

North Center Baptist Church
The Gathering in Worship (Part 3)
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PRAY over *Luke 11:1–13*

This morning we are continuing our sermon series on *The Gathering in Worship*, and we are looking at why we prioritize prayer in our worship together. ***Why do we pray together?***

This is a precious topic.

- Prayer is the prize of the cross!
- Jesus died and the veil was torn in two (*Matthew 27:51*)

And those who have spent a lifetime with Jesus could spend unending hours **sharing stories** of what God has done in their lives through prayer! I've heard some of those stories, and I can't wait to hear more.

I reflect on my journey with Jesus, and I know (without a shadow of a doubt) that every part of my testimony is tied to prayer.

- I survived a traumatic birth because God answers prayer.
- I am a Christian because God answers prayer.
- I went to college because God moves in power through prayer.
- I am married to Elizabeth because God works miracles through prayer.
 - **ILL**. I started praying for my future wife when I was a young teenager.
 - Right around that same time, Liz visited a farm with baby animals and fell in love with the baby goats.
 - Sometime later, she comes across this verse in Song of Solomon where the guy tells his girl that her hair looks like a flock of goats; so she tells her mom and some of her close friends that the guy she is going to marry will say that to her! That will be her sign 😊
 - Fast-forward quite a few years and we are sitting in a movie theater...
- I currently have four children because God stirs the affections of our heart prayer.
- I am pastor living in Minnesota because God speaks to us through prayer.

As precious and as powerful as prayer is in the lives of individual Christians, God is also calling us to be a **community** – a gathering – a church that prays **together**.

**“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship,
in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
~ Acts 2:42**

This morning, by the grace of God, I want to look at three very basic biblical realities regarding prayer in the local gathering of God's people.

The first thing we notice about prayer in the early church is that...

1. **They prayed often:** “*They continued steadfastly...in prayers.*”

Prayer was an essential element in the life of the early church. I am sure that there are many churches in the world that excel when it comes to prayer, but there are also many churches that really struggle in this area.

Q. Why is that?

A. There are probably many reasons why a church might struggle when it comes to prayer (*e.g., spiritual warfare; apathy; a disbelief in the power and effectiveness of prayer...*).

But I think that one of the more “modern” reasons that American churches are finding prayer to be a struggle is because of the church’s desire to compete for the attention of people who live in a fast-paced, entertainment culture. **!**

III. For example, **the average length of a song on the radio** is somewhere around 3 minutes – absolutely no longer than 5 minutes. I’ve been studying music and writing music pretty much my entire life, and it’s really hard to write a good song that’s only 3 minutes long. The intro has to be short; the verses have to be short; the transitions have to be quick; the instrumental has to be brief; and the song can’t linger at the end – or the radio host will just fade it out. In my opinion, that’s not the way music was meant to be written, but it’s the way of the world in our fast-paced culture.

Similarly, did you know that **an action movie** changes scenes approximately every 4 seconds. That means that one movie will have somewhere around 1,900 different camera shots! *That’s very different from the movies that I grew up watching* 😊

Many churches in America are trying to compete with this culture (even the little churches), and it makes it tough to have any meaningful time of prayer, because prayer doesn’t have any of the qualities that our culture finds entertaining: it’s not flashy; it’s not easy; it’s not amusing...

We are a society on the move, and prayer forces us to be still. ²

If you have ever paid attention to the flow of our Sunday gatherings here at North Center, you’ve noticed that we pray throughout the entire service,³ and that’s because we are trying to align with the Bible – and not with modern culture.

¹ **Our culture is SO FAST!** I get **honked at on the road** almost every single day because I’m not moving as fast as people want me to move. Whenever I go **out to eat**, I am ALWAYS (and I mean ALWAYS) the last person to finish – because while I am trying to savor my food, it feels like everybody else is racing to get done.

² Two things tend to happen to prayer in a fast-paced, entertainment culture

1. It gets shortened.
2. And it gets used as a transition tool. Many churches use prayer as an opportunity to move people around so that the service can go as smooth and as quick as possible.

³ Sunday Gathering Prayer

- Prayer over the worship service: *adoration & supplication*
- Prayer after the music: *confession & thanksgiving*
- Prayer over the message: *adoration & supplication*
- Prayer of blessing at the end: *supplication*

In the early days of the local church, they were steadfast in their prayers.

2. They prayed together:

42. “And they continued steadfastly...in prayers

44. Now all who believed were together...

46. continuing daily with one accord...”

~ Acts 2:42, 44, 46

It is extremely important to come to God alone in prayer. We have some mighty prayer warriors in this church who spend hours alone with God in prayer, and they learned this from Jesus Himself (e.g., *Luke 6:12*).

However, it is **also** vitally important for us as a church to be praying in community together.

- There are so many reasons why a church needs to be regularly praying together, but I’ll simply note that **we see more of God when we pray together** than we do in isolation.
- Without hesitation, I can say that some of the most meaningful times of worship in my life have been listening to others pray.

III. For example (and I have very specific individuals in mind):

- When I hear this person pray, I am almost always overwhelmed with the *holiness* of God.⁴
- When this person prays, I see a vision of the lavish *kindness* of God.⁵
- When this person prays, I am moved by God’s heart for *global missions*. Every time he prays, I want to take the gospel to the farthest parts of the globe.⁶
- When this person prays, I feel *the compassion of God* for the broken and the hurting.⁷
- When this person prays, I am captivated by the *intimacy* that God wants us to have with him.⁸

When God created the world, He said, “*It is not good that man should be alone*” (**Gen. 2:18**), and this is equally true in our prayers.

- Yes, Jesus said that we are to spend time alone in secret prayer (Matt 6:6)
- Jesus also said that where two or three are gathered in His name, He is **there** (18:20)

There is an unrivaled power that God unleashes for His glory when His people are steadfast in prayer together.

⁴ John Piper; James Alexander.

⁵ Caleb Zeigler.

⁶ David Platt

⁷ Jason Meyer; Tom Steller; Francis Chan; John Sahlstrom.

⁸ Sam Couture.

ILL. I once had a pastoral search committee ask me what I thought was the most important job description for a pastor, and I said, “You want a pastor who is going to lead your church in prayer.”

One of the most powerful things about the church is that it is a people who pray *together*.

3. **They prayed missionally**: there was a missional trajectory to their prayers.

The first time we get to hear the church praying together is in **Acts 4:24**

Here’s the **context**:

- Acts 3:1–10 | God works through Peter & John to heal a man who had been lame his whole life.
- Acts 3:11–26 | Peter preaches about Jesus to everybody who was around to see the miracle
- Acts 4:1–4 | Peter and John are arrested
- Acts 4:5–12 | Peter preaches about Jesus to all the religious leaders
- Acts 4:13–22 | The religious leaders threaten them never to preach about Jesus again
- Acts 4:23–30 | Peter and John tell all of this to the church, and the church immediately begins praying together (**4:24**).

“So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord...”
~ **Acts 4:24**

There is a lot that we can learn about prayer from this passage,⁹ but I just want us to see what they were asking God for...

“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all **boldness** they may speak Your word...”
~ **Acts 4:29**

They have just been “severely threatened” by the very same people who called for Jesus to be crucified, and their only prayer is for boldness to go back and continue preaching the name of Jesus!

That is VERY DIFFERENT from the way most American Christians pray.

So many Christians spend the vast majority of their prayers asking God for health and safety and protection and smooth travels – and all the things that make for an easier or more comfortable life, but this church had a radically different vision in their prayers.

⁹ There is a lot that we could learn about prayer by meditating on this early prayer in the church. (1) They start with adoration – exalting the character of God (v. 24). They didn’t start with their requests; they started with God. (2) They prayed the Bible (v. 25–26). (3) They declared the sovereignty of God over all things – including their current situation (27). (4) They brought their requests to the Lord (29–30). (5) They prayed in the name of Jesus.

1. They had just witnessed their Savior die on a cross, conquer the grave, and ascend with power into heaven.
2. They had also just received the filling of the Holy Spirit and then been used by God to draw thousands of people to faith in Christ.
3. And the words of Jesus were still ringing in their ears:

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel”
~ **Mark 16:15**

They were praying for supernatural help in fulfilling the Great Commission, and God answered their pray in a powerful way! ¹⁰

“And when they had prayed,
the place where they were assemble together was shaken,
and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit,
and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”
~ **Acts 4:31**

Take a minute to **REFLECT** on our own prayers:

- Do our prayers as a church reflect the mission that God has given us?
 - Do we pray regularly together for the lost?
 - Are we praying for those who are taking the gospel across the seas?
 - Are we praying for opportunities and resources to engage in global missions?
 - There are a lot of scary things about the culture we live in today; are we praying for safety and protection, or are we praying for boldness to speak the name of Jesus into a dark and hostile world...

“Then He said to His disciples,
“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.
Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send our laborers into His harvest.”
~ **Matthew 9:37–38**

Clarification:

Q. Does that mean that we aren't supposed to pray for personal things (like safety, health, finances...) – things that are “less spiritual”?

A. No!

¹⁰ This reminds me of Solomon's prayer for wisdom (1 Kings 3: 5–15). His request had an outward trajectory: leading God's people well. More than anything else in that moment, he wanted to fulfill God's call on his life, which required wisdom. So he asked for wisdom and God loved his prayer and gave him more than he asked or could have imagined. *God promises the same thing in the NT (James 1:5).*

- First of all, the Bible shows us that Jesus cares about all the personal things in our life.¹¹
- Secondly, the NT gives us examples of people praying for personal things
 - The sick are told to call the elders to pray over them (James 5:14)
 - People pray for rain (James 5:18)
 - The church was constantly praying for Peter while he was in prison (Acts 12:5)
 - Jesus prayed for relief in suffering (Matt 26:39)
- Thirdly, the NT tells us to be praying for *everything* (**Phil. 4:6**) and to be casting *all* our cares on God (**1 Pet 5:7**). In fact, Jesus taught us to pray for personal, temporal things like “daily bread” (**Matt 6:11**).

So we *should* be praying for personal things:

- Finances
- Health
- Safety

But the point is that we (as Christians and as a Church) have been given a mission that is so much bigger than the temporary concerns of this life. So while we pray for personal, temporal things, let us not forget the reason we exist. Let us not forget the eternity on the other side of this life and the millions of people who have never yet even heard the name of Jesus.

There is a biblical trajectory for our prayers because there is a biblical trajectory for our lives: making the Name of Jesus known across the globe.

If the mission hasn't changed, then neither should the force and the focus of our prayers.

As your pastor, I want us to be a church that lives in prayer together:

1. That we would pray **regularly**
2. That we would pray **together**
3. And that we would pray **missionally**

Because, Jesus, Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. It's about You. Jesus, You alone satisfy. We have tasted and seen that You alone are good, and so our prayer is that You would show us more of Yourself and that you would give us hearts that long to make Your Name known all across the globe. Teach us to pray...together...for Your Kingdom to come.

¹¹ He cares about our ability to pay our taxes; He cares about our sickness; He cares about our physical and emotional needs...