrality of prayer in the life of the church. Then ask yourself, how am I making prayer a part of our corporate life together at Redeemer? How am I encouraging congregational prayer at Redeemer? Pray for God to grow us as a praying people. Pray for God to continue to give the leaders a commitment to grow in prayer and to lead the church in kingdom prayer. And in your individual prayers, ask for God to pour out his Spirit and advance the life and ministry and impact of our church in Redmond and the east side.

## **Community Group Discussion and Prayer**

1. What strikes you about corporate prayer in the book of Acts, and the recorded corporate prayer in Acts 4?
2. How have you experienced corporate prayer in your life and church experience?

## ***Practicing Prayer in your Community Group***

Take 20 (or so) minutes to pray. Pray for the following things:

- That God's kingdom would be advanced through the ministry of the church, through people being converted and the saints growing in Christ.
  - That the Holy Spirit would be poured out on the church so that we would be courageous in our witness and speak the word of God boldly.
  - Pray for specific people who are not Christians who are your friends, neighbors, colleagues, family members, etc.
3. What was hard/what was good about this time of "praying the LORD's Prayer"?