

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Devotion to Prayer

by Dan Trygg

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now *all the ones believing were being upon the same thing* and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ And they began selling their property and possessions and were distributing them to all, as anyone was having a need. ⁴⁶ And every day they were devoting themselves with one purpose in the temple complex, and breaking bread from house to house, eating food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding the ones being saved daily *upon the same thing*.” Acts 2:42-47

“...he is always wrestling earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand mature and having been brought to full measure in all the will of God.” Colossians 4:12

“Devote yourselves to prayer; watching in it with thanksgiving, praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ...” Colossians 4:2,3

As we have been studying the “discipleship curriculum” of the early church, we have used Acts 2:42-47 as our focus. **It seems quite clear that the early disciples were following the same recipe for growth.** They “were being upon the same thing”, ...that is, **they were all engaged in the same activities which helped to develop their personal lives in Christ, as well as to produce a community which expressed and displayed the amazing love and power of Christ.** *The teaching informed their minds*, and helped them understand what God *had done* for them in Christ, and to focus their attention on what He *wants to do* in and through them through the power of the Holy Spirit. *The sharing reinforced these teachings, and the shared meals helped to open up relationships of caring and concern.* **Without the activity of God within them, and in the world around them, however, those new insights and relationships were powerless to affect change or produce life.** Yet the information they learned told them that God *wanted* to do just that, and the relationships opened *their* hearts to the crying needs of people around them. **The promises of God, the needs of the people, the opportunities to share, the example of the apostles, all created within them a passion to call out for God.** *They praised Him for what He had done in Christ. They praised Him for sending the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, who was driving them to expect more in their lives, and they began to call out and petition God for more.* More understanding, ...more power, ...more love, ...more resources, ...more boldness, ...more opportunities to share their faith, ...more response from people who were hearing the gospel, ... and more glory for God!! **Prayer is the fourth part of the discipleship curriculum of the early church!** It is born of the *overflow of joy*, as well as *from the desperation of the searching, longing heart.*

There are a number of words used for prayer in the NT:

(1.) *aiteō* – to ask (Matt. 6:8; 7:7,8,11; 18:19; 21:22; Mk. 11:24; Lk. 11:9,10,13; Jn. 11:22; 14:13,14; 15:7; 16:23,24 [2x],26; Acts 7:46; 13:21; Eph. 3:20; Col. 1:9; Jas. 1:5,6; 4:2,3 [2x]; I Jn. 3:22; 5:14,15 [2x],16); *aitēma* – request, the “thing asked for” (Phil. 4:6; I Jn. 5:15).

(2.) *deomai* – to ask, beg, plead, petition, urgently seek (Matt. 9:38; Lk. 10:42; 21:36; 22:32; Acts 4:31; 8:22,24; 10:2; Rom. 1:10; I Thess. 3:10); *deēsis* – plea, entreaty, urgent prayer (Lk. 1:13; 2:37; 5:33; Rom. 10:1; II Cor. 1:11; 9:14; Eph. 6:18 [2x]; Phil. 1:4 [2x]; 1:19; 4:6; I Tim. 2:1; 5:5; II Tim. 1:3; Heb. 5:7; Jas. 5:16; I Pet. 3:12) Usually implies an urgent need.

(3.) *entugchanō* – to entreat, intercede; to come with an appeal or petition. It also means “to encounter” or “meet with”, implying intimacy and extended conversation. (Rom. 8:27,34; 11:2; Heb. 7:25); *enteuxis* – intercession, petition, converse, conferencing-with (I Tim. 2:1; 4:5).

(4.) *euchomai* – to pray, ask, petition for, wish for, strongly want (Acts 26:29; 27:29; Rom. 9:3; II Cor. 13:7,9; Jas. 5:16 [‘pray on behalf of one another’]; III Jn. 1:2); *euchē* – prayer, vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23; Jas. 5:15).

(5.) *proseuchomai* – to pray; make request – [The most common word for prayer in the NT. It is always used as a religious term as a request, prayer or vow to God, or a god] (Matt. 5:44; 6:5 [2x],6 [2x],7,9; 14:23; 19:13; 24:20; 26:36,39,41,42,44; Mk. 1:35; 6:46; 11:24,25; 12:40; 13:18; 14:32,35,38,39; Lk. 1:10; 3:21; 5:16; 6:12,28; 9:18,28,29; 11:1 [2x],2; 18:1,10,11; 20:47; 22:40,41,44,46; Acts 1:24; 6:6; 8:15; 9:11,40; 10:9,30; 11:5; 12:12; 13:3; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 22:17; 28:8; Rom. 8:26; I Cor. 11:4,5,13; 14:13,14 [2x],15 [2x]; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:3,9; 4:3; I Thess. 5:17,25; II Thess. 1:11; 3:1; I Tim. 2:8; Heb. 13:18; Jas. 5:13,14,17,18; Jude 1:20); *proseuchē* – a prayer, a request for help, petition. (Matt. 21:13,22; Mk. 9:29; 11:17; Lk. 6:12; 19:46; 22:45; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4; 10:4,31; 12:5; 16:13,16; Rom. 1:10; 12:12; 15:30; I Cor. 7:5; Eph. 1:16; 6:18; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2,12; I Thess. 1:2; I Tim. 2:1; 5:5; Philem. 1:4,22; Jas. 5:17; I Pet. 3:7; 4:7; Rev. 5:8; 8:3,4). This is the word used in Acts 2:42.

(6.) *hiketērion* – an urgent petition, plea, or supplication (Heb. 5:7).

If I added correctly, **there are up to 201 occurrences in the NT regarding prayer!** By comparison, the

word root behind “justice, righteous, righteousness, and justify” occurs 218 times. The word root for “salvation, or savior” occurs only 75 times. The phrase “eternal life” occurs less than 50 times. “Doctrine” occurs 30 times, and “teach” occurs only 97 times. **Prayer is a major emphasis in the NT.** When you look closely at the references, you will note that they are *evenly distributed* throughout the entire NT. They are *clearly evident in Jesus’ teaching and example*, as well as in the lifestyle of the early church. **All of the letters from the apostles, and the general letters, refer to prayer, and strongly emphasize its importance.**

This only makes sense, since the church of Jesus Christ is not primarily a social club, a set of beliefs, or a religious organization. It is about the spiritual birth and maturation of people to become a functioning spiritual organism, the body of Christ. The church cannot exist without the activity of God in and through the lives of His people. He will not force Himself upon us. **He expects us to ask Him to actively work in our lives, and in the world around us. If we don’t ask Him, we will not receive from Him** (Jas. 4:2).

When Jesus first spoke of the church, in Matthew 16:18, He spoke of it in terms of spiritual conflict. The word for church, *ekklēsia* in the Greek, had a strong background usage in the Greek translation of the OT. It referred to the congregation of God, the people called-out from other nations to be His people. They were to be a kingdom of people dedicated to God, who were also to serve as priests to the rest of the world (Ex. 19:5,6). In that first conflict, the enemy was the evil nations populating the land of Canaan. In that first “calling out”, the Israelites were called to follow God, to be dedicated to Him, and to dispossess the people under God’s judgment in the land. When you read the accounts in Numbers through Joshua, it is clear that *the Israelites could only succeed at this task, if they stayed close to God and followed His counsel.* In Matthew 16, when Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?”, Peter responded, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (vs. 16). The “Christ” and the “son of God” were OT titles for the rightful king of Israel (Psa. 2). After Jesus commended Peter, He said that this revelation was the rock upon which He would build His church, His *ekklēsia*, His congregation, His gathered-people. Then, however, He said something *really radical*, something that was a paradigm shift, “...and *Hades’ gates* will not be strong-against it.” This statement redefined the focus of Christ’s kingdom-congregation. **Instead of nations entrenched in a physical territory, the new enemy is the spiritual forces of Satan. Wherever this spiritual enemy is “dug in”, our mandate is to bring the assault of the kingdom of God to their very “gates”, ...to lay siege to the enemy, breach his fortifications, and dispossess him. This is a spiritual fight. It requires spiritual weapons.** It requires the *strategy, resources and power* of God. **Prayer is crucial to obtaining victory in the spiritual conflicts we must face.**

Clearly, prayer is a very important aspect of what it means to follow Christ, but it is often one of the first areas we falter in. No wonder, prayer goes directly against our own self-ability. We have to admit our powerlessness to deliver ourselves, and call upon God. We must be willing to admit that we need Him, and ask Him for His direction and power. **We have no idea how critical prayer is, and how much we need to be seeking God’s counsel and intervention.** Romans 8:26,27 says that we don’t even know how to pray as is necessary, but the Spirit helps us in our weakness. He not only makes our prayers acceptable, but He Himself also intercedes for us with an intensity and accuracy that God will receive. Then, just a few verses later, Paul says that Jesus *Himself* is praying for us! Just think of *that!* The book of Hebrews says that “He ever lives to make intercession” on behalf of us! (7:25) **Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are asking the Father on our behalf**, and on behalf of our fellow servants in Christ. **How much more should we be coming to God** with our own needs, as well as to cry out to heaven day and night on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and for the kingdom of God to advance against the kingdom of darkness!

Jesus taught about importunity, or “shameless persistence”, in prayer in Luke 11:1-18 and 18:1-8. We are to “pray at all times and not to lose heart”. **In seven other passages, prayer is mentioned in conjunction with the verb, “to be devoted to”** (Acts 1:14; 2:42,46,47; 6:4; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2). It is the Greek word, “proskartereō”, which means to “devote oneself to, persist in, persevere in, or to continue unremittently”. **It means to “stay on it”, even when it is inconvenient or difficult. Why is this so important? Because some answers require intensity and determination to receive.** We have the example of Daniel 9, where Daniel had been seeking God’s counsel for 3 weeks, praying and partially fasting until God answered him. When the angel Gabriel came with the answer, he tells Daniel that *he had been sent at the time Daniel had begun to pray*, but **he had been opposed in the spiritual realm, and was unable to get through, until another angel came to assist him! This is a very significant glimpse into the reality of the spiritual warfare that goes on around us**, which we generally cannot see with our eyes. Epaphras, a Christian from Colossae, prayed for them earnestly, that they might be **made mature in Christ, and be fully carried along into all the desire of God** for them. The word for “earnestly” is *agonizomai* in Greek. It referred to an intense struggle, or wrestling. **He not only prayed with devoted continuance and shameless persistence, but also wrestled against his own flesh and whatever discouragement or spiritual opposition he experienced.**