**God’s Praying People!**

Jesus prayed! Jesus taught His disciples to pray. In Luke 18:1 Jesus challenged His men to pray. Jesus said,*“…**Men ought always to pray, and not to quit/faint.”*

Jesus’ disciples were so impressed by His prayers that they asked Him to teach them to pray. They wanted to pray like He prayed, so Jesus taught His men to pray. The Bible very quietly, in a still, small voice tells us that Jesus prayed. In less than booming words, the Gospels tell us that Jesus “went out to pray very early in the morning.” He even prayed on the cross. Jesus cried out to His Heavenly Father, as he drew His last air on this earth, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

As God’s people we should be known for our praying. We are known for many things, but prayer is not one of them. How would your life be different if you took prayer seriously? What if Grace Church took prayer seriously? What if we really were a praying people? What if we really were a praying church? S. D. Gordon said, *“We can do many things once we have prayed, we can do nothing until we have prayed.”*

There are many notable conversion stories in God’s Word. One of the most exciting is found in Acts 9. It is the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a Christ hater! Yes, I said a Christ hater! Saul had a reputation as a persecutor of the church of God. In the early days as Christianity was spreading throughout the Roman Empire, Christianity was irreverently referred to as “The Way.” Saul took it upon his broad and proud religious shoulders to do everything he could to destroy the church! Aren’t you glad he failed?

**Meet me in Acts 9:1… we will read down through 9:11.**

1. **First, Prayer is God’s will for His church.**
* This is a big bold statement!
* The question is, **Can it be proven?** Yes, it can be proven historically and practically!
* **Historically,** we see prayer as foundational for the church in Jerusalem.
* **Acts 1** lays down a pattern of prayer for the first disciples. They were waiting, obeying and filled anticipation!
* **Acts 1:14** These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication…. “Supplication” implies continuous, ongoing prayer!
* **Acts 1:14 (NLT)** They all met together and were constantly united in prayer….
* They prayed ***corporately*** and they prayed ***continuously*!**
* **Acts 2:42** emphasizes this pattern of prayer, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."
* **Practically,** in **Acts 4** prayer gains even more traction within the church of Jesus Christ!
* **Acts 4 and 5** ~ Prayer was essential for *the preservation* of the Church! Persecution!
* **Acts 6** ~ Prayer was also essential for *the preaching* of the Gospel! Propagation!
* **Ray Pritchard notes,** “When the church is on its knees, heaven stands at attention.”
* Historically and Practically the Church has been a praying church!
* There is no escaping it … The early church was known as a praying church!
* **First, Prayer is God’s will for His church.**
1. **Secondly, Prayer deepens our relationship with the Lord.**
* Look back at **Acts 9:8**… notice the details!
* Paul’s *three day* experience with Jesus left him blind, fasting and praying!
* As Paul obediently waited on God, ***he prayed!***
* "Prayer is the autograph of the Holy Ghost upon the renewed heart." **C.H. Spurgeon**
* **9:9** ~ **Three days** of prayer transformed Paul from the inside out!
* These three days of prayers solidified in Paul's heart the Lordship of Jesus Christ!
* **POINT:** When prayer grips your life, you can be assured that your relationship with the Lord is deepening! The Lord is doing something IN YOU!
* **CHALLENGE:** Maybe we need to be blinded, maybe we need to be hungry and thirsty, and maybe we need to prayerfully waiting on God!
* What kind of prayer lives do we have?
* I bet almost everyone here today prays in one way or another.
* **Question**: If our prayer lives registered the depth of our spiritual lives, how deep would we be?
* Here’s an interesting thought relating to Paul’s conversion.
* He assumed he had a relationship with God.
* Paul was meticulously religious, *but it was all about himself!*
* Paul’s relationship with God was based upon his impressive credentials.
* He was impressed, but God wasn’t!
* His pristine record spoke for him but not for Jesus!
* When Paul met Jesus, all of those things became absolutely worthless.
* Did Paul pray before his conversion? *Sure he did!*
* **How** did Paul pray before he met Jesus? Probably like the Pharisee in Luke 18!
* **Luke 18:11 says, “**The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself….”
* **Jesus spoke these penetrating words in Matthew 6:5** And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
* **9:12** ~ makes the point that Paul knew God was not finished with him. The Lord’s work in him had only just begun!!!
* Prayer marked the fact that Paul’s relationship was on track and that God was just beginning to work in and through him!
* ***Maturity*** for the Christian is *impossible* without prayer!
* Our sanctification is definitely connected to our prayer lives!
* **Pastor** **Derek Thomas gives us this insight,** “***Prayer is one of the sure marks of true discipleship*** — the very sign that Ananias needed to assure him that Saul of Tarsus had been genuinely converted was that he was praying. Well, apply that for a second, that that is the sign that Ananias receives that you are genuinely converted and that you genuinely are in union and communion with Jesus Christ.”
* **First, Prayer is God’s will for His church.**
* **Secondly, Prayer deepens our relationship with the Lord.**
1. **Thirdly, Prayer prepares us for our mission as His church.**
* Begin reading with me in Acts 9:13…
* What was going on in Paul’s life?
* His work was set aside so that he could do God’s work!
* How do we know this and how did Paul know it?
* Paul is our example… **“Behold he prayeth.”**
* Prayer drove Paul to his mission. Prayer drives us to our mission as well!
* One sure way to determine God’s will is in prayer!
* Everything that happened in Paul’s life up to this point came by way of prayer!
* God’s will came to him through prayer.
* God’s revelation led him to his life’s calling!
* It validated his calling to preach the Gospel, to plant churches and to makes disciples of Christ!
* How important is prayer to you as a believer?
* How important is prayer to you regarding your church?
* How important is prayer to you regarding your mission and vision as a child of God?
* **Ray Pritchard is right,** “Whenever God wants to do something great in the world, He first stirs His people to pray. When God wants to touch a family, a church, a city or a nation, He begins by moving His people to pray. Prayer is always the first stage in God’s plan to change to the world.”
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