

# Acts 2:42d

## Prayer

Devoted: Week 4

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### Introduction

*Grab your bibles and turn to Acts 2...*

*Things with the building are moving along!*

*We're in a series called **Devoted** where we're looking at what it looks like to be devoted to Jesus...*

That being devoted to Jesus means that you're devoted to the things of Jesus... And to do that, we've been in a deep dive into **Acts 2:42-47** looking at the start of the church and the things they were devoted to...

Alright so this morning we're going to be talking about **prayer**...

Last week I went into **Adalyn's room** to do our bedtime routine, which can be eventful... Never know what to expect when I come in to tell her goodnight...

But she said she was having bad dreams about monsters...

- Jesus not listen to me, He not answer me, I pray and I pray and He not do anything...
- The later that week I asked if she wanted to pray- I never force her to, she said yes!
  - Bad guys...
    - *You are a bad guy...*

This morning as we look to the devotion of the early church, I want to show you the significance of **prayer** ... *Let's jump in...*

### Acts 2:41-47

**41** So those who accepted his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to them.

So, 3000 people heard the gospel believed and received it...

*Then watch the power of the gospel at work in them-* here's the implications of the gospel's impact on their lives:

**verse 42:** They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. **43** Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. **44** Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. **45** They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. **46** Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, **47** praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

So, they were devoted to **prayer**...

**Andrew Murray:** *The man who mobilizes the Christian church to pray will make the greatest contribution to world evangelization in history.*

- *That's what I want to do!*

What we have to understand is that every major awakening in the history of Christianity started with prayer

***Rather than just tell you about prayer this morning I want to show you how prayer played out in the early church and the implications and impact it had... And what this should mean for us!***

*I want to jump forward in Acts and show you what this looked like...*

## Acts 12:1-19

**1** About that time King Herod violently attacked some who belonged to the church, **2** and he executed James, John's brother, with the sword. **3** When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter too, during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. **4** After the arrest, he put him in prison and assigned four squads of four soldiers each to guard him, intending to bring him out to the people after the Passover.

At this point, the church was growing like crazy, despite the opposition and persecution that they had received from the **religious leaders**—A new community had emerged, one where people were living differently than the rest of the world ... and it was gaining momentum!

And BTW, **the primary leaders in this movement are normal everyday people**- not pro's: prophets, apostles, and pastors... We're going to see more evidence of this in just a minute...

But by the end of **chapter 11** so much had been happening in this movement that "this new community" was labeled as "CHRISTIANS" for the very first time!

And up until now, the church hadn't faced any persecution from the **government**, they just kinda stayed out of it. But for whatever reason Herod got the bright idea to attack the church out of nowhere and when he does he kills James (*the first apostle to be Martyred and the 2<sup>nd</sup> recorded martyr in Acts*) ...

So, Herod kills James on the raid and the **Jews** (*most likely the religious leaders*) are pumped about this- **which is sick!** And Herod feeds off of this wanting more favor with them, and so he arrests Peter with the intent to Kill him too...

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

Notice the church's response. It was like a reflex for them: They prayed **Fervently**: "Eagerly, earnestly, continuously..."

**Verse 6** When Herod was about to bring him out for trial, that very night Peter, bound with two chains [name of a rapper from College Park], was sleeping between two soldiers, while the sentries in front of the door guarded the prison.

Herod wasn't playing around, he had guards stacked and had them chained up...

**Verse 7** Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. Striking Peter on the side, he woke him up and said, "Quick, get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. **8** "Get dressed," the angel told him, "and put on your sandals." And he did. "Wrap your cloak around you," he told him, "and follow me."

**9** So he went out and followed, and he did not know that what the angel did was really happening, but he thought he was seeing a vision. **10** After they passed the first and second guards, they came to the iron gate that leads into the city, which opened to them by itself. [*like the automatic doors at Walmart*] They went outside and passed one street, and suddenly the angel left him.

**11** 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." [*Really it took you that long to figure it out Peter?!? You didn't get that- I don't know- when you saw and angel, or when you walked past all the guards, or when the gates opened up on their own*] **12** As soon as he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many had assembled and **were praying.**

Now, there's a few things that we need to notice:

In **verse 5** the text said that the "**church**" was praying—now we see **where** they were praying—they were at Mary's house...

So, this wasn't an event or a group text- this was a group of people committed to one another that responded by coming together to pray...

And we know that the church of Jerusalem is HUGE so there is no way everyone is at Mary's house...

Mary's house would have had to have been **one** of many smaller groups that had gathered to pray for Peter!

And this had to be a place where they gathered regularly because Peter knows where to go!

- This is powerful and it's a picture of what the church should actually be and look like...

For them, the church was never an event that you attend when it's convenient, it's **a group of people committed to Jesus, and committed to each other** on a personal level...

And check out how much they were committed to one another and how much they believed in prayer...

**Verse 12** tells us that Peter heads to Mary's house where they **were still praying...** It's the middle of the night!

When's the last time you've done that? *Most of us get antsy when it gets to 8:45 and we haven't wrapped things up yet at Community Group!*

**What if we prayed with this kind of dedication for the people in our church when they were in great need??**

Let's keep reading:

**13** [Peter] knocked at the door of the outer gate, and a servant named Rhoda [I like to call her **Rhoda**] came to answer.

**14** She recognized Peter's voice, and because of her joy, she did not open the gate but ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the outer gate.

**Rhoda** just left him there... I can see Peter like *deep breath- ALLLL THIS, and I can't even get let in the gate... I'm out in the middle of the road after escaping from jail...*

So, **Rhoda**, runs in and tells the crew Peter is here... Meanwhile she leaves Peter outside the door... *bless her heart...*

**15** "You're out of your mind!" they told her. But she kept insisting that it was true, and they said, "It's his angel." **16** Peter, however, **kept on knocking**, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were amazed.

**17** Motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. "Tell these things to James and the brothers," he said, and he left and went to another place. **18** At daylight, there was a great commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. **19** After Herod had searched and did not find him, he interrogated the guards and ordered their execution. Then Herod went down from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there.

**Alright, let's take a look at 3 things that we need to see about prayer in the early church**, understanding that the same should be true about us...

### **1. Prayer was a war-time walkie-talkie**

**John Piper says:**

*"Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den... Until you know that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for: Prayer is for the accomplishment of a wartime mission."<sup>1</sup>*

Let me show you this played out in the Church here in Acts:

- At the very beginning of **Acts 1:14** when Jesus had ascended into heaven they were in continual prayer together...

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God*

- **Acts 1:24** they had a big decision, who would take the place of Judas as the 12th apostle, what did they do? Prayed...
- **Acts 2:42** they were devoted to prayer together...
- **Acts 4:23-31** prayed for boldness and endurance to continue the message and ministry of Jesus after they had faced opposition.
- At the end of **Acts 7** Stephen's last words are a prayer before he is stoned to death... (literally almost like one final radio in to God as bombs were dropping around him)
- **Acts 9:40** A girl named Dorcas had died, Peter prays for God to raise her from the dead and God does...
- **Acts 10:9** Peter goes up to the roof to pray as the church is continuing to expand...
- *Here in Acts 12...* Peter is imprisoned because of the mission, and the church prays...

They knew that the only way that they were going to continue the mission that Jesus had sent them on—to *take the gospel to the nations*—**was to ask God for the power and ability to do it!!**

Don't miss this... almost everything that the church prayed for in **Acts** was directly related to, or around, the mission of furthering the message of the gospel...

- Now, that doesn't mean that you can't pray for other things... They were concerned with Peter's safety in this as well...
- But what this does mean is that you better not neglect praying for missional things relating to the expansion of the gospel!

The reason why **the mission** shaped so much of the prayer life of the early church is because they were so involved in it, they gave their lives over to advancing the gospel... And a lot of times they ended up in less than ideal situations...

But the reason they gave their lives over to it and were willing to do whatever it takes to move the gospel forward is because they understood the weight of the message, that it was life or death!

Listen, let me correlate this specifically to your prayer life: ***the amount of time that you spend praying about the advancement of the gospel, reflects the magnitude in which you view the gospel...***

- explain

For many of us we're wasting time on the intercom when we need to be on the walkie-talkie! Because there are eternities at stake...

**Apply:** Is prayer an intercom of convenience or a wartime walkie-talkie? Are you praying for things related to the advancement of the gospel? Are you praying for our church? Are you praying for our city? Are you praying for lost people??

Some of you have forgotten that this is war-time (*spiritually speaking*) that you have a mission to accomplish in the midst of a chaotic and broken world.

Are you praying for a spiritual awakening, are you praying against the things in this world that are not right that need the power of God and light of the gospel?

For some of you, you don't know how to be part of the mission, you don't know how you should take a next step, you feel frozen and it's because you don't pray asking God to lead you in it!

*Let's look at the second thing that we see from the church is Acts:*

## **2. They prayed with persistence**

There is a pattern of persistent prayer for the church in Acts and now here they are literally burning the midnight oil in prayer for Peter... You know why they did that? You know how they knew to do it? **Jesus** had taught them...<sup>2</sup>

In **Luke 11: Jesus says pray like this...** and He tells a story:

- A friend comes to visit you in the middle of the night
- You don't have food so you go to your neighbor

<sup>2</sup> Pastor JD Greear: Sermon. *SENT*; Acts #16

- Your neighbor says go away- and he don't even like you because you turned him into the HOA because his yard looked like the amazon jungle and it had started to crawl into your yard...
- But you keep knocking and keep knocking- that guy will get up and give you what you want...

**Jesus' point:** that if you can convince a guy like that to do what he doesn't want to do for you in the middle of the night, then how much more will a loving God do for you if you're willing to pour out your heart to Him!!

**And then Jesus would circle back around to a story similar to this in Luke 18:1-5** where He tells his followers a parable about a persistent widow... let me read it to you:

**1** Now he told them a parable on the need for them to pray always and not give up. **2** "There was a judge in a certain town who didn't fear God or respect people. **3** And a widow in that town kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' **4** "For a while he was unwilling, but later he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or respect people, **5** yet because this widow keeps pestering me, I will give her justice, so that she doesn't wear me out by her persistent coming.'"

**Jesus' point:** if this evil Judge can be moved by the petitions of a stranger, how much more will God help his children when they cry out to Him **persistently**?!

Jesus is making a point through **contrast**, not **comparison**...

**God is the opposite of the unjust evil Judge**... And for those that have trusted in Jesus, you are not like the widow...

She came alone with no advocate pleading her own case, but Jesus is the advocate who pleaded for your case! Through Jesus you have been adopted as sons and daughters of God!

And look how Jesus says end's this parable in **Luke 18:8: Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"**

**What does that mean??** Jesus is saying that the point of being persistent in prayer is us having continual faith in God!

The goal isn't just simply trying to wear down God, the goal is continual faith in God!

**One Pastor says it like this:** *Prayer and faith stand and fall together. Faith is the furnace of our lives. Its fuel is the grace of God. And the divinely appointed shovel for feeding the burner is prayer.*<sup>3</sup>

The church in **Acts** was living this out! They didn't know what was going to happen with Peter, but what they did know is that they needed to be praying, persistently...

- They needed to set their faith in God, and trust that he is faithful, and he is in control!

But so many times we run right past this... ***We might petition God with our mouth, but we aren't really trusting Him with our heart!***

God gave us prayer as a reminder of our dependence on him! When you pray, focus your heart on trusting that God is in control! Your prayer is a declaration of that! ***"I can't, YOU can!"***

You want to increase your faith in God? Be in consistent, persistent prayer, I promise it will shape your heart.

Are we persistent like the church in Acts was persistent as we pray for in regard to the mission of our church?

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> thing that we see from the Church is Acts is that:*

**3. They recognized the power of Prayer**

**Charles Spurgeon** says that: *Prayer moves the arm that moves the world!*

<sup>3</sup> John Piper: Sermon. Always pray and do not lose heart. Jan 9, 1983

**You know what's interesting**, the ones who you think would have all the power don't, and the ones that you think don't do...

- Herod- powerful ruler
- Peter- in prison
- Herod- had an army at his command
- The church didn't have an army
- But what the church had was prayer...

They believed in it, they valued it and they trusted in it... for them **Prayer wasn't a last resort it was a first response**... They really believed God was listening and that He would act...

Is that true for you? Do you believe in the power of prayer? Is it your first response or is it more of a last resort for you?

**Is prayer more of a formality for you or is it something you rely on for access to God's power?**

Here's the thing- **prayer will never become powerful to you until the gospel is at the center of your life**...

When you recognize the power that it took to save you, you will see the significance of the power that you have access to through prayer...

Peter was in chains awaiting his judgment, but at just the right time he was freed, not by his own ability but through an act of God...

In the same way, you and I are in chains, slaves to sin awaiting the judgment of God for what we have done- the crimes against Him that we have committed, but at just the right time and act of God gave us the ability to be free from our chains...

God sent Jesus, but instead of walking us out of prison he took our place, and he was judged on our behalf and though he was innocent

he took on the sin of the guilty, and Jesus, the perfect Son of God was executed in the place of you and me...

And He raises from the dead- offering us new life in him...

- Jesus is the means of salvation for those who believe! Have you believed in that?

You will never understand the power of prayer unless you've believed in the power that saved you...

Want to increase your prayer life? **Your consistency in prayer will be determined by your dependence on God!**

The degree in which you view the gospel will shape your prayer life...

**Samuel Chadwick (in *The Path of Prayer*) says:**

*The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from prayer. Our enemy fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.*

*Prayer turns ordinary mortals into men of power. It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God. There is no power like that of prevailing prayer.*

Let me ask you, **do you pray like that?** Big audacious prayers because you believe in a big audacious God? Or do you pray small prayers because down deep you lack faith?

What if tonight God said to you: **the answer is yes to everything you have prayed over the last month...**

- How would the world be different if that happened?
- How many lost people would be saved/healed??
- Or would you say: *oh man if that was the case then I would have prayed differently!*
  - I wouldn't have just prayed for God to let me have a

good day and to bless the food...

**Pastor Joby Martin** says: *that if your prayer life isn't intimidating to you then it may be insulting to God!*

*Flesh out... We need to take a step forward in praying bigger things*

### **Conclusion: [VAMP]**

Would we be a church that has an intimidating prayer life... Would we be a church where our prayers assume we have a God far greater and far more powerful than we could ever imagine...

**Here's how I want to close...** I want to give you some space to respond... the band is going to play behind us and I want you to pray...

Some of you need to repent and believe the gospel for the first time today, this is the time for you to do that...

The rest of you, I want you to take the next several minutes and pray your heart out... If you feel comfortable and you can I would encourage you to get on your knees...

**Give space, I will close out in prayer...**

### **Out take:**

**Samuel Zwemer:** "The history of missions is the history of answered prayer... I am convinced that when we stand before God... we will discover that every soul ever brought to a knowledge of Christ was in some way related to intercessory prayer." (Dick Eastman)

**I want you to look back real quick to how the jail situation ends:** Herod opposes Jesus, yet is unsuccessful in his efforts as the people of God come together in prayer. Herod pays for his opposition of Jesus in his death after receiving praise in the place of God.

**Verse 22** The assembled people began to shout, "It's the voice of a god and not of a man!" **23** At once an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give the glory to God, and he was eaten by worms and died. **24** But the word of God flourished and multiplied. **25** After they had completed their relief mission, Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem, taking along John who was called Mark.

Herod's dependence was on man- the churches was on God

There are many in our city like Herod who are dependent on man... and what they can do in their power... they will be judged... we need to feel the weight of that...

- Are we paying for God to save them, for God to use this church?